

ARTICLE

Teddy's Bear Country: Imagining Wild Nature in Theodore Roosevelt's America

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Abstract

As an ambivalent symbol of America's relationship with the natural world of wild things, the bear acquired new importance in the years of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency (1901–1909). This article offers an interpretation of the significance of the bear at this time, looking at outdoor sportswriting and the cultural response to Roosevelt's own bear-hunting exploits in that context. It finds two contrasting ideas of the bear, which appears both as a ferocious beast and as a bearskin trophy, a symbol of nature's uncontrollable power and also a consumer object. Bear-hunting stories, it is proposed here, thus bridged two worlds: that of wild nature and that of human modernity. This, it suggests, was also the essential cultural function of Theodore Roosevelt's public persona. Serving as president while assuming the unofficial role of bear-hunter-in-chief, and then becoming indelibly associated with sentimentalized cartoon or teddy bears, his image blurred the distinctions between the White House and the Rocky Mountains, modern life and the natural world. It is suggested in this way that the symbolism of the bear enabled Americans to navigate a way into the twentieth century, avoiding a hard choice between industrial modernity and wild nature by retaining a cultural space for both.

Keywords: nature and environment; outdoor sportswriting; Theodore Roosevelt; American nationalism

In the age of Theodore Roosevelt, bears – real bears that is – were rarely encountered. Once they had ranged widely, and earlier generations of American settlers had lived in fear of them. By the twentieth century, however, both the black bear and the “grizzly” brown bear of the Great West had retreated along with the shrinking wilderness. A relatively few hunting sportsmen continued to seek them out in remote woods, canebrakes, and mountains. But for most Americans whose lives were increasingly bounded by cities and suburbs, the wild bear became, as the popular author William J. Long observed at the time, “largely a creature of imagination.”¹ It was possible to visit caged and tamed bears at the zoo or the circus, but to find *wild* bears, Americans generally had to turn to books and magazines. There were popular natural histories, sentimental animal stories, and tales of wilderness adventure to read, but nowhere did the wild bear

make its presence felt more powerfully than in magazines of the outdoor life, where authors combined those different genres into thrilling hunting stories that strayed freely between fact and fiction. Here, as it stalked the pages of outdoor sports magazines, a ferocious beast and hunted animal, the bear of imagination came to express the feelings that the natural world of wild things inspired in people coming to terms with modern life. This article is about that bear of imagination, and its significance in the development of American national identity at the turn of the twentieth century.

American fascination with the wild bear had a distinctly topical relevance in the Progressive Era, a time when policies that promoted both environmental conservation and wildlife destruction shaped the agenda of the national government. In ways that can seem paradoxical today, the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909) made conservation a political priority, creating national parks and nature reserves; but lacking what would now be conceived as a proper understanding of ecology, it simultaneously presided over the killing and removal of wild animals, in an effort to protect farmland. During those years, the federal government funded the eradication of animals deemed predators and pests, from wolves to prairie dogs, in what historian Donald Worster describes as “an official program to rub out the varmint and to make America safe from its depredations.”² This national policy lent legitimacy to already existing local and private efforts to drive inconvenient wildlife, bears included, from the land.

Yet at the same time, feelings of loss accompanied the degradation of the environment. American attitudes toward nature can in this respect best be described as ambivalent. In California, for example, as Peter S. Alagona has shown, the population of the chaparral bear collapsed with the encroachment of agriculture and human settlement. But even as people were driving the chaparral bear from existence, they elevated it to iconic status. They adopted the image of the bear as a complex symbol of place and identity, eventually even invoking its memory in the cause of wildlife conservation.³ For the wider nation, too, the wild bear came to embody the contradictory sentiments of the modern age. As the following discussion shows, stories of hunting and the outdoor life reanimated the vanishing bear, turning it from a despised varmint into a symbol of the untamed natural world.

As such, the bear country described in writing about outdoor sports could have a very particular attraction for the growing number of city people who felt personally diminished as the current of modern life carried them away from nature. As historian T. J. Jackson Lears put it, the cultural condition of the moment was an insidious feeling of “weightlessness” – a sense of rootless detachment from tradition, and a yearning for spiritual meaning and authentic physical experience in a world of impersonal machines, factories, and offices.⁴ In contrast to the modern city, nature could provide reconnection with something authentic and alive, and bear country beckoned to anyone seeking escapism. As an untamable force of nature, the bear of imagination could appear as a dangerous yet excitingly vital creature, to be feared and admired in an otherwise mundane world. It was alluring for that reason, and in outdoor sportswriting, the hunter’s bearskin could take on added significance as a totem of natural vitality. It appeared as more than a prized trophy. As an object, nothing exceeded the power of the bearskin rug, when placed in the modern home, to inspire the feeling of an authentic connection with the raw energy of the wilderness: it possessed the quality of a symbol invested with the dreams of city folk alienated from nature. That is to say, as much as stories of bear encounters and bear hunting were about what historian William Cronon has called “the human place in nature,” they were equally about the meaning of nature in the increasingly human-made world of the modern age.⁵

In that light, it reveals much about America's cultural disposition at the time that the public persona of Theodore Roosevelt became inseparable from the image of the bear during his presidency. Partly, Roosevelt's ursine association was the result of his own doing. He was a renowned enthusiast of outdoor life and a prolific writer of books and articles about hunting. Notably, one of his most successful stories described his own experience of bear stalking, "Hunting the Grisly," which continued to appear in new editions and volumes during his presidency. Partly, others developed a symbolic connection between his persona and the bear: satirists, cartoonists, Roosevelt's admirers, and his critics alike, found in the bear an emblem of his love of the outdoors and his outsized personality. Uniquely among presidents, he acquired a coterie of imagined animal associates and doubles. There were the plush toys named for him, "Roosevelt bears" or "Teddy's bears" as they were called at the time. There were the cartoon bears too, his satirical companions: Clifford K. Berryman's bear was the most recognizable – an innocent eye, looking over the president. Other bears took on Roosevelt's likeness, with his famous toothy grin. In the case of Seymour Eaton's comic strip characters, Teddy-B and Teddy-G, *The Roosevelt Bears*, they took his name as well as his trademark pince-nez glasses and cavalry slouch hat (Figure 1).⁶

To imagine Theodore Roosevelt as a hunter among bears or as a hybrid bear-man was to link animal symbolism and national identity in ways both playful and profound. The bearlike hunter-president took office as the contours of the twentieth century were coming into view. Where previous generations had looked westward to a limitless wilderness, railroads now banded the continent. A nation of farms was becoming a nation of industrial cities. In office, President Roosevelt could seem to be something of a herald of the modern age. He asserted a new, powerful voice in world politics, while his Square Deal domestic agenda marked out a newly expanded role for government in the management of the industrial economy and the nation's natural resources. It is telling that at this pivotal moment, facing a new era of progress and power, looking back to the



Figure 1. Teddy-B and Teddy-G, "The Roosevelt Bears," illustrated by V. Floyd Campbell, circa January 1906. Detail of image held in Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University. Original in Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

frontier and ahead to a rapidly emerging future, Americans saw in their modernizing president something of the character of the bear of imagination.

As the bear cohabited with the president and inhabited his body, it took on weird hybrid forms that were nevertheless part of a longstanding cultural tradition. As Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald have shown, scholars working in the wide multidisciplinary field of animal studies have often looked to precisely these themes of hunting, anthropomorphism, and hybridity to unlock an understanding of the relationship between humans and nature.⁷ More specifically, for example, Jon T. Coleman has looked at folklore and the humorous writing of the nineteenth century to show how American backwoodsmen and hunters were often imagined as hybrid animal-people. Surrounded by “an accumulation of pelts and skins,” and “[s]teeped in nature, they took on the characteristics of the prey they slew for a living,” in the popular imagination. In this way, they became archetypal Americans, embodying the idealized wilderness.⁸ Heir to that cultural tradition, Roosevelt, in his bearlike persona – a president with one foot in civilization and the other in the wilderness, and a modernizer who seemingly possessed the bear’s raw natural vitality – emerged as a symbol of a nation reimagining itself.

Bear stories appearing in outdoor sports magazines had, then, a consequential influence on the cultural landscape of the Progressive Era – and in ways that have not always been fully appreciated. Fair to say, scholars including Jan Cohn, Matthew Schneirov, Richard M. Ohmann, and others have given more sustained attention to generalist titles than to specialist magazines of the outdoor life.⁹ Yet, just as *Harper’s*, *Century*, *Atlantic*, *Munsey’s*, *McClure’s*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and other general titles achieved a kind of ubiquity in middle-class homes around the turn of the century, the likes of *Forest and Stream*, *Outing*, *Sports Afield*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Field and Stream* made their contribution to the era’s evolving consumer culture, promoting aspirational leisure pursuits and travel to tourist destinations. As John F. Reiger and others have shown, these magazines often took on a special advocacy role, too, adopting an editorial line that favored responsible conduct, conservation, and adherence to game laws, typically presenting outdoor life as an antidote to the individualistic and materialistic commercial values of the Gilded Age.¹⁰ Readers could find advice about navigating the consumer market while gaining insight into appropriate sporting conduct as they came to understand their place within a larger national culture. In short, these magazines presented readers with the sort of practical advice that could seem essential when planning a vacation, by explaining where to go and when, what to take and how to use it, and how to behave appropriately in the wilderness. Outdoor sports magazines had a practical ethos in that respect. But no less importantly, they could appeal to readers looking for escapism – and in effect, this readership included almost everyone with an interest in outdoor life.

Bear country was, for most Americans at the turn of the century, largely an adventure-lands of imagination. The hunting grounds of the mountain West and Alaska (or across the border, in northern Canada) lay a time-consuming and expensive journey away, largely beyond the reach of most middle-class city folk of the East. But then, those who could afford the cost might find that their business affairs prevented them from getting away. And no one was able to be in the great outdoors all the time. The close season limited hunting time, as did inclement weather. All of which is to say that everyone had cause at one point or another to turn to an outdoor sports magazine in search of vicarious adventure.

In turn, magazines had to anticipate a readership looking not only for practical advice and factual reports but also stories of hunting experiences – and with long nights indoors to endure, it was acceptable for those stories to be more or less embellished in the cause of

entertainment, or to be entirely fictional. Yet hunting stories have rarely been understood as escapist literature. This is not how Reiger and the historians that followed him approached outdoor sports, for example. Nor have hunting stories typically fallen under the ambit of scholars of adventure fiction – from Martin Green down to Gary Hoppenstand's more recent work, for example. Nevertheless, these stories undeniably followed trails into the land of “impressive beasts and adventurous characters” that Karen R. Jones has called the “imagined geography of the frontier.”¹¹

That said, by asking how bear stories connected national identity to an idea of wild nature, the discussion here departs from the prevailing interpretation of the significance of outdoor life in Theodore Roosevelt's America. Broadly speaking, over many years, historians including Richard Slotkin, Gail Bederman, Kristin L. Hoganson, and Matthew Frye Jacobson have tended to explain Roosevelt's enthusiasm for hunting, sport, and outdoor adventure as a facet or adjunct of his attempt to shape and personally exemplify a revitalized white, masculine ideal, or they have shown how it dovetailed with his bellicose imperialism.¹² For example, Roosevelt's doctrine of “the strenuous life,” Jacobson argues, was part of a discourse that “provided a ready-made rationale for conquest and domination” in an age of American imperial expansion.¹³ Or, as Hoganson contends, just as Roosevelt believed “that men and nations could build themselves through strenuous endeavor,” it led him to the ominous conviction that the “[m]ost strenuous [endeavor] of all was war.”¹⁴ Bederman gives more attention to Roosevelt's love of hunting, specifically, although again she sees it as an expression of the same domineering mindset. His post-presidential safari in Africa was a colonial fantasy, she argues, in which he played “the masculine hunter and manly Bwana [lord or master],” in the role of “emissary of civilization in the African jungle.” It was illustrative of the extent to which, “for Roosevelt, race and gender were inextricably entwined with each other, and with imperialistic nationalism.”¹⁵ Or, in the work of Karen Jones or Christine Bold, the West of the hunter has appeared as an arena of conquest, play, and privilege.¹⁶

Without question, these scholars have captured an essential truth about a certain regressive cultural tendency in American life. And yet such atavism was not wholly representative of the broader current of national culture at the time. For that matter, nor was such atavism strictly representative of Roosevelt himself, a complex figure whose lifelong fascination with the natural world and curiosity about animals and their habitats found outlets equally in hunting and an ethical commitment to conservation (however flawed it appears in retrospect) – as his many biographers, including Edmund Morris, David McCullough, Douglas Brinkley, and Darrin Lunde, have shown.¹⁷ Safe to say, the historiographical record has, in this respect, been imbalanced. A preponderance of scholarship shows that hunting was sometimes linked to the performance of a domineering white masculinity, or deployed in imperialist rhetoric. But it was also part of a culture that could, as Brinkley and Lunde have both persuasively argued, foster an appreciation for the natural world at a time when Americans were grappling with the tensions of modernity. Roosevelt's hunting habit was significant precisely because it symbolized an enduring connection to the natural world, even as he was charting a course into the twentieth century.

Tracking the imagined bear of hunting fantasy through the pages of outdoor sports magazines, spanning the cultural, political, and environmental history of the Progressive Era, the following discussion develops over three sections. The first looks at the way the bear acquired definition as a symbol of wildness in outdoor sports and adventure writing. The second is concerned with the significance of trophy hunting, and the way that writers made symbolic use of that most totemic of hunting souvenirs, the bearskin rug. Lastly, the

third section looks at the way those two perspectives on the bear combined to shape President Theodore Roosevelt's public persona in sportswriting and especially in journalism and satirical cartoons that represented him sometimes critically, sometimes playfully – but which equally connected his image to the natural world of wild things. In these ways, this article shows how the wild bear of imagination became entangled in cultural life and the symbolism of the nation, giving Americans encouragement to see untamed nature as a source of excitement, authenticity, and power in the modern age.

A Creature of Imagination

When the nation's most celebrated naturalist, John Burroughs, took up his pen against the nation's most cherished authors of children's animal stories in an article for *Atlantic* magazine in 1903, he set off a literary debate that became known as the "nature faker" controversy. The object of his displeasure was, above all, William J. Long's recently published *School of the Woods* (1902). It was, he declared, an egregious example of "sham natural history." He especially disliked Long's description of mother animals instructing their young. Animals behave according to instinct, he insisted; to claim otherwise was misleading. Long was not the only culprit, Burroughs argued, but he must be considered chief among those writers who "seem to seek to profit by the popular love for the sensational and the improbable."¹⁸ Described by Ralph Lutts, Sue Walsh, and others, the "nature faker" controversy can be seen as an attempt to impose clear dividing lines when in reality authors blurred distinctions between fact and fiction, realism and sensationalism, or exposition, description, and narrative, in order to engage a readership eager to be entertained as they learned about the wilderness.¹⁹ And as much as Burroughs bemoaned popular taste, sensationalism was undeniably part and parcel not just of children's writing, but of a literary culture that was broadly represented in magazines of outdoor life, where animal stories, natural history, and tales of hunting and adventure cohabited and commingled. Nowhere was this sensationalism more evident than in outdoor sports stories about bear hunting, in which wilderness adventures defined an image of wild nature.

As much as it could be said to apply to Long's writing, "sensational and improbable" is equally a fitting description of many bear stories appearing in outdoor sports magazines around the turn of the century. The bear of the sporting magazine resembled nothing so much as the "creature of imagination" that Long suggested haunted childhood dreams: a terrifying, "ferocious beast, prowling about gloomy woods, red eyed and dangerous, ready to rush upon the unwary traveler and eat him on the spot." Long wanted to show another side of the animal. Undoubtedly, the bear was "a beast to be dreaded, a great savage brute," armed with sharp teeth and claws, and "possessed of enormous strength," Long wrote, but "his ferocity has been greatly exaggerated by hunters." Drawing on his observation of black bears in Maine, he declared them "shy and wild, and timid as any rabbit," fearsome when provoked, yet playful and slow to anger (Figure 2). All the same, hunting stories showed little interest in that idea of the bear. The outdoor sports bear was often more straightforwardly the ferocious bear of imagination – and especially so the brown bear, the talismanic trophy quarry of U.S. hunting culture.²⁰

Bears, whether the brown or black variety, do not usually attack people unless they are surprised or feel threatened.²¹ Nevertheless, they are large, powerful animals, and the grizzly brown bear has an especially fearsome reputation. For that reason, the grizzly was widely considered North America's big game, the equivalent of the African lion, as

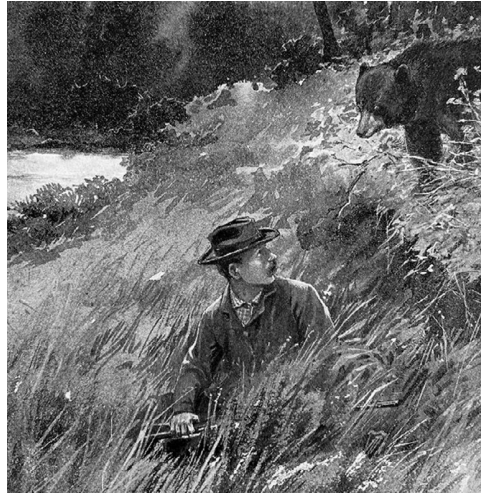


Figure 2. William J. Long comes face to face with a bear. William J. Long, *Beasts of the Field* (Boston: Finn and Company, 1902).

Outdoor Life put it. And it was mythologized almost as much. The smaller black bear was considered lesser game in comparison, although in the South it was hunted on horseback by the planter class and acquired a high-status association in that context. Theodore Roosevelt hunted both species, but he was somewhat of a rarity. What readers of outdoor sports magazines made of these stories is difficult to know for sure, although given that deer was the more typical quarry of those who did regularly go hunting – and keeping in mind that relatively few Americans could afford an extended vacation to the West at this time – it seems likely that the stories were taken as thrilling adventure tales. That sense of adventure was heightened all the more by the remote setting of so many stories. The bear, a denizen of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado or faraway Alaska, could appear as a symbol of the trackless wilderness to readers sitting at home, by the fireside, back East. Bear hunting consequently had a status situated between reality and fantasy.²²

Even Theodore Roosevelt, who later joined Burroughs in condemning Long and other “nature fakers,” was hardly guiltless of sensational writing when it came to bears. His brown bear, described in *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893) is “the grisly” (not the grizzly), the fearsome creature of folklore “known to the few remaining old-time trappers of the Rockies and the Great Plains” as “Old Ephraim” or “Moccasin Joe” – for his “half-human footprints, which look as if made by some misshapen giant.”²³ Roosevelt’s description of stalking a bear switches between the conventions of nature writing and adventure writing, and his appeal was precisely in his blend of description and sensationalism. So he described the scene as he lay in wait: “A little black woodpecker with a yellow crest ran nimbly up and down the tree trunks for some time and then flitted away with a party of chickadees and nut-hatches.” Sunset came, and with it a shift into adventure. “Under the great pines the evening was still with the silence of primeval desolation. The sense of sadness and loneliness, the melancholy of the wilderness, came over me like a spell. Every slight noise made my pulses throb.” Then, “Suddenly and without warning, the great bear stepped out of the bushes and trod across the pine needles with such swift and silent footsteps that its bulk seemed unreal.” As he opened fire, “the woods resounded with its

savage roaring.” Or there are descriptions of idyllic scenery, “a small, noisy brook, with crystal water,” a glade, “carpeted with soft, wet green moss,” where he camped. Then the bear appears. Its “eyes burned like embers in the gloom.” As it turned on him, “I saw the gleam of his white fangs.” It came “crashing and bounding through the laurel bushes,” swiping at him with its claws. He fired a fatal shot just in time.²⁴

Outdoor sports magazines published endless hunting stories of this ilk. In fact, the same month Burroughs was denouncing children’s animal stories in *Atlantic*, March 1903, *Outdoor Life* was offering its own fancifully idealized vision of bear country with a cover illustration that suggested readers would find sensational, dime novel-style adventure fare inside. A bear stands, scrambling over rocks, its head turned, its fanged mouth agape. In the background, the indistinct shape of two hunters can be discerned between the crags, one aiming a rifle. Has the hunter struck home? Will the bear be felled with one shot, or will it turn and charge? It is the moment upon which life and death, for bear and sportsman, are decided in the arc of the typical hunting narrative. Such narratives were familiar to readers of this and other such magazines – stories like the one in the June 1903 issue of *Sports Afield*, in which a bear turns on its pursuers, who suddenly “came face-to-face with the monster.” As was often the case in stories of this sort, the writer emphasized the terrifying nature of bear attacks: “his claws caught Monroe by the bottom of his coat, and he found himself, rifle and all, in the embrace of the brute, with his hot breath stifling him.”²⁵

Set in a harsh and inhospitable remote wilderness populated by giant brutes, bear stories often pointed beyond the experience of most recreational hunters to a realm outside human dominion. They took readers in search of a quarry that, unlike deer, might fight back, and fearsomely. This bear of imagination was a force of nature that could hardly be contained by humans. Often, writers described terrible injuries, rounding out the image of an almost unstoppable, monstrous denizen of the wilderness. “The Fearful Grizzly,” from *Outdoor Life*, offers a description of a bear attack in visceral style: “The bear came at him, caring nothing for the storm of lead it met.” And “– ah, poor Williams. Where his head had been were but a few tattered shreds of flesh and bone. The grizzly, with his paw armed with claws like railroad spikes, had with one last fearful blow, crushed the hunter’s skull.”²⁶ Or, the same idea of bear ferocity celebrated in a doggerel poem: “A second more, and I looked at death / And felt the blast of his hot, foul breath / And I remember two fiery eyes, / And two black arms of enormous size.” Shot, the bear became more enraged, “With a fiercer growl, eyes more a flame!”²⁷

The greater the ferocity of the bear, the greater the honor accorded the hunter, in the tradition of storytelling running back to the days of Hugh Glass.²⁸ Sensational tales of wilderness adventure in outdoor sports magazines often similarly celebrated hard-fought victory in the desperate struggle of human against nature. Consider, for example, the bloody fight between hunter and bear in one 1902 issue of *Sports Afield*. The hunter, “with desperate strength, putting forth every energy to keep the bear from tearing and biting him,” was gorily wounded as it “cut him on the back and shoulder in a horrible manner – stripping off his clothing and making with her sharp claws long gashes, from which blood poured in streams.” It only ended when the hunter succeeded in killing the bear with a knife. “Torn and gashed and weak with loss of blood, he dragged himself over the long miles of rough country,” homeward.²⁹

In the years around the turn of the century, Americans put a name to this notorious creature of imagination: Old Mose. Reality and fantasy collided. An almost mythical beast, Old Mose was said to have been responsible for a years-long reign of terror in Colorado – the supposed culprit not only of countless attacks on cattle herds, but also,

according to hearsay, murderous attacks on hunters who had disappeared after daring to track him down. He turned all who stood in his way into “a mass of broken bones and mutilated flesh,” and it was said he had been shot over a hundred times and yet survived. Still, he met his end in 1904 – or, at least, when rancher Wharton Pigg and James Anthony shot and killed an immense bear that year, it was said to be Old Mose, “the King of the Grizzlies,” as *Outdoor Life* sensationally called him.³⁰

Yet, these tales did not always celebrate hunting success. Rather, the bear could be an expression of an irrepressible nature. Like Long’s bear of imagination, it prowled the woods, ready to leap at the passing hunter. In *Forest and Stream*, for instance, a campfire-style tale described one hapless hunter who encountered three bears in the woods. “I have an idea,” the narrator explained, the bears “were raised within the Park,” and one day “wandered out to get at me.” He had seen one, took aim, but two others appeared, and they charged. Quickly, they caught him as he fled: “one had me by my left leg in an instant and fairly lifted me and turned me over so that the back of my head hit the ground. One other grabbed me by the side.” Mauled and thrown aside, he was lucky to escape alive. “My leg was bitten to the bone the first bite, the two long teeth cutting like lances.” Here was a picture of the bear as the embodiment of the hostile force of nature, waiting to devour anyone who wanders far from hearth and home.³¹

The deeper the journey into the imagined woods, the more ferocious the bears of imagination become, their fearsome character marking the adventurer’s distance from the modern world. Agnes C. Laut’s 1903 short story in *Outing*, “Ba’tiste the Hunter,” takes readers far into Canada. This place was far from the comforts of city life, something that Laut, herself a native of Northwest Canada, was keen to impress upon her readers. You may have been “bear hunting in a field where the hunted have been on the run for a century,” she wrote, and come away with “a very tame idea of the natural bear in its natural state.” But in wild Canada, she suggested, “grizzled old trappers, coming down to the frontier towns once a year for provisions, or hanging around the forts of the Hudson’s Bay Company for the summer, tell a different tale.” What follows is a sensational tale of frontier adventure to entertain readers on a dark February night. There is, predictably, a gruesome bear attack: a man is seen “rolling over and over – clutched by or clutching a huge, furry form – hitting, plunging with his knife, struggling, screaming with agony” as the creature “had him on his back between her teeth, by the thick chest-piece of his double-breasted buckskin,” clawing at his eyes. But the tale ends with Laut engaging a style of realism, reflecting on the meaning of the story. She asked, “Are such onslaughts common among bears, or are they the mad freaks of the bear’s nature?” She continued, “President Roosevelt tells of two soldiers bitten to death in the Southwest.” “Even as I write, comes word from a little frontier fur post, which I visited last fall, of a seven-year old boy being waylaid and killed by a grizzly.” This was in August 1902, as “sentimental ladies and gentlemen, many miles away from danger, were sagely discussing whether the bear is naturally ferocious or not.” The modern world had its bounds, she reminded her readers, beyond which the terrors of nature, red in tooth and claw, lurked.³²

It might seem strange that magazines specializing in outdoor sport and tourism presented readers with such hair-raising images of the wilderness, but these were really adventure stories, distant from the experience of most recreational hunters. The ferocious bear of the imagination was a symbol of wildness and of a place where human mastery became less assured. There was danger there, but there was also a vitality, embodied in the figure of a ferocious beast that could seem impervious to bullets and tear a person limb from limb. Bear country was a place to meet the sternest challenge, giving readers cause to

reflect on the power of nature. The death of a bear could be heavy with ambivalent symbolic meaning, then, representing a triumph over nature, but also the destruction of a vital force of the wilderness. For many hunters, then, there was a longing to preserve a sense of their connection to the vital wild spirit of the bear. Hunting stories often concluded not with the killing of the animal but with an act of consumption: carrying off a bear's hide and head. The significance of the trophy within bear-hunting stories, of the consumption of this symbol of the wilderness, is the subject of the next section.

The Story of a Rug

For the editor of *Outdoor Life*, J. A. McGuire, the highlight of his visit to the Colorado mansion of noted big-game hunter Dall DeWeese was undoubtedly its lofty den. It was a trove of trophies and taxidermy, its walls hanging with "rugs made from almost every imaginable animal." DeWeese had not yet bagged a musk ox or polar bear, although he hoped to do so before long, but in the meantime, he seemed to have almost everything else. There was an enormous moose head, and caribou, elk, deer of different species, mountain goats, as well as a smart set of horned-sheep heads. He had lynx, bobcat, and mountain lion specimens, a wolf and wolverine, "and, in fact, all the smaller mammals." His bear collection was particularly impressive. Black and brown bears were both represented, including "grizzly" and "silver tip" pelts from the Rocky Mountains. McGuire was especially impressed with the Kodiak bearskin from one of DeWeese's hunting trips to Alaska in the 1890s, which he had documented in a handful of articles for *Outdoor Life* at the time. It was an impressive specimen with a spread of ten feet seven inches. In this residence, built in a fashionably rustic style that McGuire described as dazzling the senses, luxuriously appointed with "little snaps of entertainment," the den was the crowning glory. Bringing the wild outdoors inside, these trophy hides, heads, and horns completed the furnishing of a comfortable modern home. As he settled down with McGuire by the den's crackling fireside, DeWeese began to recount the tales of his wilderness exploits, recalling each hunt with the "spirit, earnestness and enthusiasm of one who 'has been there' many times." Here was the hunter's hunter in the guise of a discerning consumer of wild animals. Such descriptions of bear-trophy hunting allowed writers to connect seemingly contradictory worlds, the wilderness and the modern society of the sporting tourist.³³

With public voices like J. A. McGuire and *Outdoor Life* on their side, American hunters broadly succeeded in answering public concerns about their pastimes in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. They reframed the killing of animals for sport as a useful and modern pursuit. Big-game hunters could otherwise stand accused of wasteful slaughter, killing for the joy of the chase rather than the necessity of food – a problem long debated, and expressed, for example, in James Fenimore Cooper's 1823 novel, *The Pioneers*. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, however, as John F. Reiger has shown, hunting clubs and sporting magazines provided the cultural means by which these game killers were able to reinvent themselves as conservationists and naturalists, eventually counting among their number Theodore Roosevelt, "the wilderness warrior" (as Douglas Brinkley called him). They expressed concern for the preservation of wild landscapes against industrial development and advocated for the protection of wild animals from commercial exploitation. And they turned slaughtered carcasses from waste into useful objects. So, for McGuire, DeWeese's den was evidence not of the wanton destruction of wildlife, but of enquiry into the natural world. His taxidermy collection

offered something to “arouse the interest of the naturalist and excite the admiration of the sportsman” alike. In addition to promoting the image of hunting trophies as scientific specimens, outdoor sports magazines went about shaping an understanding of taste, instructing readers on how to furnish their homes in the hunter’s style. No sporting home was complete, surely, without a bearskin rug. Bear hunting stories, so often revolving around the collecting of pelts, could explain the killing of a vital force of nature as the creation of a useful object for the modern home.³⁴

Many bear-hunting stories led back to the trophy room, to the domestic world of possessions and collections, where a bearskin or mounted head was a tourist’s souvenir that recalled a moment of wilderness consumption. W. R. Smart’s 1903 article for *Outdoor Life*, bookended by a photograph of a bear’s carcass and another of its stretched-out skin, is case in point.³⁵ Frank Mossman’s 1901 article about hunting in British Columbia, also for *Outdoor Life*, was, in similar terms, a celebration of slaughter rather than a tale of hunting adventure. He described surprising and shooting one brown bear, spotted in the brushwood, and two others as they were distracted, “hard at work digging out squirrel holes,” before killing a presumably orphaned cub. The article concluded with self-congratulation as the hunters admire their haul of hides.³⁶ Or, in the case of S. G. Hurst’s “Bagging Bruin in Colorado,” for a 1905 issue of the same magazine, the story described how paid guides effectively arranged for the author to shoot and kill a bear to take home as a souvenir of the vacation.³⁷ Other authors described capturing bear cubs, taking living trophies for a private collection, or donating them to a zoo.³⁸ Or in James Kidder’s case, after the conclusion of his Alaska trip, described in articles for *Outing* magazine in 1903, he gifted an entire Kodiak brown bear skeleton to the U.S. National Museum (of the Smithsonian Institution), while adding to the collection of bearskins and mounted heads in his own home. The wilderness was packaged for consumers in these stories, with the bear serving as the preeminent souvenir of a successful hunting vacation.³⁹

But they were often, more precisely, stories that twinned adventure and consumption. For example, readers turning the pages of *Outdoor Life*’s March 1903 issue would have eventually made their way to a rather sensational and improbable short story, offered that month. “Three Bullets and a Trio of Bears” told the exploits of Miss Susie Billings from Colorado. Susie Billings, it is noted, is a crack shot with a rifle. One day, she encounters a brown bear and two cubs on Cook Mountain, a fearsome beast. “The old bear ... raised on her haunches, executed a circle around her cubs, and emitted a low but heart-chilling growl.” With nerves of steel, she aims her rifle, and as the bear growls again, she steadies her trembling arms and fires. “It took just one bullet [contrary to the title] to bring each of them down,” and Susie becomes “almost faint from excitement.” Her “heart throbbing with excitement,” she runs home to tell her mother and brother, and the story ends in a way comprehensible to a readership of hunters and aspiring sporting tourists, with an illustration of Susie Billings sitting next to a bearskin rug, “one of the mementoes of her experience” (Figure 3). It is the most cursory of short stories, but it moves between two recurring images of the bear, wild beast, and trophy souvenir, and so completes a cycle of wilderness consumption that would be integral to the culture of outdoor sports.⁴⁰

As such tales might suggest, trophy hunting could open out a wider world as sporting tourism was shown to flow into adventure. These stories brought color to the narrative in a way recognizable to modern tourists, incorporating descriptions of camp or cabin life. In “A Bear Hunt on Leopard Bayou,” for *Forest and Stream*, for example, one correspondent wrote of a trip to Louisiana in which tourism, consumerism, and adventure combined.



Figure 3. "Miss Billings and One of the Mementoes of Her Experience." *Outdoor Life* 11 (March 1903).

There was an evocative description of a frosty morning, the "invigorating odor of newly made coffee and a glimpse of a brightly burning camp fire," under "a blue-black sky with a thousand and one stars," and "a sharp scent of foliage, rank and vigorous – the pungent resin of the wax myrtle." Later, on the hunt, the fearsome beast appears: "a deep, hoarse growl issued from between the well worn ivories which fringed the dripping tongue." But after the quite pitiless slaying of the bear as it scrambled, vulnerably exposed in a tree, the story concludes with the carrying of its carcass home as a trophy, in conventional hunting-tale style.⁴¹ Or, in "A Bear Hunt," which also appeared in *Forest and Stream*, the story weaves descriptions of camp life on a vacation to the Allegheny Mountains together with the pursuit of a bear.⁴²

Stories of this sort gave more or less play to the element of danger, and the trophy sometimes served as a symbol of a moment in which a hunter faced down a rampaging bear. In one story appearing in the January 1902 issue of *Outdoor Life*, for example, the narrator's companion is charged by a bear that is "snapping her jaws viciously, while the hair on her back and shoulders bristled up ... forming a ferocious and forbidding sight." The hunters manage to slay the creature as it charges, but "the agony of that moment was the most severe which I ever expect to experience." They kill a male bear and a cub in the same trip, and despite the terrors of the hunt, they return, happy with their trophies.⁴³ Or, for K. L. Clock, writing in *Outdoor Life*, the search for adventure was an essential attraction of hunting. "There is probably no other incentive that will prompt a hunter to undergo such hardships, endure the fatigue, hunger, thirst and exposure as the hope that at last his efforts may be rewarded by a battle with Bruin." He went with his wife to "see a wild bear running in the woods," and they got their wish when a cinnamon bear came charging at them, "cuffing and snapping viciously." But obtaining a trophy properly fulfilled the purpose of the trip, a photograph of the hunters standing by their hanging bearskins attesting to the successful outcome.⁴⁴

Writers might adopt a style that recalls the wilderness of the adventure story genre. Following a similar pattern to the tale of Susie Billings, but describing the experience of a young sportswoman from the East, "A Rocky Mountain Bruin," in *Outdoor Life*, was the first-person story of "a thin slip of a girl" who killed a bear when it intruded into her camp. The bear appears as a ferocious wild beast, "a deep, rumbling growl making my hair rise to a pompadour," visible as it approached in the bright moonlight. "With a menacing growl he started for me," she continued, "and with a prayer frozen on my lips, I shut my eyes and

pulled the trigger.”⁴⁵ Or, a bear hunt could be a quest, as in the 1904 story for *Outdoor Life*, “A Montana Bear,” in which a suitor attempts to woo “a maid of the mountains [who] had made a bearskin rug the open sesame to her affections.”⁴⁶ There were often opportunities to give emphasis to the element of danger. In “Tackling a Cinnamon,” in the April 1891 issue of *Sports Afield*, for instance, the narrator’s friend has to escape up a tree to avoid having a “quick transformation into ‘bear’s meat’” – although the hunters did eventually secure their bearskin rug.⁴⁷

It was often said that every bearskin rug had its own story – the hunter’s tale – and so it could serve as a plot device. In “Bill Mearn’s Last Bear Skin” for *Outdoor Life* in 1905, the rug itself was the starting point of a narrative. “Yes, this rug has a history,” the story begins, but “I have always withheld the tragic tale” of “the man who lost his life in securing it.” Along the way, the author evokes the landscape in spare but vivid prose. “The pine needles scarcely rustled as I walked silently upward. The sun, which shone brightly, only penetrated in places the thick foliage.” Then, true to the adventure story genre, the narrator discovers a man dying. First, he passes “a precipitous rock embankment forming one side of a deep shadowy gully, through which a mountain stream rushed.” There, “At this lonely and shadowy place I received the first premonition of the tragic result of a struggle for supremacy between man and beast.” The man lay broken: “His coat and shirt were torn away from his side and were drenched with blood.” As the dying testimony of the man concludes the narrative, the author reflects on “the lonely fastness of the mountains” – embodied there in the figure of the ferocious bear, and then in the hide that is taken from the scene and placed in a trophy collection.⁴⁸

These hunting stories provided the sort of vicarious thrills that served as the vital cultural connection to a wilderness that was as imagined as real. The fantasy wilderness was where the bear of imagination prowled, and where hunters might win their most prized trophies without even leaving the fireside. Just as Dall DeWeese and other wealthy hunters surrounded themselves with the symbols or mementoes of their adventures in the form of heads, hides, and horns, such items also served at times as props, as Karen Jones has described, for their own more or less embellished hunting tales. In that light, did not a collection of magazines, a run of *Outdoor Life*, *Sports Afield*, and the like, especially when displayed in a home study or library, attest to the knowledge and sporting discernment of the owner? Each issue was a trophy of sorts to the daydreaming, armchair big-game hunter, as well as a cultural link to the imagined wilderness. In the end, hunting came down to stories.

And so to turn to the sportsman-in-chief, Theodore Roosevelt, the bear-hunting president whose exploits were recounted not only in his books and articles, but also in newspapers and magazines, feature articles, news reports, and satirical cartoons. As he moved further into the national spotlight, first as vice president in 1901, and then as president, after succeeding the assassinated William McKinley, Roosevelt’s hunting became a reference point for his admirers and critics alike. Along the way, it was the bear, the biggest of American big game, that emerged as a symbol of his outsized personality. The next section is about the cultural interplay of the bear of imagination and the president of imagination as Americans contemplated the place of wild nature in the world of the twentieth century.

Terrible Teddy, the Grizzly King

While much historical discussion of Theodore Roosevelt’s hunting has revolved around its more atavistic cultural associations, scholars have less often given focused

consideration to the extent to which his public persona mediated an understanding of the changing place of nature in an increasingly modern America.⁴⁹ Yet bear hunting, with which Roosevelt's name was indelibly linked, could connect fantasies of outdoor adventure and of human encounters with the force of nature, with consumerism and the cultural symbolism of the domestic home, thus bridging the world of wild things and modern life. Theodore Roosevelt, as a public figure who was written about, caricatured, and set to the cultural work of representing the nation in print media, encompassed those divergent tendencies in the role of bear hunter. In no small part, he built his reputation as a man of integrity upon his standing as a sportsman and his prowess as a bear hunter. His admirers saw him as a figurehead who was authentic and complete: as he stood with one foot in the modern world and the other in bear country, he could unite both worlds. Roosevelt's hunting persona could similarly symbolize America's journey into the twentieth century by preserving a cultural space for wild nature and consumerism to grow together.

Not all of Roosevelt's contemporaries took a positive view, though, and the story of how he came to symbolize an idea of America in those terms effectively charts the political and cultural landscape he traversed. Entering the cultural space of the wilderness, Roosevelt was judged positively and negatively for his association with the world of wild things. Yet either way, both his supporters and his adversaries recognized the quality of wildness that informed his public persona, and in a way that acknowledged its significance in the symbolism of the nation. After all, he appeared to be a bearlike man, a force of nature in himself.

Roosevelt got his best hearing with the hunting crowd. When J. A. McGuire of *Outdoor Life* sat down with the vice president-elect in January 1901, on a train returning from a recent hunting trip to Colorado, the writer felt immediately at ease. The excursion had been a grand success. Roosevelt had not sought the most challenging of big game this time, but he acquitted himself well, killing twelve mountain lions and five lynxes. A consummate sportsman, he recorded the measurements and weights of his specimens, and, as McGuire noted, each skin would be used to decorate his den at home. Roosevelt had the sportsman's manner, too. Upon meeting the writer, Roosevelt "grasped my hand warmly, insisted on my sitting down," and then he spoke in the easy, informal manner "known to all sportsmen." He professed to be an admirer of McGuire's magazine and said he particularly enjoyed the recent profile of Dall DeWeese. McGuire, in turn, was effusive in his praise of Roosevelt. He "is one of the most congenial, whole-souled men imaginable," and has the personality of "a warm-hearted sportsman." His sporting values gave a wholesome character to his political values, as someone who was "a natural man of the people," an "honest, fearless and intrepid fighter" for justice, and "a lover of the hills and streams."⁵⁰ Or, as Edwyn Sandys wrote in his profile of "Our Sportsman President," published in the December 1901 issue of *Field and Stream*, Roosevelt had proven himself "[o]n the trail of the grizzly" as a hunter, the same way he had proven himself "on the slope of San Juan" as a soldier in the Spanish-American War of 1898, and as he had "on the rocky steep of politics." The same outlook had served him in each field. It came from his determination, honesty, courage, and integrity – the qualities of a sportsman, strong in body and mind, each honed in the great outdoors.⁵¹

Other journalists expressed less reverence. Sometimes, they made good-natured fun. The *New York Times* presented Roosevelt as something of a dime-novel Western hero in sensational terms. The first day "netted him a handsome [mountain] lion," although only after "the angry beast sprang from the tree" at Roosevelt and his companions. "Quick as a flash, the Colonel's gun was at his shoulder and the ball struck true, while the animal was

in mid-air.” Still, there was more danger to come, as the *Times* reported two days later, during a brush with a grizzly bear. The hunters spotted “a huge brute lumbering unsteadily up Miniature Canon,” and Roosevelt incautiously gave chase. He fired, merely clipping the bear, which turned, “rearing on his hind legs, and snarling fiercely, he started toward ‘Teddy.’ ‘Run, Colonel!’ yelled [his guide] Goff, for the bear was mad and his twelve hundred pounds were fairly quivering with rage.” It was stirring stuff. Roosevelt stumbled as he ran, and fell, but then “scrambled to his feet.” As the bear closed in on him, he “cooly turned and fired again and stopped the animal.”⁵²

Meanwhile, Roosevelt’s critics in the Democratic press treated his antics as a gift to satire, and they took the opportunity to deflate his heroic persona by painting him as an inauthentic, vainglorious fantasist and fanatical butcher. They traduced his image of capable sportsmanship and also suggested he lacked that quality of manly self-control that (as Bederman and others have described) was imagined to be the defining trait of white masculine identity at the turn of the century. So, according to the New York *Evening World*, Roosevelt’s tales would put Baron Munchausen to shame. In another edition, that newspaper had him as “Terrible Teddy,” and reported that he had “abandoned the revolver for the knife” in search of new ways to satisfy his bloodlust. Turning from the Battle of San Juan Hill to Colorado, “instead of shooting Spaniards in the back,” the Rough Rider Colonel was “now stabbing mountain lions in the heart.” An accompanying cartoon showed “The Proud Lion,” who got away, with Roosevelt’s unmistakable teeth, disembodied, clamped around its tail. Or, as the *Silver State*, a Nevada newspaper, described him, he was “Terrible Teddy, the grizzly king.” Roosevelt’s implacable critics at the *St. Louis Republic*, meanwhile, presented his image in a crude pastiche of a dime-novel cover: *The Strenuous Life Library*, special “Teddy the Terror Edition.” With a characteristic grin and a cigarette nonchalantly placed between his teeth, he holds a knife in one hand, upturned against a pouncing cougar, and a pistol in his right hand, shooting a bear. No doubt, “when Teddy gets back to civilization he will go gunning for new game and send some yellow journalists to cover,” the *San Francisco Call* wryly suggested.⁵³ Roosevelt could be criticized for being too much the brute, too much the wild man – as though the value of whatever vital power he drew from nature was diminished by an implied lack of self-control.⁵⁴ He could even appear as something of a ferocious beast himself, if presented in a satirical light.

Bears, the biggest of American big game, provided the richest material for partisan mockery of this sort, especially if the ferocious beast could be represented as a diminutive cub. Tellingly, Roosevelt’s Colorado encounter with mountain lions would very soon afterward be misrepresented as a bear hunt in a political stunt played out ahead of Inauguration Day. Mark Lulley of Arizona, a wealthy mining prospector, a Democrat, and something of a wit, lost a private bet on the outcome of the election, and as a forfeit, he agreed to take two bears across country to Washington, D.C., for the appointed time. He sent out word that these two bears, captured in the mountains of Arizona, would be joining the parade alongside Roosevelt.⁵⁵ Said to be “playful and cute,” and fond of candy, the bears, called “Lulley” and “Lindsay,” were bound ultimately for the Smithsonian’s National Zoo.⁵⁶ Mark Lulley had an eye for publicity, and by the time he and his bears stopped in St. Louis to enjoy a celebrity breakfast at Union Station, before continuing eastward, the city’s Democratic *Republic* newspaper was reporting they had acquired the names “Teddy” and “Theodore.” They were due to ride alongside the vice president-elect, the *Republic* reported with a dose of sarcasm: a guard of honor of “bears – grizzly bears – to give a living reminder to the populace of Teddy’s thrilling exploits in Grizzly Gulch.”⁵⁷ Later, the Connecticut-based *Waterbury Evening Democrat* mischievously claimed that

during the parade, “Some wag started a story that the two Colorado performing bears that were carried in the Inaugural parade” had been “captured by Teddy during his recent hunting trip”; throughout the crowd could be heard the constant excitement, “here comes Teddy’s bears.” Meanwhile, “Mr. Roosevelt is said to have been made quite angry by the story, and especially by the constant public reference to it.” Or, at least, the newspaper presumed its readers might like to imagine so.⁵⁸

In fact, Roosevelt’s association with the bear was on balance more favorable to his public image during the years of his presidency than his partisan opponents perhaps assumed. For one thing, when he took part in bear hunts, he attracted considerable press attention in a context that allowed him to elevate himself temporarily above politics. His trip to Mississippi in November 1902 took him into the unfamiliar territory of the Delta canebrakes at a time when he was seeking to reach out to the South. He returned without having killed a bear, famously refusing to slaughter one that had been tied to a tree by his hosts. It was an adventure all the same, wrote Lindsay Denison in *Outing* magazine. One of the few reporters granted access to the camp, Denison published a friendly write-up, emphasizing the element of adventure in the “jungle” landscape, the arcane rituals of the southern hunters, and the camaraderie that Roosevelt enjoyed, particularly with the legendary African American scout Holt Collier. The president’s Colorado bear hunt in spring 1904 provided a more conventional version of success: the three-part account, introduced by J. A. McGuire but written by Roosevelt’s guide, John B. Goff, was illustrated by photographs of the many bearskins the president’s party took during their stay.⁵⁹

The bearskin soon became a motif of Roosevelt’s presidency, in ways that connected outdoor hunting adventure to modern domestic consumption and put both to work in shaping the symbolism of the nation. In moments away from matters of government, Roosevelt occasionally spent time dealing with his hunting trophies, arranging for the mounting and display of a bearskin for his den, for example, or sending a thank-you letter, in one case, for the gift of a bearskin, which he noted would be given a place in the White House living room. His enthusiasm for collecting bearskins even crossed into international relations. In September 1905, he sent a goodwill gift to Emperor Meiji: “the skin of a large bear which I shot.” Responding with understated diplomacy, the emperor declared it “a rare present.”⁶⁰ As his fellow Americans came to terms with their sportsman president, cartoonists made play with the image of the White House bedecked with bearskins (Figure 4). Clifford K. Berryman’s cartoon, “Hearing all About it,” pictured the first cabinet meeting after the conclusion of a Roosevelt vacation, as the president relates the story of the rug hanging on the wall behind him (Figure 5). Or there was Floyd W. Triggs’s “Cozy Corner in the White House,” which pictured the president relaxing in an armchair, bearskins dotted around, and an axe buried in a log pile by the hearth. Here was the president represented at home in the domestic style of the modern American hunter: wild things turned into soft furnishings.

In addition to appearing as an object of consumption, the figure of the bear itself emerged as a totemic symbol of this bear-hunting president. If cartoonists were not showing Roosevelt with bearskins, they often portrayed him in the company of bears. Sometimes he possessed their ferocious qualities, while on other occasions they took on his appearance. In a cartoon referring to a controversy surrounding economic policy in November 1902, for example, Charles Bush Green pictured Roosevelt holding onto the tail of a bear, labeled “Trusts,” ferociously brandishing a sword between his teeth. Green’s cartoon of the president’s Mississippi hunting trip shows a bear with Roosevelt’s toothy grin and glasses, watching him depart in the direction of the train, suitcase in hand, rifle



Figure 4. Clifford K. Berryman, “Welcome to the White House.” Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University. Original in Library of Congress Manuscript Division.



Figure 5. Clifford K. Berryman, “Hearing all About it.” Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University. Original in Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

over his shoulder. The bear, borrowing Roosevelt’s famous pronunciation, declares himself “de-light-ed” with the outcome of the hunt.⁶¹ There was, they seemed to say, something bearlike about Roosevelt.

As well as a symbol of ferocious vitality, the bear could represent the natural world of wild things. This representation contrasted what contemporaries often saw as the sophisticated cynicism of industrial modernity and the morally compromised politics

of national government. With the bear as his totem, Roosevelt could appear as a figure capable of shaping a future with both energy and integrity. Berryman's cartoons developed the most recognizable of Roosevelt's bear companions, originally appearing in a redrawn version of "Drawing the Line in Mississippi," his response to the 1902 hunting trip. "Drawing the Line" shows Roosevelt in the act of refusing to slaughter a captured cub, which went on to accompany the cartoon president in the years to come. From one creature of imagination to another, the ferocious bear of Roosevelt's *Wilderness Hunter* became Berryman's bear, a cub that stood witness to the president's deeds through successive cartoons. Its innocent eye provided a point of reflection on Roosevelt's deeds and the broader political events of the first decade of the twentieth century. The bear was looking over him as he had to contend with vying interests competing for his support, or when choosing political allies. It was also there in cartoons where wild animals seemed to welcome him to the wilderness, or in the case of "Out of the Woods," expressed sadness, weeping, as he returned to civilization. Roosevelt's image of moral integrity found symbolic expression in this companion bear cub, the innocent eye that watched over a president who was navigating the cynical and self-serving world of Washington politics.⁶²

Roosevelt at least appears to have seen the Berryman bear in something like this light early on. He wrote to the cartoonist in December 1902 to say he was "delighted with the little bear cartoons," and that he had begun to see it as something like an Egyptian cartouche, an icon that was said to protect the Pharaoh from harm.⁶³ A cartouche for a latter-day Pharaoh, possibly, but as an innocent eye on the world, Berryman's bear could also express a hope that the rising American empire would possess the moral integrity of the president over whom it watched. Or, as President Roosevelt symbolized an enduring connection to the wild world of the bear, so the bear symbolized his and by extension the nation's moral integrity. It was a link to a world that seemed authentic rather than sophisticated, wild rather than static, socially level rather than hierarchical.

Seymour Eaton invested largely the same spirit in his popular characters, the Roosevelt Bears, Teddy-B and Teddy-G, who first appeared in the *New York Times* in 1906, and then in a series of books relating their travels across the United States and around the world. Teddy-B and Teddy-G were not so much the president's companions, though, but more so manifestations of his distinctive persona. They were introduced to readers in instantly recognizable garb, sporting the unmistakably Rooseveltian pince-nez and cavalry hat. Yet it is no less their taste for adventure and their open-hearted, optimistic spirit that marks them out as the president's doubles, as they head out on their journey from Colorado to the East. They encounter problems and absurdities aplenty in modern America, but as Teddy-B and Teddy-G discover, there is nothing that cannot be overcome with a dauntless and energetic optimism, a willingness to break from convention, and an open-hearted spirit of fellowship – the qualities that Theodore Roosevelt's admirers said he embodied, which were also the qualities of sportsmanship, said to be the qualities common to those who live in bear country. There is a telling moment in Eaton's work when all of this comes together, in his second book, the 1907 sequel, *More About the Roosevelt Bears*. When Teddy-B and Teddy-G finally reach Washington, D.C., they are reunited with Roosevelt himself, in a moment that imagines the political heart of the modern nation through the eyes of these avatars of the wilderness. In the familiar role of the authentic backwoodsman, whose lack of modern sophistication is imagined to bring about cultural regeneration in a society grown cynical and self-interested, the Roosevelt Bears take the spirit of the wilderness to modern America.⁶⁴

In other words, the bears were expressing the same purpose that Theodore Roosevelt came to embody, at least to his admirers. Greeting Teddy-B and Teddy-G at the White House was none other than that same “warm-hearted sportsman,” Theodore Roosevelt: bear hunter, companion of the bear, and double of the bear (but here dressed in formal attire, while his doubles and guests provide a visually striking pair of counterparts, dressed in a mix of the colonel’s favored cavalry garb and western clothes). The District of Columbia, though, proves not to be a terminus. From the west to the east, and then off to distant lands, later escapades take the bears around the world. Teddy-B and Teddy-G at large in the world: a new chapter opens in America’s adventure – one that might be guided, Seymour Eaton presumably hoped, by the vision of a world symbolized by the wild bear, the nation’s bearlike president, and its president-like bears.

Conclusion

The wild bear prowled the collective imagination of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, a symbol of the nation and its complex relationship with the natural world. Appearing as a ferocious beast in stories of hunting and outdoor life, the bear could express the ambivalent feelings of fear and excitement that untamed nature aroused. For a world-weary modern people, it could seem powerfully alive in a world lacking vitality, as machines, bureaucratic processes, and standardized routines increasingly set the rhythm of life. But at the same time, tales of bear hunting were often stories of consumption, ending with the taking of the animal’s pelt or head. The bearskin rug or mounted trophy could enliven the modern home as a symbol of the natural world when set among the furnishings of the industrial age. As fantasies of hunting, adventure, and consumption, bear stories expressed not so much an outright rejection of modern life as a desire to preserve a cultural connection to the natural world of wild things, and to reconcile the experience of the industrial present with feelings of longing for the vanishing wilderness.

Theodore Roosevelt was an apt figurehead for those times. A modernizing president, his public persona nevertheless owed much to his reputation as a hunting sportsman and enthusiast for natural history. He was a figure who could seem equally at home in the White House or the Rocky Mountains, and as capable of delivering a speech from the rear platform of a train on a whistle-stop tour as stalking a bear through the forest. Roosevelt’s hunting exploits inspired contrasting sentiments among his many admirers and critics, but either way, he became closely associated with outdoor life, and especially with his pursuit of the largest of American big-game animals, the bear. As a symbol of his presidency, bears came to surround Roosevelt: from Berryman’s bear to the Roosevelt Bears to the teddy bear. His ursine doppelgängers appeared as his companions, or sometimes took his place in satirical and fondly humorous cartoons – and so the bear became intimately linked to the symbolism of the nation.

Whether as the hunted animal of outdoor sportswriting or as the president’s cartoon companions and doubles, the bear of imagination had an important place in national life as Americans were coming to terms with the changing world of the early twentieth century. It was a place preserved for the vital force of untamed nature in the modern age, for mystery and unpredictability, and for a sense of cultural continuity even amid great social change. Through that time, the bear embodied what would be an enduring fascination with wildness – with the idea of a realm that exists outside human dominion and resists mastery. America’s bear obsession did not stand in the way of national policies that encouraged the extermination of varmints in the name of efficiency and farm

productivity. But it did express an ambiguous celebration of the natural world of wild things and of the absence of human control. In the age of Theodore Roosevelt, the bear of imagination helped Americans to find a wild version of modernity and a modern version of wildness.

Notes

- 1 William J. Long, *Beasts of the Field* (Boston: Finn and Company, 1902), 127. As Peter S. Alagona has observed, today, “Californians are surrounded by bears” but “none of these animals are *alive*. They are all only images and monuments”—appearing on flags and “pendants and billboards and ... inscribed on T-shirts and logos.” Peter S. Alagona, *After the Grizzly: Endangered Species and the Politics of Place in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 12–13.
- 2 Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 262–263. See also Thomas R. Dunlap, “Values for Varmints: Predator Control and Environmental Ideas, 1920–1939,” *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (May 1984): 141–161. Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: Harper, 2009).
- 3 Alagona, *After the Grizzly*, 22–34.
- 4 T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), xv.
- 5 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 69–90.
- 6 “The Roosevelt Bears,” *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1906, 10; “Two Roosevelt Bears for the Bronx Zoo,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1906, 9; “Lots of Roosevelt Bears,” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1906, 9. Theodore Roosevelt to Clifford K. Berryman, Dec. 29, 1902, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, Dickinson, North Dakota, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library> (hereafter cited as TRDL-DSU). See also Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 173–174.
- 7 Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, “Editorial Introduction.” In *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), xiv–xvi. The urtext in this field, in the humanities, is often taken to be Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991). See also, for example, Matt Cartmill, “Hunting and Humanity in Western Thought,” *Social Research* 62 (Fall 1995): 773–786; Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); John Berger, “Why Look at Animals.” In *Animals Reader*, ed. Kalof and Fitzgerald, 251–261, and Boria Sax, “Animals as Tradition.” In *Animals Reader*, ed. Kalof and Fitzgerald, 270–277.
- 8 Jon T. Coleman, *Here Lies Hugh Glass: A Mountain Man, a Bear, and the Rise of the American Nation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 99 (Kindle edition).
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