



# **Shakespeare and the Hunt**

**A Cultural and  
Social Study**

**Edward Berry**

# SHAKESPEARE AND THE HUNT

*A Cultural and Social Study*

EDWARD BERRY

江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521800709](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521800709)

© Edward Berry 2001

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2001  
This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Berry, Edward I.

Shakespeare and the hunt: a cultural and social study/Edward Berry

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN 0 521 80070 6 (hardback)

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 – Knowledge – Hunting. 2.  
Hunting – England – History – 16th century. 3. Hunting – England – History – 17th century  
4. Hunting in literature. I. Title

PR3069.H85 B47 2001

822.3'3 – dc21 00–063063

ISBN-13 978-0-521-80070-9 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-80070-6 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-03058-8 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-03058-7 paperback

## *Preface*

The current controversies surrounding the sport of hunting in Britain and North America make it likely that a book on Shakespeare and the hunt will be greeted with suspicion by both proponents and opponents. To readers engaged in the controversies, I should say that, while I have never hunted and have no desire to do so, I am not a vegetarian or a principled opponent of the sport. To readers not engaged in the controversies, and for whom the problems of urban society might make such controversies seem marginal and trivial, I can only appeal to the prominence of the hunt in Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, to the extent of Shakespeare's imaginative involvement in it, and to the continuing significance of the issues – ethical, social, ecological – that surround the killing of animals for sport.

Although the subtitle represents this book as a “cultural and social study,” I tend to include social structures within the broad concept of culture throughout. Hence I refer often to a culture of the hunt. Though inexact, the phrase allows me to imagine Elizabethan and Jacobean culture as in some sense a hunting culture, presided over by monarchs who spent much time in the field and for whom hunting was a ritualistic expression of socially pervasive royal power. It is also a notion that allows me to imagine the hunting “fraternity” as a sub-culture within the broad society as a whole – a sub-culture which might itself be divided into such overlapping but sometimes antagonistic groups as hunters and poachers. Finally, the word “culture” allows me to think of the hunt in a broad sense: as a social practice, a symbol, a ritual, a discourse, an ideology. My context for understanding Shakespeare's relationship to the hunt therefore includes the practice of the sport itself, handbooks of hunting, poems and plays, mythology, theology, politics, painting – in short, the entire apparatus of what we usually understand as culture. As with most subjects in the early modern period, the evidence that survives favors high culture over low.

Research into the early modern culture of the hunt poses special challenges. Eye-witness accounts of the sport are rare and sketchy. Descriptions in the handbooks are not only incomplete but also inconsistent. The terminology of the sport, though wonderfully pedantic, is imprecise. And there is little in the way of modern research into either the practice of the hunt or its cultural significance. Hence I owe a special debt of gratitude to previous scholarship in the field – in particular, to D. H. Madden's odd but useful book, *The Diary of Master William Silence* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907); to Richard Marienstras's *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and, most significantly, to Roger B. Manning's *Hunters and Poachers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

The book contains eight chapters and touches on nearly every major Shakespearean allusion to hunting. Chapter 1 surveys the theory and practice of the hunt in the period, introduces the major issues surrounding the sport, and suggests, in general, Shakespeare's relationship to it. Chapter 2 examines hunting in *Venus and Adonis* and *Love's Labor's Lost*, with particular attention to the paradoxes of female hunting embodied in the figures of Venus and the Princess of France. Chapter 3 treats the ritual of the hunt as a context for tragedy in *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*. Chapter 4 offers a new interpretation of *The Taming of the Shrew* by focusing on the implications of Petruchio's speech on taming Katherine as a falcon and the prominence of the hunting lord in the Induction. Chapter 5 surveys the comic career of Falstaff as both stag and poacher from *1 Henry IV* to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Chapter 6 explores the paradox of pastoral hunting in *As You Like It*. Chapter 7 juxtaposes Prospero's hunt of Caliban in *The Tempest* with James I's career as a hunter and the crisis brought on by his assertions of his royal prerogative at the time in which the play was being written. Chapter 8 concludes the study with a brief overview of Shakespeare's conception of hunting.

Throughout the study I quote Shakespeare from G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). In quoting from old texts, I have normalized *u*, *v*, *i*, and *j* to conform with modern practice. I deliberately use the gendered word "man" to represent "human-kind" throughout the work since replacing it with such terms as "people" would tend to erase the patriarchal bias of the period.

I owe thanks to a great many people for their assistance, some of whom I must mention by name. The "onlie begetter" of this project, for which he is in no way to blame, is François Laroque, who prompted my

invitation to address the Société Shakespeare Française on the topic of the Shakespearean “green world” and thereby precipitated my frantic search for something new to say on the topic and my discovery of hunting; an early version of the section on *Love’s Labor’s Lost* was published in the proceedings of this conference (*Shakespeare: Le Monde Vert: Rites et Renouveau* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995]). I owe thanks as well to the many students who were persuaded to share my esoteric interests; to my colleagues in the 1997 Shakespeare Association Seminar on *As You Like It*, so ably chaired by Christy Desmet; to Patrick Grant, who read part of the study; to Terry Sherwood and Roger B. Manning, who, heroically, read it all; to the University of Victoria for support in the way of research grants and study leave; to my efficient and gracious editor at Cambridge, Sarah Stanton; to my wonderfully supportive but too distant children; and, finally, to Margaret, to whom this book is dedicated.

## *Glossary*

(The definitions below attempt to capture the most common meanings in early modern handbooks of hunting and falconry, but the terminology is imprecise and often inconsistent)

**bow and stable hunting** the most popular kind of hunting in parks, in which deer were driven towards bow-hunters, waiting in stands

**buck** a male fallow deer, often one of five years

**coursing** pursuing hares or other game with greyhounds, guided by sight

**doe** a female fallow deer

**falcon** the female of all long-winged hawks

**fallow deer** a medium-sized deer, most commonly kept and hunted in parks

**hart** a male red deer, usually one after its fifth year or possessing antlers with ten tines; the noblest animal hunted in Elizabethan England

**haggard** a mature hawk captured in the wild, usually considered a superior hunter

**hind** the female of the red deer

***par force de chiens*** the noblest kind of hunting, in which a hart or stag was pursued in open forest by hounds guided by scent, and hunters

**rascal** a young, lean, or otherwise inferior deer of a herd

**red deer** the largest animal hunted in England, and prized for *par force* hunting

**stag** a male red deer, usually one five years old (not always clearly distinguished from the hart)

## *Contents*

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Glossary</i>	xii
 1 Introduction: the culture of the hunt and Shakespeare	 1
2 Huntresses in <i>Venus and Adonis</i> and <i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>	38
3 "Solemn" hunting in <i>Titus Andronicus</i> and <i>Julius Caesar</i>	70
4 The "manning" of Katherine: falconry in <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	95
5 The "rascal" Falstaff in <i>Windsor</i>	133
6 Pastoral hunting in <i>As You Like It</i>	159
7 Political hunting: Prospero and James I	190
8 Conclusion: Shakespeare on the culture of the hunt	209
 <i>Notes</i>	 226
<i>Index</i>	251



## *Illustrations*

1	Robert Peake, "Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Sir John Harington"(1603). Reproduced by permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art	<i>page 2</i>
2	Queen Elizabeth at a hunt assembly. From [George Gascoigne], <i>The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting</i> (1575). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library	5
3	Queen Elizabeth taking the assay. From [George Gascoigne], <i>The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting</i> (1575). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library	6
4	Robert Peake, "Elizabeth of Bohemia"(1603). Reproduced by permission of the National Maritime Museum	7
5	Paul van Somer, "Anne of Denmark"(1617). Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of Lamport Hall	8
6	James I taking the assay. From [George Gascoigne], <i>The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting</i> (1611). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library	9
7	County map of Warwickshire (detail). From John Speed, <i>The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain</i> (1611). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library	16
8	Devonshire Hunting Tapestry, 1435–50 (detail). Reproduced by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum	33
9	Memorial brass of John Selwyn, underkeeper of the Royal Park of Oatlands, Surrey (c. 1587)	43
10	<i>Les Chasses de Maximilien: Décembre</i> (mid sixteenth-century). Reproduced by permission of the Louvre	46

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Introduction: the culture of the hunt and Shakespeare*

In the British Museum, a magnificent Assyrian frieze depicts a royal lion hunt. The climactic moment of the hunt features the king Ashurbanipal killing a wounded lion. The roaring beast, an arrow lodged in its forehead, lunges at the king, who extends his left arm to ward off the attack, and with his right arm plunges a sword through its chest. The faces of king and lion are level with each other, only a foot apart, and they stare directly into each other's eyes. The rigid and almost hieratic pose of the combatants suggests primal conflict: this is the most powerful of the beasts against the most powerful of men. Despite the closeness of the two in magnificence and stature, however, the power of Ashurbanipal is triumphant. He stands erect, utterly unmoved by the assault. His face betrays no emotion, unless it be the slight suggestion of a smile. His extended arms, massive yet calm in their strength, literally stop the lion dead. The frieze, like the hunt it depicts, serves to define and glorify the power of the king.

An Assyrian frieze from the seventh century BC may seem a peculiar starting point for an exploration of the Elizabethan and Jacobean culture of the hunt. Yet its central image, which evokes with such elemental force the dominance of the king over nature, foreshadows one of the most powerful Jacobean representations of the hunt, that of *Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Sir John Harington*. In this painting (fig. 1), the stern young prince, with a huntsman, horse, and greyhound just behind him, sheathes his sword after executing a symbolic *coup de grâce* to a fallen deer, its antlers held by the young Lord Harington, who rests on one knee.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the painting, Prince Henry was nine years old.

Despite the two thousand years that separate them, the Assyrian and Jacobean images have much in common: both use the hunt to celebrate royal power and, more specifically, royal power over wild nature. In the painting of Prince Henry, the elemental conflict depicted in the Assyrian frieze has been elaborated and invested with distinctively Jacobean



1 Robert Peake, "Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Sir John Harington" (1603).  
The nine-year-old prince sheathes his sword after symbolically decapitating a  
dead deer.

significance. The beast hunted is no longer the lion but the deer, the noblest of animals routinely pursued as game in a land unhappily deprived of lions, wolves, or, for the most part, boar. The supreme hunter is not the king himself but the prince, whose youth makes the action seem a rite of initiation. The solitary conflict between ruler and animal is replaced by the image of the ruler surrounded by helpful and obedient human and animal companions: friend, huntsman, horse, and dog. The climactic action, moreover, is no longer a stab through the chest but a ceremonial assault upon an animal already dead. Despite these differences, the essential import of the two images remains very much the same: the painting, like the frieze, demonstrates and celebrates royal power. In the portrait of Prince Henry, that power extends to humans, both aristocratic and common, to domesticated animals, to wildlife, to the forested landscape in the background, and, one might add, to the viewer, whose gaze is returned head-on by the stern eyes of the young warrior-prince. In Peake's painting, one might say, the viewer plays the role of the lion in the Assyrian frieze, stopped dead not by the out-thrust arm but by the penetrating gaze of the prince.

From the Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century in England, hunting was one of the most significant royal activities and manifestations of royal power. "To read the history of kings," observed the democrat Tom Paine in the eighteenth century, "a man would be almost inclined to suppose that government consisted of stag hunting."<sup>2</sup> During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, every English monarch except Edward VI and Queen Mary hunted throughout his or her reign, either regularly or obsessively. As a young king, Henry VIII hunted so often and so hard that one member of the court complained to Wolsey that he spared "no pains to convert the sport of hunting into a martyrdom."<sup>3</sup> Queen Elizabeth was still hunting at the age of sixty-seven, as is shown by a letter from Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney on 12 September 1600. Whyte, writing from the palace at Oatlands, informs Sidney that "her majesty is well and excellently disposed to hunting, for every second day she is on horseback and continues the sport long."<sup>4</sup> James I so immersed himself in hunting when king of England that his recreation occasioned serious religious, political, and popular protest. Hunting was also an important recreation for Charles I, who was introduced to the sport by his father at the age of four.<sup>5</sup> Charles II remained true to his father and grandfather in his devotion to the sport, continuing to hunt at least until three years before his death at the age of fifty-five.<sup>6</sup> Among the tasks facing Charles during the Restoration was the

re-establishment of the royal parks, forests, and herds, many of which had been damaged or destroyed as symbols of royal and aristocratic privilege during the Civil Wars.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the reigns of the Tudors and Stuarts, then, hunting was an important part of the life of the court, and of the aristocratic households connected with it. It existed in a variety of modes and served a variety of purposes. It provided a regular source of exercise and recreation. It served as entertainment for foreign visitors. It amused the monarch on progress, both as a diversion en route and as a subject for pageantry provided by the owners of estates. It served social purposes as simple as informal recreation (if any action involving a monarch can be called informal), or as complex as court ceremonial. Images of the hunt surrounded the monarchy and nobility of the period, appearing in their plate, their tapestries, their paintings, their statuary, their poems, and their masques. Stirling Castle, the birthplace of James I, still features a statue of the goddess Diana on its exterior wall and a clear view from its interior down to what in James's time was a hunting park below. Queen Elizabeth's palace of Nonsuch included a grove of Diana with a fountain depicting Actaeon turned into a stag.<sup>8</sup>

Although the pictorial tradition of the hunt is rather thin in Tudor and Stuart England, a number of images confirm the importance of the sport as an emblem of monarchical power. Queen Elizabeth was apparently never painted as a huntress, despite her association with Diana, goddess of the hunt, but she appears prominently in three woodcuts in George Gascoigne's 1575 edition of *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* (two are reproduced as figs. 2 and 3). In the Jacobean court the hunt took on dynastic significance, providing memorable images of many members of the royal family. A 1603 painting of the Princess Elizabeth by Robert Peake shows a hunting scene in the background (fig. 4). Peake's hunting portrait of Prince Henry, previously mentioned, was produced in two versions. A 1617 painting by Paul van Somer features Anne of Denmark in royal hunting attire, standing beside her horse and holding her dogs by a leash (fig. 5). Although James himself seems not to have been painted as a huntsman, his image in the role was kept alive in the 1611 edition of the most important hunting manual in the period, George Gascoigne's *The Noble Arte of Venerie*; in that edition two of the three images of Queen Elizabeth and her ladies-in-waiting that had appeared in the 1575 edition were cut out and replaced with images of James and his pages (one is reproduced as fig. 6).<sup>9</sup>

The continuing popularity of the hunt among the monarchs of



2 Queen Elizabeth at a hunt assembly. From [George Gascoigne], *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* (1575).

England cannot be explained merely as personal inclination or even as family tradition. The easy substitution of James for Elizabeth in the images of *The Arte of Venerie* highlights the fact that the monarch's role was more important than any personal views he or she might have towards hunting. Because of its legal status, the hunt was deeply intertwined in conceptions of the royal prerogative itself. The very definition





3 Queen Elizabeth taking the assay. From [George Gascoigne], *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* (1575).

of a forest provided by John Manwood in his *Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* (1615) suggests the convergence of real and symbolic power in the role of the monarch as hunter: "A forest is a certaine Territoric of woody grounds and fruitful pastures, priviledged for wilde beasts and foules of Forest, Chase and Warren, to rest and abide in, in the safe protection of the King, for his princely delight and pleasure . . ." <sup>10</sup> The law



4 Robert Peake, "Elizabeth of Bohemia" (1603). Hunting (right background) is juxtaposed with intimate conversation (left background).





5 Paul van Somer, "Anne of Denmark" (1617).

of the forests, which originated with the Norman kings and was separate from the common law, gave the monarch sole authority over every forest in the kingdom and all of the so-called beasts of forest, chase, and warren within them. According to this definition, forests were essentially wildlife preserves for the royal hunt. The right to hunt in a forest could