

# VIOLENT LOVE: HUNTING, HETEROSEXUALITY, AND THE EROTICS OF MEN'S PREDATION

BRIAN LUKE

"It will require a courageous grasp of the politics and economics, as well as the cultural propaganda, of heterosexuality to carry us beyond individual cases or diversified group situations into the complex kind of overview needed to undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control."

—Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* (summer 1980)

In his novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Arthur Conan Doyle tells a story concerning a cruel nobleman named Hugo Baskerville. Hugo desired a neighboring woman who consistently avoided him. One night he and his companions kidnapped her and locked her in an upstairs room in Baskerville Hall. She escaped by climbing down the ivy on the outside wall, and

some little time later Hugo left his guests to carry food and drink—with other worse things, perchance—to his captive, and so found the cage empty and the bird escaped. Then, as it would seem, he became as one that hath a devil. . . . And while the revellers stood aghast at the fury of the man, one more wicked or, it may be, more drunken than the rest, cried out that they should put the hounds upon her. Whereat Hugo ran from the house, crying to his grooms that they should saddle his mare and unkennel the pack, and giving the hounds a kerchief of the maid's, he swung them to the line, and so off full cry in the moonlight over the moor.<sup>1</sup>

The woman ultimately died of fear and fatigue, and Hugo himself had his throat torn out by a mysterious large black beast, "the hound of the Baskervilles."

In linking hunting with predatory sexuality, Doyle's imagination matches reality. From the perspective of the man hunting

with hounds, the chase is hot, charged with phallic sexuality:

The sudden immersion in the countryside has numbed and annulled him. . . . But here they come, here comes the pack, and instantly the whole horizon is charged with a strange electricity; it begins to move, to stretch elastically. Suddenly the orgiastic element shoots forth, the dionysiac, which flows and boils in the depths of all hunting. . . . There is a universal vibration. Things that before were inert and flaccid have suddenly grown nerves, and they gesticulate, announce, foretell. There it is, there's the pack!<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I show how contemporary hunting by North American white men is structured and experienced as a sexual activity. The erotic nature of hunting animals allows sport hunting to participate in a relation of reciprocal communication and support with the predatory heterosexuality prominent in Western patriarchal society.

### A PASSION FOR POWER

Hunters unfailingly describe their relation to their prey in terms of sex and affection. For example, Robert Wegner discusses the "profound love" of deer possessed by Archibald Rutledge, a man who killed 299 white-tailed bucks in his lifetime.<sup>3</sup> In describing hunting, no term in the vocabulary of love is neglected (emphasis added in each case):

For many people throughout history, the most *seductive* voice of Mother Nature at special times of the year has been the invitation to join in the quest to hunt and kill birds, mammals, reptiles, and fish. . . . For the *passionate* hunter who is willing to *fall in love* with the creatures that are hunted, the desire to give something back to nature bears equal passion to the hunt. . . . Hunting, in the final analysis, is a *great teacher of love*.<sup>4</sup>

[Jack] felt that bow hunting made him superior to those who killed by looking through the sights of a powerful rifle. "What did they know," he had said to his girlfriend Candice once, "what *intimacy* did they feel with the animal?"<sup>5</sup>

The decision to cull was made by *caring* professionals [referring to the decision by Florida wildlife officials to permit hunters to kill deer stranded by flooding].<sup>6</sup>

Hunting, properly done, is not an outworn cruelty but rather a manifestation of man's desire to reestablish or maintain a union with the natural world. There are various paths to this *marriage*.<sup>7</sup>

There is no incongruity in describing the disposition to shoot wild animals to death as loving, if one correctly understands the vocabulary being used. "Love" here simply means the de-

sire to possess those creatures who interest or excite the hunter. Taking possession typically entails killing the animal, eating the flesh, and mounting the head or the entire body. The identification between "loving" and possessing by killing and mounting is made in the following hunter's comments regarding two ducks he shot and stuffed: "'I saw these mountain ducks and fell in love with them,' says Paul, the tone of his voice matching the expression he wears in the photo with the Dall sheep—one of most tender regard for something precious. 'I just had to have a pair of them.'"<sup>8</sup> Aldo Leopold—hunter, forest manager, and founding father of modern environmental ethics—described the trophy as a "certificate" attesting to the hunter's success in "the age-old feat of overcoming, outwitting, or reducing-to-possession."<sup>9</sup> And Jose Ortega y Gasset, who wrote the outstanding statement of twentieth-century sportsman's philosophy, defined hunting by both humans and nonhumans as "what an animal does to take possession, dead or alive, of some other being that belongs to a species basically inferior to its own."<sup>10</sup>

"Romance" is probably the word most commonly used to refer to hunting, as in the following representative list of titles and subtitles, all from books about hunting: *The Eternal Romance between Man and Nature*, *The Romance of Hunting*, *Romantic Adventures in Field and Forest*, *Romance of Sporting*, even *Flirtation Camp: Or, the Rifle, Rod, and Gun in California: a Sporting Romance*. Andrée Collard remarks on the prevalence of romantic images of the hunt, which she analyzes thus:

A romantic removes the "love object" from the reality of its being to the secret places of his mind and establishes a relationship of power/domination over it. There can be no reciprocity, no element of mutuality between the romantic lover and the "love object." The quest (chase) is all that matters as it provides a heightened sense of being through the exercise of power.<sup>11</sup>

This power difference determines the "basically inferior" status of prey species as claimed by Ortega y Gasset.

Hunters' statements confirm Collard's analysis of romance. One sportsman speaks of the "wild romanticism" of Africa and remarks that "as the animal moves into your sights, you are most thoroughly alive."<sup>12</sup> And in his book, *In Defense of Hunting*, James Swan describes as "romantic" the lives of the old

market hunters ("people who killed ducks, geese, passenger pigeons, and anything else they could for money"). Swan explains the source of the appeal of hunting:

Though fishing and hunting share the common quest for capturing a wild creature, hunting for me has always had a more *seductive* call. . . . Once a fish is hooked, excitement rises to be sure, but once the fish is landed it can be returned to the water to live on. Also, relatively few fish that get off the line before being landed are harmed or killed by being hooked. There is more leniency in fishing. A hunter holds life and death in his hands, with creatures for which we have a closer kinship.<sup>13</sup>

So power over life and death is central to the seductive, exciting romance of hunting. But words like "seduction" and "romance" connote sex as well as power. It is not that "romance" connotes only sex when applied to heterosexual relations and connotes only power when applied to hunting. Rather, hunting and predatory heterosexuality are instances of romance because each is simultaneously sexual and an expression of power.

John Mitchell describes a dinner-table argument over hunting during which a frustrated hunting advocate throws up his hands and says: "Telling you about hunting is like trying to explain sex to a eunuch."<sup>14</sup> Hunters frequently use sexual allusions to explain their killing. For example:

[H]unting includes killing, like sex includes orgasm. Killing is the orgasm of hunting. But like in making love—talking and touching and, you know, looking in the eyes, and just smelling—the long story is the real lovemaking, and orgasm is the inevitable end of it. That is the killing of hunting, but only one part of it.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, James Swan compares the "hunter's high" to the "payoff of an orgasm," and Paul Shepard describes killing as the "ecstatic consummation" of the hunter's "love" for his prey.<sup>16</sup>

Men who defend hunting frequently compare it to sex. One of the most common arguments used to justify hunting is that men who hunt today are expressing a deeply ingrained instinct.<sup>17</sup> In the context of this argument we find comparisons between hunting and sex such as the following: "One of my basic hypotheses here is that man is instinctively a hunter. He does not hunt for reasons of pleasure, although he has come to associate pleasure with absolute necessity. One may draw an analogy between the pleasures we have learned in the hunt and those we associate with sex."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, according to James Swan, hunting remains a "basic instinct, like sex, which

is implanted in our minds and bodies." He likens the possibility of foregoing the hunt to the possibility of foregoing sexual intercourse: "We can get by without hunting, but is this something we really want to do? We could also drop having sexual intercourse in favor of in vitro fertilization."<sup>19</sup> Swan's rhetorical question suggests that both possibilities are equally unnatural, absurd, and undesirable.

The argument that sport hunting is instinctive is easily enough rebutted, for example, by noting that those who do not hunt (a 93 percent majority in the United States) show no evident signs of being repressed.<sup>20</sup> If hunting is instinctive, why do children in hunting families sometimes refuse to hunt,<sup>21</sup> and why do hunters themselves experience such pangs of conscience that many of them eventually stop killing?<sup>22</sup> My main interest here is not in the soundness of this argument but in the presumption it makes about hunting and sex—namely, that both are so natural as to be unalterable:

[Hunting] is absolutely beyond accepted, formal morality in the way, at essence, that other fundamental human activity, sex, is: sex can bring us pleasure or sadness, but the desire to join with another, whether or not acted on, remains basic and unalterable: by itself it is neither good nor evil; it only is.<sup>23</sup>

By naturalizing hunting, this argument attempts to move it out of the realm of moral dispute altogether. The comparisons of hunting with sex in this respect both draw from and reinforce the common view that sexual behavior is innately determined. The naturalization of sex is a reactionary position often promoted specifically to excuse men's sexual violence against women and children, just as naturalizing hunting excuses men's violence against animals.

James Whisker compares hunting to sex in order to explain and defend hunting but rejects the literal identification of hunting as a sexual activity. Against theories that analyze hunting as an expression of phallic sexuality, Whisker argues that there exist many other phallic symbols besides guns and that, although men do admit to feeling "manly" as a result of hunting, they also derive this feeling from other sports. But the existence of institutions expressive of manliness or phallic sexuality other than hunting says nothing about the nature of hunting itself. Whisker also points out that there are female as

well as male hunters.<sup>24</sup> A relatively small number of hunters (less than 7 percent in the United States) are female. Whisker evidently presumes that these women cannot be experiencing their hunting as a form of sexualized domination. But if we reject deterministic/dualistic theories of sexuality, it remains an open question whether some women develop a predatory sexuality (in hunting or elsewhere). To be sure, women's writing on hunting remains relatively free of the frenzied, highly sexualized accounts men frequently give of their hunting.<sup>25</sup> But even if sportswomen do tend to experience hunting differently than do sportsmen, this by itself would not invalidate any given analysis of the nature of *men's* hunting. If some women hunt in nonsexualized ways, this certainly suggests the possibility that some men might also hunt in nonsexualized ways. This abstract possibility notwithstanding, sportsmen's self-descriptions, sampled below, indicate that among them sexual experiences of hunting are very common.<sup>26</sup>

The reasons behind Whisker's reluctance to identify men's hunting as sexual are noteworthy. Whisker states that within sexual interpretations of hunting, the "hunter has been reduced to the position of being a sexually immature, unfulfilled and frustrated and probably mentally ill creature who is in need of therapeutic help."<sup>27</sup> According to Whisker, to see hunting as a sexual activity implies that hunters are fundamentally "unfulfilled and frustrated," that is, they do not gain sexual satisfaction elsewhere. Because Whisker rejects the notion that hunters are sexually dysfunctional, he also rejects the interpretation of hunting as sexual.

Like Whisker, antihunters also at times equate sexualized hunting with sexual dysfunction or deviance. But antihunters are more likely to accept sexual interpretations of hunting and use the equation to stigmatize hunters (hunters are sexually frustrated or impotent; hunting compensates for small penises, and so forth). Neither Whisker's analysis nor antihunting rhetoric of this sort recognizes the possibility that eroticized animal hunting may be a sexual expression of *normal* men in hunting communities. As I argue in the following section, sexual descriptions of hunting are not merely metaphoric; for many North American sportsmen hunting is a sexual experience. By interpreting the sexuality of hunting as sexual deviance, anti-

hunters gain a quick way to demonize a morally repugnant activity, but only by ignoring the fact that hunting is not perpetrated by a few isolated, abnormal men but rather is organized and carried out by entire communities of men. Within hunting communities it is the abnormal man who does *not* enjoy hunting. Hunting men are not frustrated and sexually impotent, they typically enjoy sexual relations with other people, *and* they enjoy the erotics of stalking and shooting wild animals. Within certain patriarchal social structures the disposition to take sexual pleasure in the domination and destruction of other living beings is a normal part of men's fulfillment.

A comparison with theories of rape may be useful here. Rape is often imaged as the deviant behavior of a sexually frustrated man overwhelmed by a chance encounter with a provocative woman. To sustain this image certain facts must be ignored: that most rapes are premeditated, that rapists usually know those they attack, that rapes are often carried out by men in groups, that rapists are typically not degenerates or sexual deviants, that more than one-half of college age men surveyed said they would force sex on a woman if they were sure they could get away with it, and so forth.<sup>28</sup> The last two facts suggest that rape is hardly a deviant activity, yet to acknowledge this conclusion, just as to acknowledge the normalcy of men's erotic enjoyment of hunting, suggests the threatening possibility that there is something seriously wrong with normal manhood in this culture.

The other consequence of the standard image of rape is that it puts the burden on women to control their behavior to avoid "provoking" men into rape. When the man rapes, it becomes "her fault." This is not only a presumption of the legal system, it is also a common feature of men's phenomenology of rape. As the interviews in the book *Men on Rape* demonstrate, rapists often report feeling that *they* were attacked by their victims and that the rape was a way of regaining lost control or seeking justifiable revenge.<sup>29</sup> I would not deny that some of these men actually feel that they were the disempowered victims, but I would distinguish those feelings from the reality that rape remains a premeditated, unprovoked act of aggression. In a similar way, hunting men often report that they are only responding to some violent depredation initiated by the animal

(mountain lions attacking joggers, wolves killing livestock, deer eating crops, and so forth). Hunters make these claims even in situations where the overall context reveals that they themselves initiated the attack. For instance, the 1989 film *In the Blood* tells the story of some of the male descendants of Theodore Roosevelt mounting a hunting expedition to Africa. Once there, the group splits into two parties: one hunts for trophy-size Cape Buffalo, the other decides to bait and kill a large, wily old crocodile known by the locals. A native who makes money guiding white hunters tells the sportsmen that this crocodile has taken some of their livestock. Rumors are floated that this crocodile may even have killed some children. As the sportsmen carry out their ultimately unsuccessful attempt to kill the crocodile, they construct an image of themselves as benevolent protectors responding justifiably to the crocodile's aggression against the local people. Lost in this image is the reality that these white men came to Africa specifically to kill some indigenous animal or other and that once there they fixed on the crocodile not simply because he was claimed to be a threat to the locals, but also because he promised to be a challenging adversary, and because crocodiles are protected from sportsmen in most other parts of the world (thus greatly increasing their trophy value and the market value of the pelt).

### **THE EROTICS OF HUNTING**

North American white men do not hunt out of necessity; they typically do not hunt to protect people or animals, nor to keep themselves or their families from going hungry. Rather, they pursue hunting for its own sake, as a sport. This point is obscured by the fact that many hunters consume the flesh of their kills with their families, thus giving the appearance that hunting is a subsistence tactic. A close reading of the hunting literature, however, reveals that hunters eat the flesh of their kills as an *ex post facto* attempt at morally legitimating an activity they pursue for its own sake.<sup>30</sup> The hunter often portrays himself as providing for his family through a successful kill and "harvest." This posture seeks to ritually reestablish a stereotypical masculine provider role less available now than it



may once have been. In reality hunting today is typically not a source of provision but actually drains family resources. Deer hunters, for example, spend on average twenty dollars per pound of venison acquired, once all the costs of equipment, licenses, transportation, unsuccessful hunts, and so forth, are calculated.<sup>31</sup>

This hunting is doubly sexual—as a source of erotic enjoyment as well as an expression of masculine gender identity. In her ecofeminist critique of hunters' discourse, Marti Kheel cites a number of sportsmen and hunting advocates who understand hunting as an expression of aggressive male sexual energy.<sup>32</sup> The following sampling of North American hunters' literature indicates the validity of a sexual interpretation of hunting. The pattern is that of a buildup and release of tension organized around the pursuit, phallic penetration, and erotic touching of a creature whom the hunter finds seductively appealing.

Hunting is experienced as and expected to be a very sensual activity for the hunter.<sup>33</sup> The physical exertion; exposure to the elements; immersion in environments rich in sights, sounds, and smells; and the stalking induced intensification of sensory capacity all contribute. But the warm internal feelings mentioned by hunters go beyond the sensory focus and stimulation entailed by stalking in the wild and suggest an additional, purely sexual aspect of the hunting sensuality.

Indeed, the hunting experience follows rhythms typical of men's sexuality in this society. For rockstar Ted Nugent, bow-hunting follows this pattern—anticipation, desire, pursuit, excitement, penetration, climax, and satiation.

Last season's hunts are still vivid in the mind, but it does little to satisfy the craving.<sup>34</sup> . . .

It's the preparation, the thought process that goes into anticipating the hunt that's the most exciting part.<sup>35</sup> . . .

Their grace and beauty . . . was the essence of the thrill of the hunt. My binoculars revealed their delicate features; . . .

a certain light, cream-colored sheep was calling me; . . .

Him, I wanted; . . .

I had worked myself up to a nervous wreck waiting to shoot; . . .

the heated excitement of the shot; . . .

the shaft was in and out . . . complete penetration; . . .

I was hot . . . I was on fire;<sup>36</sup> . . .

Oh yeah, a lot of blood here, I'm getting excited now . . . there's no telling what I might do . . . I'm excited . . . I am high.<sup>37</sup> . . .

the kill is climactic; . . .

I felt good all over; . . .

it satiated a built-up frustration; . . .

a serious still hunt/stalking maneuver . . . can gratifyingly drain a guy. I like that.<sup>38</sup> . . .

And one southern hunter explains: "Deer huntin' is like the fever. It builds up all year long and then has to be released. It's like buildin' up for 'a piece.' Once ya laid one, you move onto the next one that may be harder."<sup>39</sup>

This is a phallogocentric sexuality. The weapon becomes an extension of the hunter's body and thereby the means by which he penetrates animal bodies: "the traditional archer carries his bow lightly and casually, almost as if it's an extension of his body." Decisions of which instrument of penetration to use are made by reference to maximizing the erotic sensation experienced by the hunter, as in this argument for traditional hand-made wooden bows and arrows over high-tech factory-produced equipment: "Is there any romance in a steel cable or a magnesium pulley? Does an aluminum arrow generate any feeling of warmth for the archer?"<sup>40</sup>

The various dysfunctions of phallic heterosexuality all have their counterparts in hunting. In a passage that could easily be paraphrased into a sex manual, Nugent lists the varieties of "target panic," a malady afflicting hunters who become too excited to shoot properly: "The target panic demon comes in many disguises. Flinching, freezing above, below or to one side, failing to come to full draw, releasing the arrow prematurely, not being able to release at all! All kinds of mind-boggling dementia."<sup>41</sup> "Target panic," also known as "buck fever," is common enough among hunters to have generated its own extensive literature.

Targetted animals become objects of erotic desire for the hunter. One night in the middle of a weekend goose hunt, James Swan dreamt "I saw a Canada goose come to me, and then it was lying beside me."<sup>42</sup> Another hunter explicitly identifies his feelings toward hunted animals with sexual desire: "You see the animal and it becomes a love object. There is tremendous sexuality in this . . . sexuality in the sense of want-

ing something deeply, in the sense of eros. All quests, all desires, are ultimately the same, don't you think?"<sup>43</sup> And elk hunter Ted Kerasote ends his book by describing this dream:

I . . . see elk before me, around me, moving everywhere, big dark shapes in the trees, along with their calves of the year. I raise the rifle, wanting to fire, but also wanting to wait. . . . I walk among them. They aren't afraid, and behind me one of the cows rubs her flank against me. She doesn't smell like elk—dry and musky. She smells washed and clean. When I turn around she drops her coat and becomes a naked woman, pressing herself to me and pushing me down. Her skin is the creamy color of wapiti rump, her breasts are small. . . . As she bends her head to my chest and tries to take off my shirt, I lift her chin. Her eyes are wet and shining, and I can't tell if she is about to laugh or to cry. I put my hand behind her head pulling her face toward me for a kiss, when I see the elk hide under my nose in the dawn.<sup>44</sup>

Hunters are very aware of the physical beauty of wild animals, a beauty they describe in detail and with longing:

No one can know how I have loved the woods, the stream, the trails of the wild, the ways of the things of slender limbs, of fine nose, of great eager ears, of mild wary eyes, and of vague and half-revealed forms and colors. I have been their friend and mortal enemy. I have so loved them that I longed to kill them.<sup>45</sup>

Through killing the hunter gains ultimate control over the animal. In particular, he may now do something to wild animals that they generally do not permit while alive—he may touch them. Thus Thomas McIntyre exults over a successful kill: "We may look at those antlers now for as long as we wish and whenever we please. We can, if we dare, even put our hands on them."<sup>46</sup> Hunters take great pleasure in stroking the fur, antlers, and horns of the large mammals they kill. The erotic nature of this touching is evident from the sensual way that it is done, from the quiet, admiring comments about the animal's beauty that frequently accompany the stroking and from the words hunters use to describe this aspect of hunting:

the hand touches the gleaming points (or the horn tips), caresses the antler beams (or the burr), and plays with the soft hair on the head. Hunting is a passion better men than I have tried to describe. . . . Were someone to call it an intercourse with nature, I should shake my head at the choice of words, but I shall know what that person gets out of hunting.<sup>47</sup>

In this context Plato's characterization of hunting as "nothing more than pursuing the game and laying hands on it" is perfectly apt.<sup>48</sup>

In many types of hunting the sexuality of the hunted ani-

mals themselves is thoroughly integrated into the pursuit. Hunters make use of the calls and scents of mating animals to track or lure them, to get close enough to kill. For instance, deer hunters attempt to bring bucks close to their stands by spreading the scent of a doe in estrus; Jerry Daniels, in *Hunting the Whitetail*, recommends that "you heat your doe scent to 103 degrees to imitate the smell of a 'hot doe.'"<sup>49</sup> Deer hunters are keenly aware of the sexually charged state of the bucks they pursue—they rely on this to make the bucks more reckless than usual and thus easier to kill. Deer hunters also tend to identify with these bucks; for example, one hunter joked that "all bucks everywhere better watch their nuts today," as he cupped his left hand over his own.<sup>50</sup> The hunters' attribution of aroused states (the "hot rut") to prey animals with whom they identify adds to the overall sexual experience of the sport for the hunter—and not just for deer hunters. Archibald Rutledge suggested that: "To call a turkey one will perhaps do best if he will put himself in the place of the bird and will call in such a manner that, if he were in the place of the bird, he would come." Rutledge had such success with one particular turkey call that he "had her christened Miss Seduction."<sup>51</sup>

## HUNTING AND HETEROSEXUALITY

In noting the sexuality of hunting we may start understanding what might otherwise be a puzzling phenomenon, namely, the perception of hunting as a dating situation by hunters such as James Swan:

I do not remember ever taking a date out hunting in high school, but on a number of occasions we did organize group outings where several couples went out at night spearing carp. . . . One could . . . make a Freudian argument about the symbolism of the spear being thrust into spawning carp. . . . Later, in college, . . . many women students hunted. It was not the kind of date in which most other students on campus participated, but we had a lot of fun.<sup>52</sup>

A Pennsylvania woman describes one such hunting date: "I dated a man who looked forward to that first [day of deer season] with an ardor I wished he would have reserved for me. . . . Before hunting season opened, my boyfriend and I walked the woods of Central Pennsylvania, listening and looking for game. . . . We stopped a lot to kiss."<sup>53</sup>

Sportsmen see their hunting as connected to their sexual relations with women. As reflected in the title *The Man Whom Women Loved* (from a book about big game hunter Bror Blixen), hunters commonly believe that success in hunting animals will gain them affection and sexual attention from women. James Whisker projects this hopeful belief on to prehistory, stating: "Man . . . would receive sexual favors from the waiting female as a reward for being a good hunter and provider" and speculating that perhaps "the community gave successful hunters sexual rewards, e.g., by offering the most attractive female or a virgin, or the most accomplished lover, to the hunter."<sup>54</sup>

Thomas McIntyre believes that for both male deer and male humans the possession of large antlers lures females:

[T]rophy antlers may have served for the male hunter the very same function they served for the male deer. A female was far more liable to be allured by and to "select" a male who had manifested his ability to provide food, protection, and social rank. . . . Do we also keep the racks of the animals we hunt for similar, unspoken reasons? Probably. Our initial reaction upon entering a trophy room, a present-day cave, filled with antlers reaching to the ceiling is to be just the teensiest bit impressed and intimidated.

Note the specific process by which successful trophy hunters gain sexual access to women, according to McIntyre: by impressing and intimidating others. McIntyre does not merely tacitly condone the rapism implied by his remarks; he gives explicit approval to men's sexual aggression (excused through the usual biological determinism): "Is this, then, a bad thing? I don't think so . . . we are all to some extent still motivated by down-home primitive emotions and lusts that all the bullying in the world for us to act 'socially responsibly' is not going to purge from the wicked, wicked human."<sup>55</sup>

Hunters speak admiringly of the imagined sexual lives of the large, antlered males they seek to kill; Ted Kerasote describes rams as "hierarchical and sexually freewheeling: souls who begin their combat early, establishing dominance through their horn size; who won't bond to a single female or even collect a harem." By applying human social categories to the lives of game animals (Kerasote's "harem"), hunters bolster their expectation that somehow in killing male animals who are sexually active they will also gain sexual access to females—the presumed dominant sexual status of the targeted

animal transfers to the man through the act of taking possession. The general belief is that the antlered male's sexual prowess correlates with his antler size, as in McIntyre's remarks above and Kerasote's statement that the bull elk with large antlers "is the mate a cow wants."<sup>56</sup> By transference the antlers a trophy hunter has "collected" measure the extent of *his* virile masculinity; in the hunting world antler size matches the function of penis size in Western patriarchal culture more generally. Antlers are thus the phallic centerpiece of the trophy hunter's attention: "The big boy up front was a huge specimen with maybe 30-inch horns, a truly oversized trophy. His buddy was a respectable 261/2 inch."<sup>57</sup>

The designation of the antlered male as a prized trophy insures that hunters are often aware of the biological sex of targeted animals. In fact, hunters extend the bare maleness of their targets into intense attributions of manly status and power, referring to their targets as the "fallen monarch," "ancient patriarch," "king of the mountain," and so on.<sup>58</sup> Large antlers on an animal represent to the hunter the animal's success in surviving years of threats, including harsh conditions, challenges by males of the same species, and the predatory efforts of previous hunters. The hunter's sense of being, developed from his exercise of domination, is felt more fully when the victim is himself imbued with power. The victim must be seen as powerful for the hunter to feel manly and alive in his conquest; thus, hunters construct elaborate rules of fair chase to keep the power difference between hunter and hunted from appearing absolute.<sup>59</sup> The application of manly titles to their antlered prey is part of this process of constructing a victim imaged as powerful.

Interestingly, hunted animals do not lose their status as objects of the hunter's erotic desire when the hunter is self-conscious about the maleness of his prey. For example, Larry Fischer calls one hunter's thirty-five-year career of shooting "trophy" deer his "love affair with large, mature bucks."<sup>60</sup> The erotic stroking of the corpse is part of a successful hunt regardless of the animal's sex. Indeed, the antlers themselves are a particular focus of this sensuality. Nor is the phallicism of hunting lessened when the prey is seen as male—it takes on homoerotic connotations as in this dialogue exchanged between hunters

stalking giraffes: "Give it to him!" "Right in the ass?"<sup>61</sup>

The erotic pursuit of overtly male animals becomes significant when we consider that *heterosexuality* is explicitly intended in the comparisons between men's hunting and sex. For example, Ted Kerasote, after inadvertently flushing three sage grouse, wonders why his reflexive response was to imagine shooting them: "[D]oes my tracing these grouse across the Wyoming sky, nothing in my hands except my bicycle gloves, lie buried in my hypothalamus like my sexual preference for women? If this part of my brain were a few microns smaller would I prefer men? Would I feel no pleasure at my imaginary tangents intercepting feathered motion in the sky?"<sup>62</sup> Significantly, Kerasote contemplates a theory that assumes if a certain part of his brain were slightly smaller he would *simultaneously* lose his pleasure in hunting and his sexual preference for women. This position moves beyond a mere comparison of hunting and heterosexuality as two structurally similar instincts; the desire to kill animals and a sexual orientation toward women are here seen as coming together in a single package.

For those who defend hunting as an instinctive behavior, the desire to hunt evolved to facilitate food procurement, while the supposed heterosexual instinct evolved to facilitate human reproduction.<sup>63</sup> Thus in principle the two "instincts" remain distinct and separable. Yet, the position articulated by Kerasote—that hunting and male heterosexuality are but variant expressions of a single innate quality—remains a common assumption. The bumper sticker "I HUNT WHITE TAIL YEAR ROUND," described by Matt Cartmill as "decorated with drawings of a deer's scut and a woman's buttocks to make sure nobody misses the pun," illustrates just one instance of this viewpoint.<sup>64</sup> And for anthropologist Paul Shepard, heterosexual intercourse and hunting are but two forms of the same phenomenon, which he calls "venereal aggression." According to Shepard, the woman draws on to herself, the hunting man's hostility toward animals subtly transforming it in the process into sexual relations between people.<sup>65</sup>

Hunting men relate their pursuit of male animals to their sexual relations with female humans, because both eroticize power difference. Thus we can understand the behavior of Rex

Perysian who, after shooting a boar to death with three arrows, "stood astride the boar and . . . lifted its head by the ears for the camera. 'I'll grab it like I grab my women,' he told his pals. Then Perysian dropped the animal's head and bellowed into the woods, boasting that the kill had sexually aroused him."<sup>66</sup> The biological sex and species of his targets are less essential to Perysian's masculine sexual identity than is the establishment of domination, so the fact that his victim is a nonhuman male does not preempt his comparison with his sexual relations with women. Nor does his mounting of a male animal undermine his identity as a heterosexual male, because he is in the position of dominance. Ultimately a man's sexual identity as lady "killer" and big game hunter fuse, as in the following lyric from Ted Nugent:

I am a predator  
 That's one thing for sure  
 I am a predator  
 You better lock your door<sup>67</sup>

Men are often portrayed as innately predatory, with women and nonhuman animals as their natural prey. Sharing a common status as the designated targets of men's sexualized violence, women and game animals can merge in men's minds, as in Ted Kerasote's dream of shooting/kissing elk/women, and in Paul Shepard's remarkable statement that the "association of menstrual blood and the idea of a bleeding wound is inescapable."<sup>68</sup> Although hunters often consciously image their animal targets as virile males, the very same animals may be seen as female outside the immediate context of the pursuit itself. For instance, the character "Bambi" is a buck in the Disney movie and in Felix Salten's novel. He is represented in the movie as "Prince of the Forest" and this is exactly how sportsmen tend to think of the bucks they hunt. Yet the name "Bambi" has come to be given exclusively to girls, indicating that the male deer is ultimately feminized by our broader, nonhunting culture.<sup>69</sup> This becomes explicable in terms of the radical feminist observation that the eroticizing of power difference occurs originally and typically in the subordination of women.<sup>70</sup> Notwithstanding his overt maleness, as a designated target for sportsmen, the character "Bambi" assimilates the prototypical target of men's sexual violence, the woman. Thus in discussing the



1989 gang rape and beating of a woman in Central Park, columnist Joanne Jacobs wrote: "The most critical element of this attack was that they were male. She was female. They were predators. She was Bambi."<sup>71</sup> Gender marks relative positions of power as much as it signifies biological sex. In this sense the feminization of the buck can be compared with the practice of referring to sexually subordinated men in U.S. prisons as "gal-boys," as "she" or "her."<sup>72</sup> Regardless of their biological sex or species, subordination feminizes people and animals.

Although both groups are designated as targets for men's violence, the status of women and wild animals is not identical. Within traditional patriarchal marriage, women's situation can be seen as closer to that of domesticated animals than to that of game animals.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, the term "husband" simultaneously means a woman's spouse and a man who manages livestock for reproduction. The farmer completely controls the sexual and reproductive lives of cows and pigs to further his interests. Thus, the common use of terms such as "cow" and "sow" to refer to women shows either women's similar domesticated status or a cultural expectation that such subjugation would be appropriate. Similarly, the application to women of the term "bitch" is significant given that, as Joan Dunayer has explained, breeders have always treated the bitch or female dog "as a means to a useful, profitable, or prestigious litter."<sup>74</sup> The specific use of the word "bitch" to insult assertive women shows the hostility felt toward those members of domesticated groups who do not quietly assume their designated subordinate position.<sup>75</sup>

The names of domesticated animals, almost invariably terms of derision, express the contempt felt by the conqueror for the conquered. In contrast, the names of game animals rarely become terms of derision. Hunters zealously pursue those wild animals they have made into emblems of strength and independence. Deemed *worthy* of being killed, game animals instantiate just the characteristics the hunter hopes to possess by transference through the process of killing and eating. Thus, it would be contrary to the purpose of the hunt to see game animals as totally despicable creatures.

So we can understand why parents might choose to name their daughter "Bambi": although the name connotes a crea-

ture periodically subjected to men's predatory efforts (who is to that extent in a subordinate position and thus feminine), it also connotes a creature who lives in the wild, that is, generally outside of men's control, and who thereby commands a certain degree of grudging respect. The word "fox" is another term transferred from a hunted animal to women. Like "Bambi," the word "fox" is not nearly as derisive as the names of domesticated animals, but does connote one targetted for aggressive pursuit and ultimate violence. In the United States men apply "foxy" to women they find sexually desirable and somewhat wily and evasive. Indeed, the "fox" becomes sexually desirable *because* she is independent and evasive, thus exciting to run down and conquer.<sup>76</sup> Women considered sexually undesirable, on the other hand, are called "dogs," a usage which picks up the already tamed status of those animals—because dogs come when you call them, there is no exciting challenge in shooting them nor any increased masculine status. While challenging and exhilarating, the sport of fox hunting remains extremely violent and orgiastically bloody, culminating in the fox being torn to bits, the body parts distributed to various participants, and the blood smeared on novice's faces. The sexual use of the term "foxy" implies an erotic of predation and bloodshed.

### **CONSTRUCTING THE EROTICS OF MEN'S PREDATION**

Hunting and predatory heterosexuality are both structured as institutions of men's sexualized dominance. Their structural similarity allows each to be used to describe the other—hunting to describe heterosexuality, as in this nineteenth-century romantic poem:

O let my love sing like a thrush  
 In the greenwood's blossoming crown  
 And leap away like a fleeing roe  
 So that I can hunt it down<sup>77</sup>

And heterosexuality to describe hunting: "[T]he 'dedicated' waterfowler will shoot other game 'of course,' but we do so much in the same spirit of the lyrics, that when we're not near the girl we love, we love the girl we're near."<sup>78</sup> Ultimately it becomes difficult to tell whether hunting describes sex or sex

describes hunting, as in the following lyric by Jon Bon Jovi:

First you're gonna fall  
 Then you're gonna bleed  
 For the glory of it all  
 That's the story of love<sup>79</sup>

The many examples of such cross-talk between hunting and heterosexuality reflect the fact that both institutions eroticize power difference. But this discourse does not merely reflect some independently existing social reality, it is *performative*, each speech act one part of the process of developing and maintaining the erotics of men's predation.

The overt violence of hunting coupled with its erotic stimulation make its imagery a useful resource for promulgating a predational sexuality between women and men. For example, Robert Franklin Gish describes the media portrayal of one of *Cosmopolitan* magazine's "bachelors of the month":

There he stood, attorney as hunter, in front of the mounted trophy heads of several species of exotic antelope; his left leg rests on the top of an elephant's foot made into a stool; he leans against a once beautiful tusk of ivory; a zebra's skin adorns the wall. "Mellow minxes" were invited to write to this good "catch." As for him, . . . this particular hunter extends his notion of hunters and hunting to his "feelings about relationships" as well: "I don't want a pushover, mentally or sexually. What's the thrill? There's nothing wrong with a one-night stand, but it's not worth it—what's the point? It's too easy. The challenge and the chase are what's important. That's what always intrigues."<sup>80</sup>

Through this kind of material, *Cosmopolitan* and other similar media encourage women to entertain men's sexual aggression.

Notice that although the primary image in the *Cosmopolitan* example centers on the man as hunter, pursuing both women and wild animals, the man himself is secondarily positioned as the woman's prey through the reference to him as a good "catch." This is not uncommon. The recent book, *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*, constructs men as predator/prey and women as prey/predator. On the one hand, the overt function of the book (as indicated in the subtitle itself) is to instruct women on how to "capture" men. Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider refer to men as "live prey" and report that they themselves followed *The Rules* "to ensure that the right man didn't get away." As in any hunt, the object is to take possession of the quarry—the authors write of

their readers' supposed mounting "desire to own this man" and advise against dating married men because "We do not take what is not ours." Thus the book presumes that women sexually prey upon men. But, on the other hand, the entire premise of "The Rules" assumes that pursuing others sexually stimulates men, so that if a woman wants a man to fall in love with her she must play hard to get—acting like an "elusive butterfly." The authors essentialize this, calling men's pursuit of women "the natural order of things." They advise women never to initiate sex: "Let him be the man, the aggressor in the bedroom. Biologically, the man must pursue the woman. . . . Flirt when he tries to kiss you or bite your neck. This will turn him into a tiger." The tiger allusion connotes predatory aggression. Fein and Schneider suggest that women should gain sexual satisfaction not by communicating their needs to their partner but by letting "him explore your body like uncharted territory."<sup>81</sup> A charter confers powers, rights, and privileges, including exclusive use; thus the man taking possession of the woman constitutes the erotic promulgated in this image.

So *Cosmopolitan*, *The Rules*, and other such media direct women's sexuality along the lines of male domination and female submission, eroticizing men's sexual predation. Men's magazines such as *Playboy* carry out a similar function for men. Hugh Hefner initially conceived *Playboy* magazine as just one step beyond its prototype, the existing men's magazines that fetishized hunting:

At the time other men's magazines, such as *Modern Man*, buried their sexual content under pages of he-man stories—how to hunt bears or canoe the Amazon—and masqueraded their nude pictorials as "art figure studies." Hefner sensed there was a market for a men's magazine that didn't feel "wrestling alligators was a more manly pastime than dancing with a female companion in your own apartment."<sup>82</sup>

*Playboy* has never completely forsaken its roots in the erotics of hunting. The "Playboy Bunny" is a sexualized image that identifies women with a domesticated animal that is also hunted for sport, meat, and as a varmint. And *Playboy* magazine has periodically used hunting motifs in its pictures of exposed women. One striking example of this is the feature entitled, "Stalking the Wild Veruschka" in which, according to the caption, the model is "painted to portray the untamed creativities with which she's so often compared" (January 1971, p.

101). More recently, the following two captions invite the male viewer to see himself as predator and the unclothed female models as prey:

All creatures great and small can credit evolution for providing camouflaged markings that protect them from predators. Fortunately, Kerri Kendall doesn't need to hide from anybody, because even in her faux catskin suit and cap she would be easy to spot. But don't be fooled by her trusting smile; she's still not an easy target.<sup>83</sup>

Julianna Young has an irrepressible sense of humor. Try to imagine her wearing this bra while swimming in the ocean. Wouldn't any deep-sea fisherman love to reel in such an enviable prize? Talk about your trophies! We'd bet townspeople and tourists would line up three-deep just to watch the photographer record the catch.<sup>84</sup>

A recent cover photograph from *Musclemag International* magazine also used the image of women as trophy fish. While holding the weapon used to harpoon trophy fish in phallic position, the man slings an evidently slain woman over his shoulder. Inside the magazine, the caption of the cover shot reads: "Eddie Robinson and his wife, Vanessa, having fun at the beach (see fig. 1)."

Such images and captions both sexualize women's status as prey and further the eroticization of hunting itself, although it is difficult to draw a line between one function and the other. In the interests of accuracy one might say simply that such media eroticize men's predation, leaving it ambiguous whether the target is a woman or a nonhuman animal (as the images themselves do).

The annual *Sports Illustrated* (SI) "swimsuit issue" is worth analyzing in this context. Recent SI swimsuit issues draw heavily on cross-imagery between erotic sport hunting and predatory heterosexuality. In the February 20, 1995, issue of SI, five different models pose so as to blend in with the topical vegetation of Costa Rica. One woman is placed on a large piece of driftwood, which the caption calls her "perch." And three different pictures show women waist-deep in natural pools, apparently emerging from the water toward the male viewer. This is significant because immediately following the swimsuit pictorial is a story in which white men go to Costa Rica to hook large fish and pull them out of the water for trophies. This juxtaposition of imagery indicates that SI, like *Playboy* and *Musclemag International*, believes that the image of women as

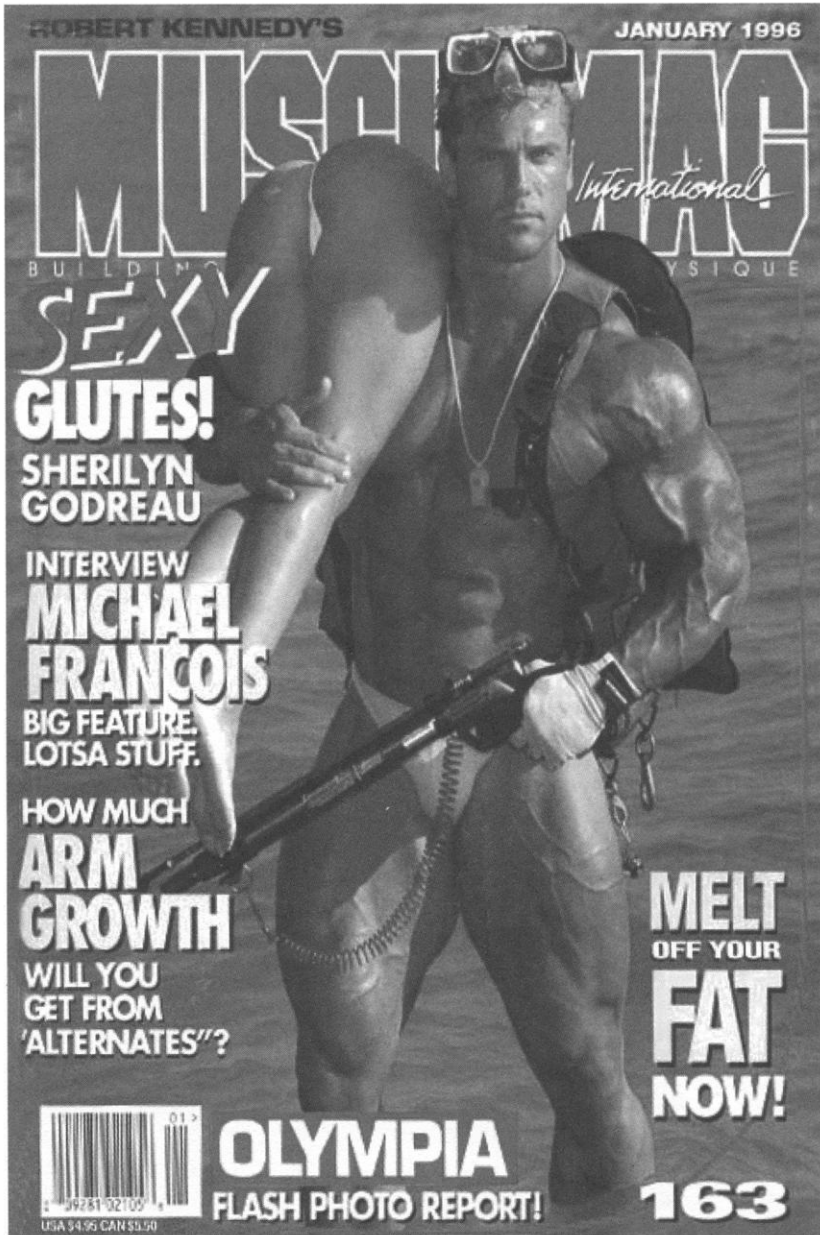


Fig. 1. Photo by Chris Tarent for the cover of *Musclemag International*, no. 166 (January 1966).

trophy fish (or fish as trophy women?) enhances the erotic appeal of their feature stories.

*Sports Illustrated* took their propagation of the erotics of predation further in the January 29, 1996, swimsuit issue. Again, women blend into natural settings such as water, sand, rocks, trees, and animals. But this year many of the models are dressed in animal-print bikinis representing species men kill and collect (leopard, tiger, cheetah, lion, zebra, and butterfly). The women are photographed in South Africa, and the swimsuit pictorial immediately follows a feature describing a private South African game park. *SI* has edited the magazine so that it becomes difficult to tell where one story ends and the other begins: the game park and swimsuit features are grouped together under a single title—"Hot Spots"—and the first photo in the game park article shows a female model in a bikini sitting next to a white man surveying the landscape with binoculars. The article remains studiously vague about sport hunting at the game preserve—all the tourists mentioned in the story intend to photograph the wildlife. This emphasis on photographing the animals actually strengthens the magazine's identification of the wild animals with the female models (who are also there to be viewed). Even with hunting downplayed, violence against animals remains a major theme of the story, as the sightseers repeatedly put themselves in positions where they must consider shooting various wild animals in "self-defense."

*SI* pictorials heavily exploit race as well. Of the five pictures of women of color in the 1996 issue, each portrays models in an animal-pattern swimsuit and/or a suit with a native African motif. The white women sometimes pose wearing items of African jewelry, such as a necklace or bracelet. And the metal rings used to constrict and elongate the necks of some African women are featured prominently in several photographs, thus fetishizing the mutilation of women. The series of eroticized photographs of African women with elongated necks works in subtle tandem with this highlighted statement, nominally about giraffes, from the preceding game park story: "big game is so abundant . . . you can order a longneck anytime you want." In this feature, women, animals, and people of color all share a common status as objects placed on display for the white male viewer's entertainment. *Sports Illustrated* blends

the iconographies of pornography, hunting, and racial conquest, using each to reinforce the others and in so doing promoting a unified white male identity of sexualized dominance over all disempowered others. One of the Costa Rican photographs, ominously captioned "Patricia Velasquez can paddle but she can't hide," represents women, animals, and people of color through a single image of a camouflaged model; the picture of white men's dominance over these groups is completed by their production, distribution, and consumption of the photograph.

Constructing the erotics of men's predation has material consequences. The *SI* features in fact market Costa Rica and South Africa as alluring vacation spots, places which cater to white men in their desires to shoot exotic wild animals and/or have sex with fascinating foreign women (the Costa Rica feature begins with the header: "our raven-haired beauties add to the exotic flavor of Latin America's hottest new destination"). The desire to see certain people and animals of the Third World turned over to the recreational pleasures of affluent white men is not new. In his 1925 travelogue, *The Royal Road to Romance*, Richard Halliburton proclaimed: "The romantic—that was what I wanted . . . I wanted to . . . make love to a pale Kashmiri maiden beside the Shalimar, . . . hunt tigers in a Bengal jungle."<sup>85</sup> Although for the mass readership of *SI*, safaris, tropical trophy fishing, and sex tours abroad remain a fantasy indulged in only vicariously, affluent white men increasingly experience such "romance" for real. Exploiting the indebtedness and relative poverty of the Third World, First World businessmen, military leaders, and politicians work with local elites to develop prostitution networks to attract North American, European, Australian, and Japanese men and their hard cash.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the exploitation of global economic inequalities turns Third World lands into game preserves serving an international clientele. In this way the bodies of indigenous animals, women, and children become available to affluent foreign men for sexualized domination and penetration.

Domestic hunting in the United States replicates the international scene. State wildlife officials are paid to manage people, animals, and plants so as to provide hunters with annual surpluses of those wild animals they most enjoy tracking and shooting. The casual hunter not heavily invested in trophy col-



3. THE GOOSE PITS



GAMEBIRD

Fig. 2. Illustration by David Levine for Vance Bourjily, *The Unnatural Enemy* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 73.

lecting may see the hunting trip primarily as a vacation, a chance to get away from the restrictions of work and family life for a while to unwind with the guys and blow off steam in masculine fashion—nominally by shooting at animals but perhaps also by drinking, gambling, passing around pornography, frequenting the local strip clubs that cater to hunters, and so forth. A drawing from Vance Bourjaily's book on hunting celebrates and promotes the common targetted status of geese and local women for men out on a hunting trip (see fig. 2).

Recognizing the common structure of hunting and heterosexuality as eroticized power difference can give us a deeper understanding of men's violence. Andrea Dworkin recounts the story of a thirteen-year-old girl on a camping trip in northern Wisconsin. Walking alone in the woods, the girl came across three hunters reading pornographic magazines. They chased her down and raped her, calling her names from the pornography.<sup>87</sup> Dworkin cites this as one example of how pornography is implicated in violence against women. But this situation does not just link pornography and rape, it also links hunting, pornography, and rape. The men were in the woods to consume pornography and to kill deer. When one of the men saw the girl he said, "There's a live one" (she thought he meant a deer). One man beat on her breasts with his rifle. An occasion nominally devoted to killing nonhuman animals slides easily into a sexual attack against a human female.

A recognition of hunting and heterosexuality as interlinked, socially encouraged forms of men's predation supports a heightened understanding of such events as nine-year-old Cub Scout Cameron Kocher firing a rifle at seven-year-old Jessica Ann Carr, hitting her in the back and killing her as she rode a snowmobile with a friend.<sup>88</sup> Cameron said he was "playing hunter" when he fired the gun. The article mentions that Cameron's father and mother taught him to fish and to hunt for squirrels and rabbits but does not ask where the boy got the idea to hunt human females. The remarkable statement by Cameron's lawyer, that the boy's "feelings of guilt, if they exist, are that he disobeyed his father," I contrast with a more encouraging thought from hunter Sidney Lea. Lea compares the aging hunter's decreasing zeal for killing with "an analogous change in a man's sexual career," concluding: "[T]he diminish-

ment of either predatory instinct isn't irredeemably grim nor even sad. For it is compensated, one hopes, by an increase in moral judgment."<sup>89</sup>

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