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THE WEST, STORYTELLING ANIMALS, AND THE HUNT AS PERFORMANCE

One bright winter day in 1873, William “Doc” Carver stepped out onto the plains at Frenchman Creek to defend his credentials as a “hunter hero” of the plains against “Buffalo” Curley. Carver, a dentist and hide hunter, boasted in confident tones how he had killed 30,000 bison and had defended his honor as a sharpshooter many times before. Curley, a known reprobate from Texas, bristled with a competitive edge, egged on by the market hunters he was camped with nearby who were particularly aggrieved at competing with Carver for buffalo hide. It was they who put up the \$500 prize for the competition, appointed judges, and ordered ammunition and horses from the Union Pacific. News of the contest provoked significant interest. Amassed were hundreds of onlookers—a curious assemblage of trappers, skin hunters, wolfers, and local Pawnee and Sioux from the White Clay Agency, along with a contingent of soldiers and ladies from Fort McPherson. The crowd waited with bated breath as the bison herd moved into view, their coats glimmering with frost particles, snorts from their nostrils producing clouds of vapor in the cold air. As the shaggy beasts entered the river to drink, Carver, Curley,

and their entourage of Indian “scorers” (charged with the task of shooting arrows into the fallen, the attached feathers marking each man’s kill tally) galloped up the draw. The referee fired a pistol shot, the herd stampeded, and the game was on. Carver, who cut quite a sartorial presence on his favorite steed Surprise, wearing a red shirt and tossing his auburn hair, claimed first blood and soon got ahead. Those watching the melee saw Doc disappear over the bluff, leaving Curley outpaced and his horse spent. As the judges counted Carver’s haul, some 160 animals (Curley’s score, intriguingly, was not recorded), Doc paused at a buffalo wallow to fill his hat with water and pour it over his wearied horse. As the crowd cheered uproariously, Carver was crowned “Champion buffalo hunter of the plains.”¹

The story of Doc Carver’s rifle contest that bracing day in Nebraska presents a classic account of frontier whimsy: gunplay, dueling men, thundering buffalo, and wide prairie vistas. It also illustrates, in colorful style, the centrality of hunting to the western experience as well as its embedded codes of staging and performance. Enacted for reasons of subsistence, for the market, and for sport, hunting left an indelible mark on the mechanics of westward expansion in the nineteenth century, lassoing environments and human communities in a consumptive and cultural bind that was nothing less than transformative. For British traveler Isabella Bird, the West was, quite simply, “the world of big game.” Hunting impacted the practical lives of westerners on an everyday level and also emerged as an integral part of the region’s mythology. Transmitted by a process of trans-media storytelling that took in oral history, print culture, art, photography, and even taxidermy, the “story” of the hunt, in fact, became a critical device through which frontier experience in the trans-Mississippi was constructed, maintained, and memorialized. As Montana settler Horace Edwards noted in correspondence with a friend, “a letter from me to you would hardly be complete without some hunting sketch would it?” A terrain both literal and figurative, the West was a physical space in which animal capital had tangible economic, political, and social value and an imaginative geography in which the drama of nationhood was played out. Critical players in the performance of the hunt were the masculine hunter hero—“leading man” and exemplar of rugged individualism and all-action bravado; the lady sharpshooter and “wild woman” that subtly subverted his hegemony; and a cast of suitably charismatic beasts waiting in the wings to snarl and stampede, directed at once by biological makeup

and the needs of theatrical flourish. A vibrant realm filled with animal and allegorical sign, the nineteenth-century hunting frontier was an animated, expressive, and, at times, contested space. Disentangling the complex relationships between the human actors and the wild things they pursued sits at the heart of *Epiphany in the Wilderness*.²

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY WEST: THE AGE OF THE HUNTER

When Thomas Jefferson sat in the library at Monticello, his gaze flitting from the bucolic confines of the garden to the pile of books on the desk whose subject was the strange lands west of the Mississippi, hunting was probably the last thing on his mind. In common with other political commentators of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he believed the highest form of civilization to be an agrarian republic that held society and nature in perfect synchronicity. While cultivating a certain “boldness, enterprise, and independence to the mind,” hunting smacked of barbarism and primitive civilization. The future belonged to the yeoman farmer. One hundred years on, things looked a little different. President Theodore Roosevelt was dressing in buckskin to play big game hunter across two continents, “Buffalo Bill” Cody and Annie Oakley, “the first American superstars,” wowed audiences on both sides of the Atlantic with their sharpshooting skills, and Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis celebrated the hunting shirt and the pioneer cabin as foundational artifacts of American identity. Hunters were performing everywhere, their collective efforts pointing to a simple conclusion. The nineteenth century was irrevocably shaped by westward expansion, and in that story the hunter stood center stage.³

Hunting in the West naturally subscribed to different categories and followed particular chronologies over the span of a century. Hunting for subsistence had long been a feature of indigenous culture, evidenced by the traps, drives, and buffalo jumps (such as the magnificently named Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo-Jump in present-day Alberta) still visible in the contours of the landscape. Dominating the practice and the symbology of the hunt was the bison, a nutritional powerhouse and provider of all manner of goods from rawhide parfleches to skinning knives crafted from scapula bone. The acquisition of horses from Spanish traders in the 1730s saw a mobile and highly effective nomadic hunting culture spread across the plains, reaching its apogee in

the early 1800s. For the Lakota, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and other plains Indians, hunting on horseback was nothing short of revolutionary. According to ethnologist John Ewers, a minute-long chase from two accomplished hunters armed with bow and arrow could yield up to a ton of bison meat. Indigenous hunting was functional and also deeply performative—the dramaturgy of stampeding animals and whirling mounted hunters captivating a legion of observers from Wild Hog of the Cheyenne to plains artist George Catlin.⁴

The first Euro-American explorers and emigrants to the West were beguiled by its faunal complement: nature's performance opened the show in style. From the expedition of Lewis and Clark (1804–6) to the thousands of emigrants traveling the Oregon Trail in the 1840s and 1850s, the sight of a “first” bison, elk, or grizzly bear prompted cries of delight. Writing on a bluff above the Missouri on April 22, 1805, Meriwether Lewis spoke of “immense herds of Buffaloe, Elk, deer, and Antelopes feeding in one common and boundless pasture.” Travelers feasted their eyes and filled their cooking pots: wild game was representative of a welcome larder as well as an aspect of wonderment. According to Raymond Burroughs, on its 4,000-mile trek across the West, the Corps of Discovery supplemented rations with 1,001 deer, 375 elk, 227 bison, and 43 grizzly bears (as well as game birds, horses, and more “exotic” western fare including hawk, wolf, and gopher). Emigrants took heed of Lansford Hastings's *Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California* (1845) and brought rifles, pistols, lead, powder, and shot alongside essential supplies of flour, coffee, sugar, salt, and bacon expressly for the purpose of hunting (what Hastings called “making meat”).⁵

The settler experience in the West was equally marked by the primacy of the hunt. Jefferson's yeoman farmers eager to claim a slice of prairie sod under the auspices of the Homestead Act (1862) regarded game meat as an invaluable source of sustenance. Cornelius Henderson, who emigrated from Minnesota to Kalispell, Montana, in the 1870s, took to the game trail for a few months every year, finding sage hens welcome culinary relief from his cabbage crop. Hunting for wild game was part of the seasonal cycle of life on the nineteenth-century frontier and also became a key point of cultural reference and social memory. Montana pioneer Nannie Alderson remembered eating buffalo steak in Miles City on her emigrant journey west from Chicago, her first home floored with canvas and animal hide, and plump ranch house cushions stuffed with curly bison hair from one of the last beasts

to roam that area. The spoils of the hunt were everywhere, pragmatic and symbolic markers of frontier experience.⁶

More than hunting for the table, the pursuit of wild things in the nineteenth-century West was an issue of market economics. Game meat, skins, and hides were valuable commodities, marking the trans-Mississippi as a resource frontier in which hunting could bring sizeable financial returns. The trade in animal capital connected the West to a global market, enmeshing it in a transnational network that bonded the plains and mountains to the urban metropolises of New York, London, and Paris. As historian George Colpitts notes of the Canadian Northwest, wild meat served as “the first currency” and a means of barter between indigenous tribes and fur traders, attesting to a complex phenomenology of the hunt that spoke of cultural collision and animal exchange. Central to the trade in the early part of the century was the beaver, a critter that had long been of interest to the British crown (sponsor of the Hudson’s Bay Company) and in the aftermath of the Lewis and Clark Expedition inspired a procession of free trappers and company men to head to the streams of the Rockies in search of fortune. At the height of the industry during the late 1820s, the American Fur Company (1808–47) was harvesting more than 700,000 furbearers annually.⁷

The beaver population was in serious trouble by the 1830s, but changing fashions for wool and silk hats saved the species from the worst incursions of the market. The bison, however, earned no such reprieve. An archetypal “animal of enterprise,” bison were pursued on an industrial scale from the 1860s, facilitated by railroad access, firearms technology, and market demand. The animals were hunted for their meat (notably their tongues, humps, and hindquarters, supplied to army and railroad camps and later, with the development of the refrigerated rail car, to cities on the eastern seaboard) and for their skins (especially after new processes allowed the fashioning of bison hide into soft leather in 1871). The prospect of easy money brought thousands of market hunters to the plains armed with high-powered rifles. Hunting from a “stand” (concealed within range of the herd and firing from rocks or metal supports), buffalo hunters panicked the herd by shooting a lead animal and then fired repeatedly into the resulting melee. When rifles became too hot to use, they were cooled in streams, doused with canteen water, or urinated on. The exercise in butchery ended with packers loading carts and stripping the carcasses, before transit to camp and on by steamer

and rail to Chicago. The scale was industrial—a salient indicator of the West as a landscape of appropriation and conquest—and dramatic, captured as it was in the narrative histories of the hide hunters that resonated with paeans to the trans-Mississippi as cornucopian landscape, the “wild and woolly” days of the unbridled frontier, and of the “winning of the West” through a mercantile gaze. By the mid-1880s, however, both the southern and northern herds were gone: some seven million animals were reduced to a few hundred in a matter of decades. A new “story” and a new performance emerged—encapsulated visually in the stark photographs of bloated bison carcasses and bones piled high at railheads (for shipment as lime and fertilizer) by Layton Huffman, Frank Haynes, and other frontier photographers. Three million bison were killed during the 1872–74 period alone, a figure, as commentator William Black noted, equivalent to half the cattle in Great Britain. *Bison bison*, the “monarch of the plains,” had been one of the region’s most distinctive features and now became the sorrowful symbol of a landscape tamed with extraordinary rapidity. Montana rancher David Hilger, a self-confessed “good shot” and killer of hundreds of buffalo, later lamented, with a conservationist sensibility, his “wanton and ruthless slaughtering of these noble animals.”⁸

Alongside subsistence and market hunting, the American West in the nineteenth century saw recreational hunting on a grand scale. The frontier inspired the attentions of a colorful procession of sport hunters throughout the century, and it is this group of hunters in which *Epiphany in the Wilderness* is most interested. Most pronounced during the “golden age” of sport hunting between 1860 and 1890, big game hunters from both sides of the Atlantic flocked to the West to bag its signature trophy animals, play out fantasies of wilderness exploration, and enact a destiny both manifest and (usually) masculine. What made the West distinctive was its monumental scenery, its frontier character, including the prospect of a rub with American Indians, and a fine complement of big game found nowhere else. As Colonel Richard Dodge avowed, “I think that the whole world can be challenged to offer a greater variety of game to the sportsman.” These adventurers—in effect the first western tourists—routinely expressed delight at the landscapes of abundance laid out before them: of wide prairies “black” with bison herds, verdant forests abounding with deer, and craggy gulches roamed by grizzly bears—a veritable hunter’s paradise born from ecological plenitude as well as the narrative turn of the hunter hero setting the scene for his (and sometimes her) grand entrance.⁹

Sport hunting played a leading role in the development of a leisure economy in the nineteenth-century West while its penchant for what Monica Rico calls “disciplined violence” reflected the exigencies of class, race, gender, and empire. A western tour demanded dedication to the chase, skills with rifle and horse (although that could be practiced), and, first and foremost, financial resources. Being a sport hunter was, fundamentally, an elite activity. Legendary big-spending game hunter George Gore, for instance, spent upward of \$500,000 on his three-year shooting spree across Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota in 1854–57. The Irish aristocrat boasted an entourage of forty staff (arranged through the offices of the American Fur Company), including trappers Henry Chatillon and Jim Bridger, fifty greyhounds, a multitude of guns (which took up an entire wagon), a brass bedstead, a bathtub, and a carpet to bring comfort to prairie sod. Totaling some 2,000 bison, 1,600 elk, and 105 grizzlies, Gore’s kill tally was nothing short of extraordinary. Jim Bridger described one occasion in which “we shot hundreds o’ buffler for nothin’ but the hides, tongues, humps and backstrips and left the rest o’ the meat to the coyotes. Seemed like Sir George wanted spec’mens of everythin’ that flew or crawled or run—we got ’em all!” Such a comment elucidated the trophy ethos of the big game hunter—of spirited victory and specimen collection—and highlighted an imperial mentality that assumed the right to take resources at will.¹⁰

The typologies of hunting in the nineteenth-century West—subsistence, market, and sport—volunteered different approaches in terms of tactics, rationales, and ethnographies. Such distinctions were important, not least in terms of target species, environmental engagement, social codes, and ecological impacts. Where, what, when, and how the hunt was prosecuted varied enormously across the vast theater of the trans-Mississippi, validating what Clyde Milner has referred to as “the fragmented unity” of the region and suggesting a legion of microhistories yet to be written on specific communities. Often framed rhetorically in terms of history and honor, subsistence hunters, sport hunters, and marketeers were each keen to assert their own distinct identities that spoke of fraternal camaraderie, cultural mores, and resource entitlements. In each case, the hunt became a frame of reference through which particular groups defined their relationship to the West, both practically and symbolically. Stories spoke of identity politics and territorial claims—marking the testimonial terrain of the game trail as one heavily

imprinted with operative meaning. “Performing” their hunting identity by talking about frontier experiences, sport hunters consciously defined themselves against the materialistic marketeer, local western guides lampooned the foppish “tenderfoots” who came for their dose of wilderness adrenaline, and settlers set “their” rights to game against that of the indigene. Rubrics of class, race, gender, and empire shaped the cultural and environmental history of hunting in the nineteenth-century West and rendered the game trail as a place for the construction, articulation, and contestation of social difference. Competing notions of rightful use and ritual code positioned the hunting frontier as a locus of contest—and a deeply performative one at that.¹¹

At the same time, however, such distinctions were not always clear-cut. Among the different hunting communities of the nineteenth-century West were cultural exchanges, common visions, and border crossings. For one thing, a significant number of people successfully traversed the boundaries of typology to “perform” the hunt in its various iterations. Henry Bierman, who ventured west in 1880 “to see the country,” worked as a Chicago meat-packer and bison hunter before ranching in the Musselshell Valley, Montana. Bierman hunted regularly to supply his family, freighters, and neighbors with meat and fondly recalled sitting down to a Christmas feast, western-style, in 1886 of antelope, rabbit, dried apple pie, and sourdough biscuit. The cryptography of the chase betrayed common ciphers and spheres of interaction, entangling all hunters in a broader “imagined community” based on their quest for game. As historians Thomas Altherr and John Reiger note, “The very act of pursuing prey and perhaps killing an animal propelled every hunter into a comradeship with others.” Aside from the structural commonalities of the hunt (quest and pursuit), the hunting experience spoke of a common search for social meaning and embroiled its agents in shared networks of expertise in the trans-Mississippi arena. Subsistence hunters enthused about the thrill of the chase in the fashion of the sport hunters. Sport hunters drew on the economic infrastructure of the fur-trading industry for their western tours and ventured a complicated relationship with frontier guides that both valorized and marginalized the subaltern. Hide hunters may have recorded their bison tally by the dollar quotient, but many traded in the parlance of romantic plains lore. James Mead, hide hunter in Kansas during the 1860s, for instance, spoke zestfully of his “sport” on the prairie and kept buffalo horn as a trophy. The cultural ecology of the hunt was—for all its performative

bifurcations—fluid. Moreover, the act of storytelling—of ritually performing the hunt as a way of creating, consolidating, and evoking a frontier identity—was shared by all. The hunting frontier was, at root, a testimonial culture, and stories could be readily shared. Thus, on occasion, “redskins,” “game hogs,” and “bluebloods” could all be found together around the campfire, a pertinent demonstration of their place in a broader community of performers, bound together not only in the quest for animal capital but also by a need to talk about it.¹²

And what of William “Doc” Carver? The “Champion bison hunter of the plains” himself elucidated the fuzzy boundaries of the hunting frontier. Born in Winslow, Illinois, in 1840, Carver had migrated to Minnesota in 1857 and fallen in with the Santee Sioux. According to the *New York Times*, he became a “thorough Indian, and attained wonderful proficiency in shooting, riding, hunting, and all exercises of the chase.” Already skillful at bagging small game (according to biographer Raymond Thorp, he introduced himself to the chief as “a hunter”), Carver grafted an indigenous pedigree onto his frontier education to earn the epithet “Spirit Gun.” After three years with the Sioux, he wandered into St Joseph, Missouri, struck an alliance with trapper Charley Bruster, and took up as a hide hunter. During the 1860s and early 1870s, Doc made a tidy profit (using mounted pursuit over the “stand” and winning plaudits from at least one British sport hunter in the process) before working as a hunting guide with “Texas Jack” Omohundro and Buffalo Bill Cody. Hunting with the Earl of Dunraven in Fox Creek, Nebraska, Carver cached a bison head, only to return later and find it badly chewed by a bear. Eager to facilitate a sonorous frontier experience for his client, Doc duly shot another bison, shipped it to England for mounting, and only confessed the deception at a party hosted years later by the earl in his honor. Carver understood the dynamics of the hunt in all its incarnations. But most of all he understood it as performance.¹³

THE STORYTELLING ANIMAL: HUNTING AND PERFORMANCE IN THE WEST

In the *Wilderness Hunter* (1893), a canonical nineteenth-century treatise on the hunting encounter with wild nature and its denizens, Theodore Roosevelt paid homage to the importance of the West in the national sporting imagination. Joining animal and hunter together in a powerful imaginative

landscape of wilderness immersion was the materiality of the game trail: the engagement, contest, and hard-fought victory over wild land and its complement of charismatic megafauna. As Roosevelt proclaimed, “No one, but he who has partaken thereof, can understand the keen delight of hunting in lonely lands. For him is the joy of the horse well ridden and the rifle well held; for him the long days of toil and hardship, resolutely endured, and crowned at the end with triumph.” Of principal importance in this equation was the story—the remembrance of the chase, its recollection, and its retelling. As Roosevelt explained:

In after years there shall come forever to his mind the memory of endless prairies shimmering in the bright sun; of vast snow-clad wastes lying desolate under gray skies; of the melancholy marshes; of the rush of mighty rivers; of the breath of the evergreen forest in summer; of the crooning of ice-armored pines at the touch of the winds of winter; of cataracts roaring between hoary mountain masses; of all the innumerable sights and sounds of the wilderness; of its immensity and mystery; and of the silences that brood in its still depths.¹⁴

Beneath the narrative of communion with the wild was the imprint of the West as a figurative landscape, a panoramic theater in which grand aspirations could be played out.

As Roosevelt’s ode demonstrates, the cultural landscape of the hunt was saturated with the language of performance, recital and enactment both intrinsic parts of the game trail experience. *Epiphany in the Wilderness* foregrounds this choreographical gaze, seeing the hunting frontier as an unfolding theater where the roles of hunters and the wild things they chased were rehearsed and replayed for the purposes of personal and social memory. As such, the hunt represented a curated experience, consciously acted out on the game trail and scripted via a range of texts and objects in the hunting “afterlife” that allowed for the exercise of the idealized self of the hunter hero within the sacrosanct space of the trans-Mississippi frontier. Hunters conversed with fellow travelers, published tracts on their adventures, commemorated their journeys in photographic albums, and decorated their homes with artworks and trophies of the chase. These carefully construed totems of the hunt contained what Derrida would call “traces” or even, rather appropriately, “tracks” in the literal translation from French—intensely personal

signatures replete with meaning that allowed the staging, recall, and commemoration of moments of intimate and formative experience. At the same time, their significance was thoroughly demonstrative—the hunt was necessarily performed before a series of audiences in order to extrapolate its full importance. From peers on the game trail to the expansive arena of the Wild West Show, hunters broadcast their story through repeat and ritual performance, ratifying the authenticity of their frontier experiences by annunciation. In the process, the discrete trappings of testimonial culture were transmitted to a broader populace eager to imbibe of their “own” frontier drama by reading a story, watching a show, or gazing at a stuffed grizzly bear in a museum case.¹⁵

From the tracks of the game trail to the Wild West showground, the hunting frontier operated according to various dynamics—both material and abstracted—but looming large was the existence of a narrative framework that laid emphasis on the act of *doing*. Hence the usefulness of performance as an analytical lens through which to explore the nineteenth-century hunting frontier. As such, *Epiphany* assumes the conceptual vocabulary of “actor network theory” as developed by Michael Callon and Bruno Latour to see hunting as a ritually constituted activity in which protagonists construct a sense of meaning around event, place, community, and self by repeating and reinforcing behaviors, rites, and interactions. Both on the game trail itself and in its illustrious afterlife, the hunt was acted out, practiced, and idolized as a site of encounter and epiphany. By interrogating this process in terms of a performance, we can plot the motives and motions of its principal players, deconstruct the nature of their repertory, see how it was received by various audiences, and identify those mechanisms that conferred authority and historical significance. Of critical purchase is the idea that the hunt had to be acted and reenacted in order to establish and consolidate its social meaning. As cultural theorist Judith Butler reminds us, cultural identities have to be “performed” socially in order gain legitimization. Also important is the way in which the vernacular of performance pays heed to the subtle inferences of meaning embedded in testimony, script, and object. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz points out, “The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text beyond things written on paper or carved into stone is that it trains attention on precisely this phenomenon: on how the inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on

what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events—history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behavior—implies for sociological interpretation.” A variegated web of relations with its own gestures and interlocutions, the cultural ecology of the hunt is thus usefully understood, in the words of Roland Barthes, in terms of its “activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over,” in short, as a site of “playing.” Within this methodological framework, the historian’s gaze remains critical. As Pearson and Slater note in *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001), a systematic comprehension of performance practice requires interpretation, and this demands understanding both the nature of an event and its historical context.¹⁶

Using performance as its “trail guide,” *Epiphany in the Wilderness* explores how the cultural ecology of the hunting frontier was constructed, sustained, and disseminated—in Barthes’s terminology, its “play, activity, production, practice.” Particularly important is the fact that this conceptual frame of reference allows room for nonhumans, objects, and landscapes to “perform” the hunt as relational participants as well as foregrounding the discursive power of semiotic expression, whereby, as J. L. Austin, asserts, “to say something is to do something.” According to Richard Schechner, “Anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance,” but the trans-Mississippi West strikes as particularly fertile terrain in which to think about the dynamics of history and illocution. A heady landscape in which the historical grounding of frontier process—political, social, economic, and environmental change—played partner to a powerful mythology, the nineteenth-century West was a both a “stage” for the enacting of individual and national aspirations and an energetic folkloric space. Place and process, “f-word” triumphal and trumped, the richly textured landscape of the nineteenth-century West attests to the power of storytelling to inform historical memory. One is reminded here of Hayden White’s assertion that the process by which “story” translates into “history” is imaginative as much as empirical, necessarily rhetorical and poetic in nature, or, more parochially, of the newspaperman’s famous adage in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962): “this is the West, Sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” As an operational tool to navigate the complex contours of westward expansionism and its mythological reach, performance, then, has much to recommend it. After all, as Rosemarie Bank points out, Frederick Jackson Turner—grandmaster of western history—chose the “imagined language of the playwright” to describe the frontier as a process

in which “actors’ perform history.” Equally intriguing was the fact that William F. Cody—another star performer of frontier teleology—relentlessly asserted the *non*-theatrical nature of his productions. Instead, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show offered history “at play” in a series of apparently unscripted montages, rough and ready, naturally dramatic, and, above all, *authentic*. The implications of this, as Jefferson Slagle points out, were profound. Presented and consumed as unadulterated frontier experience, Cody’s all-action West “became history through the act of performance.”¹⁷

If the West represents ideal operative terrain for studying material-semiotic interactions, so too is the landscape of the hunt. In both semantics and structure, hunting seems apt for reading as a performance (after all, it has a start, often a long meandering middle, and a finish). From the outset, scripting and rehearsal was fundamental to those traversing the western game trail. Hunters chose when, what, where, and how to hunt, all with a nod to ritual code and inscribed social meaning. Approached as both travelogue and ontology, many committed significant attention to outfitting (George Gore spent three months selecting guns, dogs, and other sundries) and engaged in reflective musings about their impending experience of the frontier. Once on the trail, the process of introspection continued, demonstrated both in private journal confessions as well as communal display around the campfire, an intimate and deeply performative space described by hunter Grace Gallatin Thompson Seton as the “birthplace of fancy, the cradle of memory.” The dramaturgy of the game trail—its repertory—spoke of challenge and triumph, personal edification, historical gravitas, and environmental fellowship. A critical player in performance interlocation, the story “framed” the hunt, allowing protagonists to make sense of their activities, ritually possess events, extract political, social, and ecological meanings, and give them lasting significance. Accordingly, “packing out” meant not only transporting animals and equipment but also a vibrant and powerful mythology for later retelling and ritual ratification. A bust-up with a Fort Union trader led the departing George Gore to unceremoniously burn his outfitting equipment, including carpets, first-edition books, and own hunting journal. The trophies that were shipped out nonetheless provided, in the words of Captain Randolph Marcy, “abundant vouchers for his performances” back home.¹⁸

Situating the hunter both literally and figuratively, the game trail represented a site of theater, memory, and identity in which performance operated

as a vector of knowing and a vehicle for claiming place, past, and process. According to early twentieth-century psychologist John Dewey, this was no coincidence. Instead, he argued, the practical dynamics of the hunt—its implicit sense of action, dramatic pace, and narrative development—helped forge our socially constructed sense of theater: “The interest of the game, the alternate suspense and movement, the strained and alert attention to stimuli always changing always demanding graceful, prompt, strategic and forceful response; the play of emotions along the scale of want, effort, success or failure—this is the very type, psychically speaking, of the drama. The breathless interest with which we hang upon the movement of play or novel are reflexes of the mental attitudes evolved in the hunting vocation.” In short, we learned our ideas about theatrics—play, gesture, and practice—from formative experiences as hunter-gatherers.¹⁹

According to Dewey at least, the structural dynamics of the hunt molded our sense of dramatic code. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the storytelling canon of *Homo sapiens* often returned to the game trail as a site of narrative inspiration. Across the storied expanse of the Anthropocene—from classical legend to twenty-first-century cryptozoology—could be found vibrant and captivating performances of the hunt, confirming novelist Graham Swift’s contention that *Homo Sapiens* is a “storytelling animal” and highlighting the fact that, more often than not, those stories were *about* animals. In the trans-Mississippi theater itself, hunting tales galloped across different ethnographic and socio-economic stages, suggesting common structural motifs of identity, instruction, and belonging in the cryptography of the chase. Stories told of how animals coached humans in the ways of the game trail (the Blackfeet’s “When Humans and Animals Were Friends”), of unforgiving landscapes and wily foes (Jim Bridger’s engagement with an amassed faunal guerilla force of beaver and wolf as he hid in a tree), and of feats of heroism and honor (a grisly encounter with a ferocious bruin became, in the words of writer Clyde Ormond, “as American as a hot dog or apple pie”). For nineteenth-century historian Henry Howe, the performative trappings of the hunting frontier were so pervasive they even struck as a little clichéd. Speaking in a tone that suggested he had perhaps heard one too many stories of the “largest grizzly in the West,” he exclaimed: “the whole business of the hunter consists of a series of intrigues.”²⁰

The sport hunter was arguably the most flamboyant and prolific performer on the nineteenth-century hunting frontier. Possessed with the finances, the

artistic erudition, and the cultural networks to transfer experience to typography, their testimony looms largest in the storied landscape of the hunt and the narrative geography of *Epiphany in the Wilderness*. An active consumer of frontier experience, performance was an integral part of the sport hunter's outlook. Many arrived in the trans-Mississippi region already enraptured by a grand narrative of wilderness and wild beasts gleaned from the testimony of other hunters or from the growing mythological imprint of the West on the transnational imagination. Describing their travels, many chose the language of theatrics quite deliberately: positioning the western landscape as a theater in which the drama of hunter's paradise unfolded. A world of exciting stalks, campfire banter, and trophy bags galore, the performance of the sport hunter was whimsical, expansive, and endearing. It also served as an expressive device for the enacting of social difference.

Reading the testimony of the sport hunter as a performance act brings fresh insights into the world of the nineteenth-century frontier, illuminating tropes and referents in the cultural history of hunting as well as pointing to an imaginative encounter between humans and wild things that was just as important as their entanglement in the material world. Aside from their elite authorial vantage, deconstructing the body of material left by sport hunters inevitably raises issues of objectivity, representation, and audience reception. Writers prized themselves as natural historians, geographers, and ethnographers and left an autobiographical trail rich with biotic and cultural flavor: this was part of the authorial script of the hunter hero. At the same time, it is highly likely that hunters embellished their stories for dramatic purchase or teleological convenience (that, after all, was foundational to the performance process). Where did cataloging the flora and fauna end and furnishing the theater of the trail with lively incident and markers of identity begin? Arguably, such distinctions are immaterial if we accept the hunting frontier as a layered landscape of material and metaphysical composition. As historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger point out in their analysis of myth, questions of truth or falsehood are less important than the power of an idea to give actions and events particular meaning. Read through the lens of material-semiotic interaction and performance code, it is precisely the *storied* landscape of the hunt that renders it worth a look.²¹

In performing the hunt, hunters created a vibrant mythological landscape that extended far beyond the boundaries of personal reminiscence to

encompass social memory. The cultural artifacts of the hunt included hundreds of books on sport, travel, and western adventure, artistic treatments, photographs, and live action shows (presenting the intriguing prospect of hunters “performing” their own performances on the game trail). Even the trophy haul—animal capital in the form of mounted taxidermy and diorama displays—had a tale in the tail, so to speak. This afterlife of the hunt—its material culture—appealed to a broad (and transnational) audience eager to digest the imagined geography of the frontier with its complement of impressive beasts and adventurous characters. Significantly, as Michel Foucault reminds us, the networks at play between performer, audience, and stage resist binary categorization. Thus, as the mythology of the hunting frontier passed from actor to spectator, the process of framing continued. Placed at the nexus of wilderness fantasy and national expansion, the American West had considerable purchase as a metaphorical staging post for armchair adventurers and theatergoers to engage in their own performances of national myth. Frontier experience—a “piece” of the West as imagined landscape of adventure and adrenaline—could be appreciated from afar. As historian Roger Hall notes of the western entertainment “brand” in *Performing the American Frontier* (2001), “citizens could stake their claim to a portion of the frontier simply by purchasing a ticket.” The cultural artifacts of the hunt thereby provided an opportunity for “lived experience” to all who shared in its testimony, embedding the game trail not only in codes of personal remembrance but also in national mythologies of westward expansion. Consumed by popular audiences on both sides of the Atlantic as “authentic” frontier experience, the West was duly consummated as a heroic geography, a hunter’s paradise of monumental landscapes, charismatic beasts, and a illustrious genealogy of hunter heroes (and, indeed, heroines). Immortalized in trans-media storytelling, the afterlife of the hunt spoke of nature, performance, and the invention of tradition.²²

Where did this leave Doc Carver? In New York in June 1878, Carver put on a show in which he broke 5,500 glass balls in 500 minutes, earning him the title “Champion Rifle Shot of the World.” Prairie showmanship in Nebraska had been a mere prelude to a career as a performing hunter hero. Moving to California in 1876, Carver had taken up as a trick shooter on the exhibition circuit, impressing audiences shooting thousands of glass balls with well-placed aim. In the late 1870s and early 1880s he toured Europe, performing

at London's Crystal Palace, for the British royal family at their Sandringham estate, and before landed elites in France, Germany, and Austria. Cementing and communicating Carver's frontier identity, the *Whitehall Review* billed him as "a tall western hunter, riding with the swing of a prairie horseman." Highlighting his segue into the world of western showmanship, Carver published an autobiography—*Life of Dr. Wm. F. Carver of California: Champion Rifle Shot of the World* (1878)—and engaged in negotiations with Buffalo Bill to present "Buffalo Bill and Doc Carver's Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition." When it opened in Omaha in May 1883, the program advertised Carver as the "most expert rifleman in the universe," but the pairing of two of the frontier's foremost hunter heroes did not auger well. Following disagreements and litigation, the two men parted company: evidently the stage was too small for them both to satisfactorily perform the hunt. By the end of the decade, Carver was setting sail with another frontier drama, "Wild America," this time with stops in Warsaw, Berlin, Moscow, and Melbourne. The Australian press paid heed to Carver's credentials as performing hunter hero and exemplar of frontier manhood in celebrating a "triumphantly successful actor" and "backwoodsman . . . athlete, and dead shot" whose show (albeit, they argued, short on plot) was full of "hair-breadth escapes, perilous adventures, daring rescues, furious combats, and thrilling situations." Playing frontier guide on a transnational stage, Carver tracked the hunt from ecological experience to entertainment staple.²³

CONTESTED TERRAINS: MASCULINITY, CONSERVATION, AND ENCOUNTERING THE "WILD"

The performance repertory of the hunting frontier necessarily embroiled its actors in identity politics, contests over natural resources, and engagements with a "wild" both symbolic and real. By exploring such themes, *Epiphany in the Wilderness* positions hunting as a critical marker in the cultural and environmental history of the American West. Often ignored as a ubiquitous presence (as historian Paul Schullery puts it, an "analysis-exempt part of daily life") or hamstrung by moral polemic, the mechanics of power and encounter on the game trail instead highlight important processes of hegemony and subversion in the age of empire as well as the layered cultural meanings of the hunt and its critical relationship to frontier mythology.²⁴

As various scholars have illuminated, gender looms large in the identity politics of the game trail. The nineteenth century witnessed a crisis of masculine authority in which vigorous outdoor sports (including hunting) were seen as necessary antidotes for the debilitating trappings of urban industrialism. For a legion of upper- and middle-class men, the West emerged as a savage cornucopia in which to salvage their manhood and make sense of their lives. Performance was an important part of this process, in which the hunting frontier was situated as a landscape that was both inert (a stage of action) and also dripping with mythological purchase as a locus of personal proving. As Monica Rico points out, nature served as a fertile realm in which to “establish, elaborate, and defend masculinity.” Using the conceptual language of performance, *Epiphany in the Wilderness* adds to an extant scholarship concerned with the construction of masculinity by exploring how the community of sport hunters corroborated their manhood by encountering the wild, communing together in the homo-social landscape of the game trail, and rehearsing their restorative journey via a variety of cultural forms. Master of the woods in his actions and authorial voice, the sport hunter adhered to a performance code that allowed the full exercise of masculine transformation and the articulation of social prestige. Or, as old-time hunter Eldred Woodcock put it: “if you want to know all about a man, go camping with him.” In popular culture, meanwhile, the hunter emerged as a stalwart figure and exemplar of rugged individualism, independence, and physical prowess. This work considers the specifically western attributes of the hunter hero genealogy, finding new configurations of belonging at play. Beyond cultural purchase as an “American native,” the figure of the heroic hunter served as a marker of regional identity *and* imperial primacy, enmeshing British and American elites in a transnational colonial fraternity of masculine brotherhood.²⁵

The history of hunting in the nineteenth-century West tells a story of masculine hegemony under construction and extrapolation. Significantly, however, it also proposes important qualifications to the monolithic power and reach of the hunter hero. In trudging the game trail of colonial masculinity, sport hunters relied heavily on frontier guides who served as savvy brokers (choreographers, in the parlance of this work) of the wilderness experience. The western game trail was, accordingly, a negotiated space in which other iterations of masculine prowess squared up against the visiting sport. As

Basso, McCall, and Garceau explain, “The real West emerged as a pluralist region where competing notions of manhood played out in encounters among ethnic and racial cultures, classes, and genders.” United in the search for animal capital, it was in the performance details of the hunt that such contests were most starkly illuminated. The narrative script—in other words, the *how* and *why* of the game trail—highlights the American West as a rich figurative terrain in which social codes of distinction, legitimization, and hierarchy played out.²⁶

Digging further into the realms of storytelling and testimony, *Epiphany in the Wilderness* points to an even greater heresy (and one usefully encapsulated by the image of the J. L. Grandin hunting party [1879] on the front cover). While the “dead white men” of history found in the game trail a place to confirm their social status and quell anxieties about the erosion of hegemonic masculinity, women also took to the hunting trail with gusto, finding their own ways to appropriate the performance of the hunt and, in so doing, venture a challenge to socially proscribed gender roles. For the homesteader, the “lady adventurer,” and the “wild woman,” the game trail represented a site for personal proving, the rehearsal of woodcraft skills, and the exercise of flamboyant frontier panache. Just as Theodore Roosevelt dressed in buckskin for the purposes of identity confirmation and public show, so too did Calamity Jane. America’s “national costume” was not only cut for men.

The contested social meanings of the hunting trail came into relief when the natural resources of the West began to run out. The idea of the trans-Mississippi region as a site of abundant animal capital had animated the performance of hunter’s paradise for much of the century and, as faunal populations declined, set the narrative for a new dramatic reading. Witnessing the decline of game stocks, a diverse range of constituencies—from sportsmen-preservationists to camera-hunters and American Indians—proselytized on the imperilment of hunter’s paradise and its necessary salvation. Stories attested to the rich social meanings attached to the land—stories of community, biophilia, and belonging and of social difference (race, class, and imperial codes of appropriation and enfranchisement). A complicated territory of appreciation and appropriation, the history of conservation in the West resists reductive treatment. *Epiphany in the Wilderness* acknowledges the material contribution of the sporting elite to the conservationist cause but also positions the hunting trail as a politicized landscape marshaled by power

relations. Writing for *Environmental History* in 1995, Thomas Altherr and John F. Reiger called for a thoughtful scholarship that refrained from presenting the hunter as a masculine braggart crashing through the woods or an ecological heir apparent tiptoeing through the timberline, and it is to this memorandum that *Epiphany in the Wilderness* speaks.²⁷

This book sits at the intersection between the materiality of the hunt and its storytelling presence—at the nexus of typology, taxonomy, and typography. As Donald Worster reminds us, at the root of any environmental transaction is the materialism of nature, in this case a fecund story of animal capital and its role in processes of westward expansionism. Ever present is an acknowledgment that hunting existed in a physical space and was concerned with an actuality of encounter between people and the wild things that so captivated them. It is in the “material relation with the animal,” historian Erica Fudge argues, that our engagement with the nonhuman is fundamentally rooted. At the same time, the constructed nature of our engagement with the “wild” is unassailable. As William Cronon points out in his influential essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” we have created untamed spaces as points of refuge, rescue, and redemption, “the wild” being a “reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires.” Equally, it is this cultural inscription that *Epiphany in the Wilderness* addresses. In the storied landscape of the hunt, the quest for game was bound by metaphysics, ritual, and experiential code. For biological anthropologist Matt Cartmill, its importance lay in “symbolism, not its economics.” Performance remained a critical coda on, off, and of the game trail, situating the hunt not only as a socioeconomic phenomenon but a dramatic one as well. Visions of paradise, renewal, and redemption enacted a powerful afterlife of the hunt that preserved the memory of the game trail long after the hunter had left and conspired in the creation of an imagined geography. In the words of visual theorist Susan Sontag, there can be “an ecology not only of real things but of images as well.”²⁸

Taking its cue from dramatic example, *Epiphany in the Wilderness* tracks the performance of the hunt in three acts. Paying respect to the typical chronological (and, as Dewey would have it, innately dramatic) contours of hunting practice, it begins at the western trailhead to examine the actors and agents who collectively encompassed the cultural ecology of the hunt. Act 1 looks at the various players involved in the process: sportsmen crafting their own “perfect” wilderness adventure at every track; the protagonists cast in supporting

roles, from fellow travelers and beasts “red in tooth and claw” to firearms loaded with ammunition and expressive meaning; and those women hunters whose presence on the game trail and in performance code destabilized the masculine hegemony of hunter heroism. Act 2 moves on to consider the illustrious afterlife of the hunt as transmitted by a range of cultural artifacts from literature, art, and photography to theater and taxidermy and their role in constructing a national folklore of wilderness and western adventure. Here the hunter moves into position as curator of the hunting “story,” the principal producer of the testimonial culture of the hunt and an active agent in disseminating its narrative codes to a broader audience enraptured by the “lived experience” of frontier performers. In the final act, focus shifts to the demise of hunter’s paradise and a new roster of conservationist prescriptions for saving the faunal frontier. In the late nineteenth-century the story of the hunt underwent a radical reconstruction in the hands of conservationists, camera-hunters, and Ghost Dancers, each of which constructed a new narrative framework around which to enact political, cultural, and environmental relationships. The performance of the hunt in the nineteenth-century West told a complicated yarn of animal animation and social meaning. Epiphany in the wilderness spoke of environmental encounter and expressive device—an ecology of entanglement between a corporeal world and its allegorical imprint. While all of this was going on, Doc Carver continued to wield his rifle and shoot balls in the air like the frontier heroes of legend.

NOTES

1. The contest is recounted in Chas. R. Nordin, “Dr. W. F. Carver, Wizard Rifle Shot of the World on the Nebraska Plains,” *Nebraska History* 10 (October–December 1927): 344–52; Chas. R. Nordin, “Winners of the West,” October 30, 1922, Buffalo Folder, Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena (hereafter cited as MHS); Raymond W. Thorp, *Spirit Gun of the West: The Story of Doc. F. Carver* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1957), 67–76.

2. Isabella Bird, *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960 [1879]), 53; Horace Edwards to Henry, Elk Creek, September 21, 1884, Horace Edwards Letters, WA MSS S-1634, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

3. Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 19, 1785, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, ed. Julian Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 406–8; Larry

McMurtry, *The Colonel and Little Missie: Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley and the Beginnings of Superstardom in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 4.

4. John Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1953), 34. See also Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (September 1991), 465–85; J. Donald Hughes, *American Indian Ecology* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1983); Shepard Krech III, ed., *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981); Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relations in the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Christopher Vecsay and Robert W. Venables, eds., *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980).

5. Bernard DeVoto, ed., *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), 98; Raymond Burroughs, *The Natural History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 283; Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* (Cincinnati: George Conclin, 1845), 17, 143.

6. Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, *A Bride Goes West* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942), 24–28, 17.

7. George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 14. See also Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West: A History of the Pioneer Trading Posts and Early Fur Companies of the Missouri Valley and the Rocky Mountains and the Overland Commerce with Santa Fe*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986 [1902]); Robert Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous: Mountain Men and the Paths to the Pacific* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997); Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Elizabeth Vibert, *Trader's Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807–1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); David Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807–1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

8. Richard White, "Animals and Enterprise," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyder Milner, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 237–73. Black quoted in the introduction to Richard Irving Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds of the Great West* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1877), xvii–xviii; David Hilger, "Overland Trail," David Hilger Papers, SC854, Box 5, Folder 8, Writings (1907–1935), MHS, 1-6; David Hilger, "Early Days in Dog Creek, Fergus County Montana," David Hilger Papers, SC854, Box 5, Folder

8, Writings (1907–1935), MHS, 31. On the destruction of the bison, see E. Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); David Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Saga of an American Symbol* (New York: Avon, 1974); Valerious Geist, *Buffalo Nation: History and Legend of the North American Bison* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1996); Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972); Frank Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951); Mari Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men* (New York: Hastings, 1954).

9. Dodge, *Hunting Grounds*, 118.

10. Monica Rico, *Nature's Noblemen: Transatlantic Masculinities and the Nineteenth-Century American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 6; Bridger quoted in Norman B. Wiltsey, "Jim Bridger: He-coon of the Mountain Men," *Montana Magazine* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1955), 14.

11. Clyde Milner, introduction to *A New Significance: Re-envisioning the History of the American West*, ed. Clyde Milner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

12. Henry Bierman, Reminiscence, SC30: Box 1, Folder 1, MHS, 1–17, 37; Thomas Altherr and John Reiger, "Academic Historians and Hunting: A Call for More and Better Scholarship," *Environmental Review* 19 (1995): 42; James R. Mead, *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859–1875*, ed. Schuyler Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 37–40, 73–75.

13. *New York Times*, July 14, 1878; Thorp, *Spirit Gun*, 25; John Mortimer Murphy, *Sporting Adventures in the Far West* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879), 174–75, 252; "Dr. W. F. Carver—The Evil Spirit of the Plains," *Wild West Buffalo Bill and Dr. Carver's Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition* (Hartford, CT: Calhoun Press, ca. 1883), 5–7.

14. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1893), 8.

15. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978).

16. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 24–25; Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 31; Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image/Music/Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 158; Mike Pearson and Michael Slater, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001). On performance studies as a discipline, see W. B.

Worthen, "Disciplines of the Text/Sites of Performance," *TDR* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 13–28; J. Reinelt, ed., *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

17. Barthes, "From Work to Text," 162; J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 94; Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 1–2; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), ix; Rosemarie Bank, "Representing History: Performing the Columbia Exposition," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Reinelt, 234; Jefferson D. Slagle, "America Unscripted: Performing the Wild West," in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West*, ed. Nicolas Witschi (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 433. Scholarship that "reads" the West in performance terms is in its infancy but includes precursory works on theatrical production and the mythology of the frontier as a national entertainment staple in the shape of Roger Hall's *Performing the American Frontier, 1870–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Jeffrey Mann's *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993); and as well as scholarship by Banks and Slagle (both cited above) on the performance of frontier mythology at the World's Columbian Exposition and in the Wild West show respectively. Louis S. Warren in *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005); and McMurtry in *The Colonel and Little Missie* both explore the question of performance and the celebrity presence of Cody. The question of performativity and the West is, of course, informed by a broad historiography on the myth of the frontier, including Richard Slotkin's trilogy, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); *Regeneration through Violence: The Myth of the American Frontier, 1600–1800* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); as well as Henry Nash Smith's classic text *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

18. Grace Gallatin Thompson Seton, *Nimrod's Wife* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907), 177; Randolph Marcy, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1866), 402.

19. John Dewey, "Interpretation of Savage Mind," *Psychological Review* 9 (1902): 224.

20. Graham Swift, *Waterland* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1983]), 62; Clyde Ormond, *Hunting in the Northwest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 59; H. Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West: Containing Narratives of the Most Important and Interesting Events in Western History* (New York: George Tuttle, 1857), 120.

21. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.
22. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 2; Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish, Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 195–228. On the West and popular entertainment, see Richard Aquila, *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); James Grossman, ed., *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); L. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).
23. *Whitehall Review*, April 3, 1879; “Dr. W. F. Carver—The Evil Spirit of the Plains,” 5–7; *Melbourne Daily Telegraph*, undated clipping in Dr. W. F. Carver Collection, 88.179.52: Scrapbook, Autry Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles.
24. Paul Schullery, “Theodore Roosevelt: The Scandal of the Hunter as Nature Lover,” in *Theodore Roosevelt: Many-Sided American*, ed. Natalie A Naylor et al. (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1992), 229. For discussion of hunting and philosophy, animal rights, and ethics, see Simon Bronner, *Killing Tradition: Beyond Hunting and Animal Rights Controversies* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Jan Dizard, *Going Wild: Hunting, Animal Rights, and the Contested Meaning of Nature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); and *Mortal Stakes: Hunters and Hunting in Contemporary America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Ted Kerasote, *Blood Ties: Nature, Culture, and the Hunt* (New York: Random House, 1983); Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1972); David Petersen, *Heartsblood: Hunting, Spirituality, and Wildness in America* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000); David Petersen, ed., *A Hunter’s Heart: Honest Essays on Blood Sport* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996); Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974); James Swan, *In Defense of Hunting: Yesterday and Today* (New York: HarperOne, 1995). In terms of writing on the American West, there are a few “pioneer” surveys. John Merritt’s *Baronets and Buffalo: The British Sportsman in the American West, 1833–1881* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 1985) focused on the narrative biography of one of the West’s key constituents, as does journalist Peter Pagnamenta’s *Prairie Fever: British Aristocrats in the American West, 1830–90* (New York: Norton, 2012), chaps. 1–5. Judith Li’s collection *To Harvest, To Hunt: Stories of Resource Use in the American West* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2007) serves a vital purpose in pointing to the testimonials of ethnic and immigrant groups. Richard Rattenbury’s illustrated work for the Boone and Crockett Club, *Hunting the American West: The Pursuit of Big Game for Life, Profit, and Sport, 1800–1900* (Missoula, MT: Boone and Crockett Club, 2008); and Daniel Herman’s chapter on the West in *Hunting and the American*

Imagination (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003) represent the most comprehensive histories.

25. Rico, *Nature's Noblemen*, 10; Eldred Woodcock, *Fifty Years a Hunter and Trapper* (St. Louis: A. R. Harding, 1913), 226. Coverage of the identity politics of the hunter hero can be found in Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination*; Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*; and Smith, *Virgin Land*. For debates on gender and empire, see Greg Gillespie, "'I Was Well Pleased with Our Sport among the Buffalo': Big-Game Hunters, Travel Writing, and Cultural Imperialism in the British North American West, 1847–72," *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 4 (2002): 555–84; Greg Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire: Narratives of Sport in Rupert's Land, 1840–1870* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880–1939," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 296–319; Karen Wonders, "Hunting Narratives of the Age of Empire," *Environment and History* 11 (2005): 269–91; John M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). Also valuable for its transnational focus on Anglo settler societies is Thomas Dunlap's *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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