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978-0-521-80070-9 - Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study

Edward Berry

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE HUNT

Shakespeare and the Hunt is the first book-length study of Shakespeare's works in relation to the culture of the hunt in Elizabethan and Jacobean society. The book explores topics generally unfamiliar to Shakespeareans, such as the variety of kinds of hunting in the period, the formal rituals of the hunt, the roles of Queen Elizabeth and King James as hunters, the practice of organized poaching, and the arguments both for and against hunting. Situating Shakespeare's works in this rich cultural context, Berry illuminates the plays from fresh angles. He explores, for example, the role of poaching in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; the paradox of pastoral hunting in *As You Like It*; the intertwining of hunting and politics in *The Tempest*; and the gendered language of falconry in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

EDWARD BERRY is Professor of English at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. His books include *Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories* (1975), *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) and *The Making of Sir Philip Sidney* (1998). He also co-edited *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age* (1992).

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2001

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Monotype Baskerville 11/12.5 *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book 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 0 521 80070 6 hardback

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To Margaret

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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.

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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

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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.

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(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)