CHAPTER TWO

A Spectacle of Beasts

Hunting Rituals and Animal Rights
in Early Modern England

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In a long letter to a friend, Robert Laneham described the extended visit of Queen Elizabeth I at Kenilworth in July 1575. During her stay, she hunted on four separate occasions, and Laneham describes one in enthusiastic detail. In the cool of the evening on Monday, July 11, the queen vigorously pursued a hart, or red deer. The hunters, including the queen, were on horseback, following a pack of hounds. According to Laneham, the beagles raised a constant cry, the deer ran swiftly, the footmen chased the deer breathlessly, and the hunters pursued them all on galloping horses. The sounds of blasting horns and “hallowing and hewing” added to the sense of wild abandon and transport, “the excellent echoz between whilez from the woods and waters in the valleiz resounding.”

In the end, the hart was driven into a pool of water. The deer swam for his life, while the hounds continued to pursue him in the water. Laneham wrote:

Thear to behold the swift fleeting of the deer afore, with the stately carriage of his head in his swimming, speed (for the quantitee) lyke the sail of a ship; the hounds harroeing after, as had they bin a number of skiphs too the spoyle of a karvell; the ton no lesse eager to purchaz his pray, than wasz the other earnest in saveguard of his life.
The spread of the stag's antlers reminded Laneham of the full sails of a large ship, or caravel. The dogs were like smaller boats or skiffs in full chase of the caravel. The image graces at England's growing naval prowess. In comparison to this image, the death of the deer was almost an afterthought. "Well," Laneham concluded, as his language turned colloquial, "the hart was kild, a goody dear, but so crest the game yet."

Laneham wrote as a spectator, swept up in a "pastime delectable in so by a degree" that there could be none other in "onsy way comparable." His descriptions convey the enthusiasm and energy that made hunting one of the most popular sports of the early modern period, both as activity for nobility and as spectator sport. He bears witness to a defining spectacle of his time—a spectacle of running beasts.

As public spectacle, the symbolic and allegorical opportunities in the hunt were carefully exploited by the royal hunters. Queen Elizabeth used the pageantry of the hunt as a kind of theater in the woods, placing royal power and prerogative on display. Two days later, for example, the queen hunted again, on Wednesday, July 13. This time the stag ran quickly to waste. At the queen's command, the hunter in the water cut off the ears of the stag, "for a round sum." With this ransom, the stag "so had pardon of lyfe." As queen, Elizabeth presided over life and death, power and pardon.

With its elaborate rituals and pageantry, its historical importance, and its symbolic power, hunting from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance has been extensively studied by scholars. The scholarship can be understood to fall into four categories or stages, not strictly chronological and with considerable overlap among them. The first involves careful studies of the nature of the hunt, often conducted by hunters who are themselves students of the history of the chase. Closely related are the works in which scholars have produced careful editions of medieval and Renaissance hunting manuals. Second are studies of the hunt from historical and cultural perspectives, from the perspective of its social and historical significance. Third are studies that examine hunting as a richly symbolic activity, culturally influential in contemporary literature and art. Scholarship has focused on the hunt as a symbolic register for social status, manhood, gender relations, and "the love hunt." Finally, a number of studies have begun to examine the hunt as a cultural phenomenon in its own right, about which a number of prohunting and antihunting arguments developed. In other words, they examine the ethical status of hunting during the period.

This study is located in the interest in hunting as an ethical activity, and as a site of social contention. I will focus on hunting in the sixteenth century in England as an example of a broadly European activity, one that did not significantly change in its main outlines from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance. In this chapter, I will locate my interest in what Edward Berry calls the "culture of the hunt," or what Roger M. Manvell calls "the deer-running culture." The hunt for the hart or red deer was paradigmatic of the highest ideals and possibilities afforded by hunting in the Renaissance. A complex set of practices, symbols, and attitudes contributes to the making of the hunting culture of the time. I'm particularly interested in the way that hunting served as a cultural site for growing attention to, and disputes over, the nature and status of the animal. I will call this "the question of the animal." After a review of the hunt and its social context, I want to examine opposing attitudes toward hunting as the meaning of the word beast came increasingly to be questioned.

Both as a highly structured and heavily ritualized activity, and as the field of symbolic discourse about human society, hunting has received considerable attention. Yet hunting was also a complex set of discourses about the animals. Hunting was a way of talking about and knowing animals, both the animals that are pursued (the prey), and the animals that do the pursuing (the domestic allies of humans, hounds and hawks and horses). Hunting was also a discourse about humans as animals. The discourses about animals changed dramatically over the sixteenth century.

I will use the work of the twentieth-century Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset to frame the way the hunt imagines nonhuman animals and their relations with humans. Written in 1942, Meditations on Hunting is notable for its forthright discussions of the elements of the hunt. Ortega y Gasset identifies three elements of the hunt, as they emerged in the Middle Ages and through the Renaissance. The first is a relationship of hierarchy or superiority to the hunted animal. Such a relationship in the European hunt of the early modern period is so fundamental as to go almost unremarked by the hunters themselves. As Keith Thomas writes, "Man's authority over the natural world was ... virtually unlimited." This is often implied in important hunting rituals, and is occasionally stated directly. The metaphysical assumptions about humans and animals helped to give the hunt its symbolic resonance as an ennobling human and social activity. As it was enacted in hunting, such supremacy was often criticized as tyranny, not nobility.

Second, the chase produced the potentially contradictory discourse of the hunt as an animalistic release of passion. This dimension of the hunt is most often articulated through the animals themselves, especially the crying of the hounds in the chase, along with the blowing of horns and hallowing of huntsmen. It was this intoxicating rush that contributed to the addictive quality of the hunt. This discourse could involve a dangerous swerve toward the Bacchic release of animal passions in human beings, and became a cultural trope for caustic attacks on hunting, in which human hunters were characterized as the true "beasts" in the chase.

Third, hunting is another kind of discourse of training domestic animals. This focuses on managing animals, training them, and taking care of them.
This discourse meditates the guilt that was assumed to exist between humans and animals. The training of the hounds and hawks and horses involved considerable attention in the hunting manuals, and is not frequently discussed in modern commentaries about hunting. Yet the hounds in hunting (and hawks as well) lead to a remarkable attentiveness to animals.

All three of these ways of conceptualizing animals in the hunt—through superiority, animal release, and training—define hunting as an activity that takes place at the boundary between humans and other animals. As the hunt became increasingly criticized, the nature of the animal as it was understood in the hunt itself became increasingly important. I will argue that hunting and antihunting discourses, taken together as a cultural site for contention over the nature of the animal, led by the end of the century to a new language for the beast. In George Gascoigne's remarkable hunting manual, The Noble Arte of Venere or Hunting (1575), the animals themselves assume an agency and a voice that move the question of the animal beyond hunting and ethics. Hunting rites and rituals give way to a proto-language of animal rights.

**A SPORT FOR NOBLE PEERES, A SPORT FOR GENTLE BLOODS**

As he was finishing his hunting treatise, George Gascoigne was invited to provide poetic entertainments for Queen Elizabeth during her royal progress through Kenilworth. It is easy to imagine him as one of the party with Robert Laneham, swept up in the festivity and courtly pageantry, with his book on hunting as a noble art still in his imagination. “It is a Noble sport,” he concludes,

To recreate the minds of Men, in good and godly sort,
A sport for Noble Peeres, a sport for gentle bloods,
The paine I leave for servants such, as beat the bushie woods,
To make their masters sport. Then let the Lords rejoyce,
Let gentlemen behold the glee, and take thereof the choice.

His enthusiasm is tinged with a hint of reservation for the pain of the servants, as they beat the bushes after game, and reflects the inescapable, social meaning of hunting at the time. His verses also reflect a sport that had reached a level of popularity, pervasiveness, and influence greater than at any time since the ancient world, and perhaps ever.

For the aristocracy and royalty, hunting for sport had become a consuming, often daily, obsession. A French invention, the practice spread through Europe and arrived in England with the Norman Conquest. According to Keith Thomas, no nation was so addicted to hunting as the English. It was “an obsessive preoccupation of the English aristocracy.” According to Roger B. Manning, hunting was “the most esteemed pastime among peers and gentlemen, and for many of them it was the most time consuming.” Edward Berry describes hunting as “one of the most significant royal activities and manifestations of royal power.” By the time Gascoigne was writing in the sixteenth century, this sport for kings and queens and princes had become an important social marker for a rising bourgeois class. As Marcia Vale writes in *The Gentleman’s Recreations*, “Sports of the kill represented a major portion of the gentleman’s pleasure ... [and] the popularity of hunting among all sorts and degrees of gentlemen was prodigious.”

The social importance of the hunt is well known. It can be seen in the hunting habits of the Tudor monarchs of England. Henry VII took an active role in managing the royal forests to maintain a steady supply of game, and aggressively punished poachers in his forests. Henry VIII was a passionate hunter, chasing animals from early morning until late at night, wearing out several horses in the process. His poem, “Pastime with Good Company,” insists on his right as monarch to the pleasures of hunting: “Hunt, sing, and dance, / My heart is set.”

Queen Elizabeth had a famous fondness for hunting. She always treated hunting as a show or ceremony. She hunted as a young woman and as an aging queen. In April 1557, “The Lady Elizabeth” engaged in a colorful hunt at Enfield Chase, near Hatfield, with a retinue of twelve ladies in white satin and fifty bowmen in scarlet boots. In a dramatic close to this theatrical hunt, the queen herself cut the throat of the buck. In 1591, she was still hunting at Cowdrey Castle, where she killed “three or four” bucks by shooting into a paddock.

The hunt was closely associated with royalty because European monarchs asserted their rights to the ownership of the forests of their countries, and the hunt was closely associated with the assertion of national control by European monarchs over their lands and peoples. Through their control of forests and their willingness to engage in public violence in the chase, the hunt became an expression of royal power and the creation of nations. The royal forests were maintained as private hunting reserves, and their prerogatives were enforced with complex laws and, when necessary, violent policing. The forest itself was defined as a privileged space, making hunting a privileged sport, highly artificial and rigidly formalized. As the Elizabethan John Manwood wrote in *The Laws of the Forest*, “A forest is a certaine Territorie of woodye grounds and fruitfull pastures, privileged for wild beasts and fouls of the Forest, Chase and Warren, to rest and abide in, in the protection of the King, for his princely delight.”
This intersection of geography and political privilege extended hierarchically to other spaces. Monarchs maintained the exclusive control over forests, but granted nobility the right to hunt in parks. Probably introduced by the Normans, parks were lands enclosed by ditch, bank, or pale, and served as private hunting grounds. They were immensely popular, typically attached to the grand estates and castles throughout England.25 At the bottom of hunting’s geography of privilege were warrens, also probably introduced by Normans for the rabbits they brought with them. Warrens came to be associated with the hunting of “lesser game.”26

As much as one-quarter of all land in England was royal forest, and in 1300 there were as many as 3,200 private parks in England.27 The legal administration of these lands, and their associated hunting rights, reinforced royal and aristocratic authority. Hunting through the Middle Ages and Renaissance was inescapably associated with royal prerogative and political power. Hunting as a royal activity became, in many instances, indistinguishable from the act of governing. Hunting became a vehicle for political control and repression, and inevitably also for political protest and rebellion through poaching.28

The hunt at this time thus reflected a complicated world of legal privilege and prohibition, in which a political hierarchy was mapped onto physical spaces and the created world. The hunt was a central organizing principle for understanding the animals in these political spaces.

The prey were variously categorized, depending on the author. John Manwood lists three kinds of chase, and thus three kinds of beasts:

Beasts of the Forest (or Venery): hart, hind, hare, boar, wolf.
Beasts of the Chase: buck, doe, fox, marten, roe.
Beasts of Fre Scare: hare, coney, pheasant, partridge.29

Some texts, like The Boke of St. Albans (1486), list the hare as one of the “Bestys of venery.”30 It is important to note that these categories do not relate to the lives of the animals. By the time Manwood was writing at the end of the sixteenth century, wolves had been eradicated from England for a century.31 Boars were also probably extinct.32 Reflected in this hierarchy of beasts are the relative pleasures of the chase. As Richard Marienstras remarks, Manwood related the hierarchy of space to the hierarchy of animals by “setting up a graded scale [for lands] similar to that for living creatures.”33

Keith Thomas writes, “There was a social hierarchy among animals no less than men, the one reinforcing the other. The whole natural world was indeed conventionally assumed to be ordered on a hierarchical scale.”34 Hunting has to be understood at this high point in its history as a thoroughly cultural activity. It was the favored leisure activity of a warrior class without a war to fight. King James I of England, in 1599, advised his son to learn to hunt, “namely with hunting hounds, which is the most honorable and honorific sport, as the ‘faire paterne, for the education of a young king.”35

Thus, the hunt functioned as a sign of social status. The natural world of the hunt reflected a highly stratified social structure, with a complex grading of power, privilege, and prohibition. In one sense, this was simply another expression of a fundamentally hierarchical view of nature itself. Yet the hunt went beyond signs to a symbolic control over nature and other humans that could be startling. In his 1577 work, The Description of England, William Harrison relates that Henry VII worried about the symbolic meaning that hunting could carry. The force and power of the mastiffs was prodigious. They could kill a bear or a lion. As a result, Henry VII ordered all mastiffs hanged, “because they durst presume to fight against the lion, who is their king and sovereign.” He was said also to have ordered a falcon killed for attacking an eagle.36

As Roger B. Manning points out, the hunt functioned socially as a cultural site in which power was asserted, contested, and negotiated:

Hunting was many things in Tudor and early Stuart England. Certainly it afforded sport and recreation for kings and aristocrats as it has always done and provided the opportunity to develop and display the skills and courage necessary for war. It was also a ritualized simulation of war involving calculated and controlled levels of violence carried on between rival factions of the gentry and peerage. . . . Hunting was also more than a simulation of war. In a hierarchical age when kings and aristocrats continued to feel the need to fashion an image, hunting was also political theatre and provided an occasion to display power. This was an age when both state and family were asserting themselves: the Tudor monarchs had attempted to suppress private warfare and punish rebellion very seriously; aristocratic families found the more overt forms of rebellion and civil war too dangerous and had to be more subtle and circumspect than their late-medieval predecessors in pursuing feuds or expressing political opposition . . . Hunting raids on deer parks and royal forests . . . spoke a covert language which was clear enough to both courtiers and backwoods small gentry.37

Hunting was a political language in its own right.

The highly stratified and exclusive nature of this concept of hunting was incorporated into its techniques, its style, and its language. As aristocratic sport, the hunt distinguished itself carefully from utilitarian hunting, disdain ing hunting “for the pot,” as Thomas Elyot put it in 1531. Practical hunting “containeth therein no commendable solace or exercise, in comparison with other forms of hunting.”38 As a sport, aristocratic hunting was by its nature artificial, formalized, and structured by rules.
The artificial nature of this hunt as sport contributed to and underscored its vast symbolic power. The language of hunting, both as metaphor and as a figure of thought, pervades the literature of the time. It was a way of thinking, and could be employed in paradoxical ways. Thomas More offers a typical example of a writer who expresses the persistent association between hunting and manhood in a male-dominated society:

Manhood I am: therefore I me delight
To hunt and hawk, to nourish up and feed
The greyhound to the course, the hawk to the flight...
These things become a very man indeed.  

Yet at Nonsuch Palace in Surrey, Queen Elizabeth maintained a park full of deer and a grove to Diana, goddess of the hunt. The park included a fountain with a statue of Actaeon being turned into a stag by the angry goddess. It seems that class and power, even more than gender, dominated the symbolic import of the hunt. Nevertheless, hunting provided a powerful complex of images for gender relations, particularly love. At no time, I would argue, was hunting used so pervasively to examine the nature of love, Edward Berry notes that huntresses appear frequently in Shakespeare's plays, and argues that Shakespeare used erotic hunting to force characters to "confront some unsettling truths about themselves and about the nature of love." Shakespeare could use the hunt to explore complex sexual relations, as between the huntress Venus and the young hunter Adonis; to describe Lavinia's rape in Titus Andronicus; or to express exquisite sexual longing, as in the hawking metaphors of Juliet's wedding night speech in Romeo and Juliet.

As a social and broadly cultural phenomenon, the hunt may have reached an apex in the early modern period. As a figure of thinking, it seems to have become part of the psychological as well as social make-up of the time.

HUNTING AND ITS ANIMALS

As a political activity and as a symbolic discourse, the hunt betrays a stunningly anthropocentric orientation, deriving from deeply held assumptions about "the special status of man," to use Keith Thomas's phrase. Concern for animal suffering rarely figures in hunters' stories or manuals. Yet it is also true that the manuals lavish enormous attention on the animals in hunting—both the wild prey and the domestic creatures used to capture the prey. I would like in the remainder of this chapter to examine the ways in which hunters and antihunters talk about the animals in the hunt, and the way their talk contributes to a new understanding of animals themselves.

In this section, I will focus on three ways of talking about animals in hunting: through domination and conquest, release of animal energies, and training. It is customary to speak of hunting in terms of domination and control. These three categories complicate the usual notions of the hunt as a metaphor for domination of animals, particularly with regard to the presumed gulf between humans and other animals. Just as important, disputes about the nature of animals, and human sympathy for other animals, related directly to the language of animals in the hunt.

The right to use animals for human need and pleasure was a basic assumption of the hunt. In Country Contentments, Gervase Markham makes the assumption explicit: "It is intended that a man so good and vertuous as the true Husband-man, should not be deprived of any comfort, or felicity, which the earth, or the creatures of the earth, can afford him." Hunting as a sport—deriving pleasure from the death of animals—is made possible by this presumption. Yet hunting does not make great effort in this period to justify its treatment of animals. Unlike modern works on hunting, the hunting manuals of the period do not justify the treatment of animals in the hunt. Nor do they try to use the hunt as a way of describing the grand scheme of things, the way twentieth-century hunting advocates use hunting as a descriptor of a predatory and violent world. Human superiority was taken more or less for granted in hunting discourses of the period. George Gascoigne refers to hunting as "ordained" for noblemen, suggesting that the subordination of other animals to humans in the divine scheme of creation is almost beyond question.

According to José Ortega y Gasset, hunting inevitably describes a hierarchical relationship between predator and prey. In Meditations on Hunting, he writes, "Hunting is what an animal does to take possession, dead or alive, of some other being that belongs to a species basically inferior to its own." To put it another way, "Hunting is irremediably an activity from above to below." The concept of hierarchical relationship underlies the military ethic of the hunt as a sport in the early modern period. Because this concept was reflected in the hierarchical presumptions of both creation and human society, it was almost invisible, and did not need justifying. Critics saw this domination as tyranny.

As a result hunting is used to describe the domination of civilization over nature more than it is of man himself over nature. The dominating of animals in hunting is taken to be a sign of analogous relations of dominance and submission in human society. It is, in other words, largely metaphorical. Thomas Eliot notes that dominating a fierce beast is useful, not in itself primarily, but as a demonstration of power to inferior men: "daunting a fierce and cruel beast" is central to the hunt because "it importeth a majesty and dread to other persons."

One of the most important Elizabethan hunting stories thus emphasizes the political dimension to domination of the beast. John Selwyn, the Under Keeper
of the Park at Oatlands Castle, in Surrey, is reputed to have leapt from his horse onto the back of a great stag, as both animals were running at top speed. Selwyn kept his balance, drew his sword, and stabbed the stag in the neck. He steered the terrified beast to the queen, where it dropped dead at her feet.4 This allegory of domination and submission seems as much about human relations as it does about human and animal relations.

Nevertheless, the anxiety about maintaining the boundaries between humans and the other animals does reveal itself, indirectly, in the rhetoric of hunting. It seems to be an anxiety about civilization itself. Hunting was a jargon-filled enterprise. Hunting handbooks are often largely about vocabulary, and the linguistic rigor is considerable. For example, a one-year-old red deer was called a calf. At two years, it was a brocket. At three years, a spaniard. At four years, stag or staggard. At five years, a stag. After six years, it is a hart. A similarly demanding and pedantic vocabulary applied to the buck of the fallow deer. As Edward Berry writes, “Hunting was thus not merely a physical but a verbal sport, and one in which the mastery of words implied both power over nature and society.”44

The rituals of this style of hunting reveal the importance of the hunt as the triumph of civilization itself over nature. It was heavily ritualized, with the strict observance of several ceremonies. In the classic form of this hunt, in which hunters and hounds pursue a stag by scent (called hunting par force), rituals framed the key moments, and they are obsessively described in hunting manuals. The “Assembly” of hunters in the woods before the hunt, the presentation of dung to the lord of the hunt, the methods of rousing the deer, the protocols of the chase with the hounds, even the way the hart is killed—all these ritual was strange and artificial at a remove of centuries, yet were precisely described in the manuals. The defining ritual of this hunt, the breaking up of the deer after it is dead, suggests that one way these rituals could be understood is as an enactment of social and human control over the beast.

The ceremony of the hunt is important enough for George Gascoigne to describe it two times in The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting. First he gives the French manner of dismembering the dead deer. Then he gives “a special advertisement” of the English manner, because it differs in important details.46 In general, it is sufficient to note that the breaking-up insists upon special knives, particular postures from the huntsman, offerings to the chief person in the hunt from the dead deer, and a particular order of cutting up the deer. Each member of the hunting party receives specifically designated cuts of the “dainty morsels” of the deer, according to rank. The hounds are also rewarded, to the hallowing of hunters and the blowing of horns.

These rituals are central to the spectacle of the hunt, and much of the meaning of these rituals is opaque to us. Marienstras believes that the break-up is a sacrificial ritual, distinguishing the violence of hunting from mere butchery.47 Edward Berry writes, “The ceremony as a whole represents the domination of man over nature, the imposition of a specifically human order upon the wildness of the animal.”48 I agree that this is a ritual of control exercised over the animal’s body. Yet civilization itself is honored in the disarticulation, and subsequent rearticulation, of the animal. The body of the beast becomes a language of civilized order. It is possible that the quasi-religious observance of these ceremonies hints at doubt, on the part of the hunters, as to whether their use of animals for pleasure is fully justified. The ceremony provides the social sanction.

The second discourse of the hunt could be called “animalistic.” It can appear to be the opposite of the discourse of the hunt as ennobling humans with respect to animals. The hunt seems to allow hunters to cross over the boundaries between humans and beasts.

The animalistic elements of the hunt center on the exhilarating release of energy it occasions. If hunting operates at the boundaries between human and animal, it can both police the boundary in a discourse of domination and blur the boundaries. In the Renaissance, hunting was loved paradoxically because it connected hunters to their own animality. They did not identify with the prey, except symbolically—a prince, for example, with the great stag. Rather, they experienced their own powerful sense of animal release through the energy of their domesticated animals, especially the hounds. Paradoxically, in a hierarchical and anthropocentric age, the hunt connected hunters to their dogs, in whom the hunters saw a release of their own animal passions. The dogs become the objective correlates of a hunter’s wildness.

Ortega y Gasset describes this dimension of the hunt through the sudden animation of dogs in the pursuit of the prey. The hunter feels himself a plant, a botanical entity, and he surrenders himself to that which in the animal is almost vegetal: breathing. But here they come, here comes the pack, and instantly the whole horizon is charged with a strange electricity. .... Suddenly the orgiastic element shoots forth, the dionysiac, which flows and boils in the depths of all hunting. Dionysios [sic] is the hunting god: “skilled cynegetic,” Euriptes calls him in The Bacchantes. “Yes, yes,” answers the chorus, “the god is a hunter!” There is a universal vibration... There it is, there’s the pack! Thick saliva, panting, chorus of jaws, and the arcs of tails excitedly whipping the countryside. The dogs are hard to restrain; their desire to hunt consumes them, pouring from eyes, muzzle, and hide. Visions of swift beasts pass before their eyes, while, within, they are already in hot pursuit.49

This focus on the orgiastic release of animal energy in the hunt accounts for much of the pleasure of hunting. It explains why, as Markham put it, so many gentlemen were “addicted to the delight of hunting.”50
This animal pleasure could be tame, or it could turn more carnivalesque, more elemental, more primal. The hounds are the central image of this release of energy. In full pursuit, they become images of uninhibited desire, as Ortega y Gasset suggests. It can border on the “dionysiac,” and turn demonic as well. In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Hippolyta describes the pleasure of the hounds in full cry, as they bring a bear to bay in Sparta:

Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding; for besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. 11

The element of Bacchic release is also associated with the blood of the prey. James I would personally cut his prey’s throat and daub blood on the faces of his courtiers. 32

The swerve toward the “bestial” in the hunt intoxicated hunters, but it was a principal theme of hunting’s early critics. Hunters lost their reason and their humanity, degraded into beasts. A myth like that of Actaeon expresses the animality of the hunt as it turned demonic. The hunter becomes a deer, and is destroyed by his own hounds.

Finally the hunt contains a discourse of training animals, which helps to explain the central function of the hounds and hawks as allies of the hunter in the chase. The hounds were essential to the aristocratic conception of hunting. For nonhunters, the relationship between hunters and dogs is rarely mentioned, and not well understood. Gervase Markham begins Country Contentions with a definition of hunting:

Hunting is then a curious search or conquest of one beast by another, pursued by a natural instinct of enmity, accomplished by the diversities and distinctions of smells onlie, wherein Nature equallie dividing her cunning giveth both to the offender, and offended strange knowledge both of offence and safety. In this recreation is to be seen the wonderfull power of God, in his creatures, and how far rage and policie can prevalie against innocence and wisdom. 13

The hunt is defined as the pursuit of one animal by another. The domestic animal is central in this artificial and contrived contest between two animals. As a sport, however, hunting reveals to hunters “the wonderfull power of God, in his creatures.”

George Gascoigne begins The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting with an extended treatment of the antiquity of hounds, their several natures, their breeding and training. The care and training of dogs cover fourteen chapters. Hounds must be trained to understand horn blasts in the hunt, telling them if they have missed a scent, overrun a scent, or should run counter to a scent: “their keepers and huntsmen must teach them to know the Hallow as well by the horn, as by the mouth, in this wise.” 36 The hounds are carefully rewarded with morsels. Loving care is lavished on the creatures. Gascoigne concludes his treatment on hounds by observing that, in the kennel, “herewith shall you rub every night the feet and folds between the claws of your hounds with a linen cloute.” 37 It is easy to se why noble hunters were accused of caring more for their dogs than their people.

Hunters developed an intimate knowledge of their dogs’ abilities and strengths. According to D. H. Madden, this is an important feature of the hunt, then and now. 38 Shakespeare’s Induction to The Taming of the Shrew is an example of this intimate type of talk about animals:

Lord. Huntsman, I charge thee tender well my hounds
(Breach Merriam, the poor cur, is emboss’d),
And couple Clowder with the deep-throated brach.
Saw’st thou not, boy, how Silver made it good
At the hedge-corner, in the coldest fault?
I would not lose the dog for twenty pound. 37

For Ortega y Gasset, as for the hunters of the early modern period, hounds were an essential element of the hunt. As Ortega y Gasset puts it, “Man and dog have articulated in each other their own styles of hunting.” 39 In working together, the two species create a space between them in which each is in some measure recreated, human and animal. The domesticated dog, for example, “is an intermediate reality between the pure animal and man, which, in turn, is to say that something like reason operates in the domestic animal.” 40 One need not accept the fundamental otherness of the wild and the domestic to understand that Ortega y Gasset sees new potentials for thought and feeling in this relationship with dogs in the hunt. The attention to dogs as human companions in the hunt applies as well to hawks and horses. In the intimacies of care and understanding, hunters become students of their companion animals. As Vicki Hearne remarks about the training of animals in Adam’s Task, trainers have to look beyond the “Outsiderness, or Otherness” of animals. 60

These three discourses suggest that hunting carries a double valence with regard to the boundaries between humans and nonhuman animals. On the one hand, it assumes a hierarchy of creation and reinforces the sense of human dignity, superiority, and nobility. On the other hand, it blurs the boundaries that God has seemed to ordain, in animalistic release of the hunt, and in the intimacies of training.
THE ENIGMA OF THE ANIMAL

Over the sixteenth century, antihunting sentiment helped to generate a new feeling for animals. Critics attacked hunting at first, not because they felt great sympathy for animals, but because they loathed the effect of hunting on hunters. Critics deconstructed the hunt and its central claims, particularly the supposed nobility of hunters and the slippery term beast. The animality of the hunt made its critics believe that, as Sir John Harrington put it, “the royal sports of hunting and hawking were such as made me devise the beasts were pursuing the sober creation.” Such questions about the nature of the hunt and its participants led to questions about the nature of animals in the hunt.

A number of historians and literary critics have traced the development of an antihunting tradition through the Renaissance. Claus Uhlig locates the origins of a principled attack on hunting in John of Salisbury’s Politeia (1159). He identifies the principal features, or stereotyped toposi, of the critique: hunting is the origin of tyranny, it causes social irresponsibility, and it leads to the degeneration of hunters into beasts. Uhlig traces these toposi through Erasmus in The Praise of Folly, Thomas More in Utopia, and Cornelius Agrippina in Of The Vanitie of The Artes and Sciences. Matt Cartmill follows the same development, saying that the sixteenth century saw “the first condemnations of hunting heard in Europe in fourteen centuries.” Edward Berry identifies three strands in a growing antihunting feeling: the humanism of Thomas More, Erasmus, and Agrippina; the sentimental sympathies of Montaigne and the ethical opposition of the Puritans.

I will examine the way boundaries between humans and animals are contested in the debate over hunting in this period, especially in George Gascoigne’s The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting. This work’s power as proanimal discourse has been largely overlooked. It is a startling example of the way hunting itself seemed paradoxically to help produce a new view of animals in Europe. It challenges the main premises of the hunt as ennobling, develops the theme of the transformation of men into beasts in the hunt, and asserts a growing dignity for animals. They achieve moments of agency and depth as creatures, and are given voices by which to talk back. They rewrite the hunting narrative and even tell their own versions of hunting narratives. They explicitly raise the question of the representation of animals by human beings. In the context of a hunting manual, one is left with the impression that animals have made a major and unprecedented statement about their rights as creatures. A text of hunting rituals and animal rights in direct confrontation, Gascoigne’s treatise provides a case study of how hunting could deconstruct itself and its metaphysical premises.

Amazingly, this deconstruction takes place in a text dedicated to teaching men to become hunters. The animal emerges with such force and power in the course of the hunting manual that it threatens to overthrow the project of the manual itself. The terms man and beast become increasingly equivocal in the text, which challenges not only the ethics of hunting, but also its metaphysical underpinnings.

George Gascoigne wrote The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting as a translation of the French hunting manual by Jacques de Fouilloux, La Venerie. It is in many ways faithful to the original, but it is also in many ways a free translation.22 The author of A Hundredth Sundrie Flowers, Gascoigne was a successful Elizabethan poet. But he had suffered disillusionment, served time in prison, and was perhaps using this translation as a way of resurrecting his writing career. According to the Prourys, at the same time he was working on the translation of this hunting manual, he announced that he was a reformed man, now working in God’s service. He was present at Kenilworth Castle, in 1575, when the queen was hunting.

There is little to prepare one for the shock of some of the passages in Gascoigne’s hunting handbook. He may testify to hunting as a noble sport, and urge its princely delights. But at key moments something quite unexpected takes over. The animals step out of the shadows and threaten the whole social enterprise of the hunt. The climactic moment of the hunt is the kill. After some forty chapters in which Gascoigne explains the care of the hounds and the proper methods of chasing a hart, he brings the reader to the beast at bay. And the beast fights back.

Gascoigne tells the story of the Emperor Basil, who had overcome many enemies in battle and done “many deeds of prowess among men.” Yet as he tried to kill a great hart at bay, he was gored with the horns of a brute beast: yea (that more is) by a fearfull beast, such a one as durst not many days nor hours before have beheld the countenance of the weakest man in his kynge: A Beast that fledde from him, a beast whome he constrained (in his own defence) to do this detestable murder.23

This is the moment when the heroic hunter should display his prowess. Instead, an animal stands to his own defense. Though the hart was previously a coward, fleeing even the weakest man, it seems to step out of its assigned role as the creature known by flight, defeat, and submission. It assumes its own agency in the story. In fact, despite the “detestable murder,” the hart almost takes over the narrative and its significance.

Gascoigne writes that the incident should be a “mirror for al Princes and Potentates.” But it does not show them their reflected glory. It is a mirror for them to see that the hart’s self-defense is a type of all those who suffer “undeserved
injuries" at the hands of the nobility. Hunters should beware lest, "like the worm," downtrodden men will "turne againe when ... trodden on."

The animal image suggests maybe the prey will "turne againe" on the hunters.

Gascoigne seems immediately to recognize that his story is getting away from him. He would not have anyone think the hunt is unlawful, or "that I would speak against the purpose which I have taken in hand." The image of the animal defending itself almost, Gascoigne realizes, undermines his entire project in the book he is writing. He protests that he would not "seeme to argue against God's ordinances, since it seemeth that such bestes have been created to the use of man for his recreation." In moralizing the self-defense of the hart, Gascoigne has almost threatened the hierarchy between humanity and animals on which the hunt and its cultural meanings are predicated. The death of Basil by the hart presents a crack in the anthropocentrism that structures the hunt. Even after acknowledging the allegorical slippage of the hunt, Gascoigne cannot help defend the moralizing he just qualified: "by all Fables some good moralitie may be gathered, so by all Histories and examples."

Gascoigne tries to contain the damage of his rebellious hart, yet he cannot quite close the door he himself has opened. His own moralizing has threatened to subvert not only hunting as a noble enterprise, but the relations between the beast and humanity.

If this were the only occasion of narrative and metaphysical slippage in this hunting book, one could take its implications less seriously. But it is not. There are four more occasions when the animals will be heard, at the end of each of their respective hunts. In the case of the bayed hart, it appears that Gascoigne loses control. But in the case of the four animals to which he gives voice, Gascoigne seems to be fully intentional.

The 1573 version of the La Venerie includes a poem called "Complainaite du Cerf, A Monsieur du Fouilloux par Guillaume Bouchet." Gascoigne translates this poem, and expands it. According to Charles Prouty and Ruth Prouty, he heightens the poem's moral tone. And then he adds three more wholly original poems, spoken by the hare, the fox, and the otter.

Gascoigne moves the hart's poem to the end of his section on the hart. In other words, Gascoigne gives the hart the last word on its own hunt. The poem is called "The wofull words of the Hart to the Hunter." In it, the hart lies at the hunter's feet and speaks as he is about to be killed. The context and theme of this discourse, in a hunting manual, are the death of the animal in the hunt.

The hart asks the hunter, the poet, and the reader, to consider the meaning of the animal's death. The slaughter inflicted on the hunted animals could be appalling, yet the suffering of the animals was rarely remarked. Henry VIII killed 240 deer in one day with bows, and the next day he repeated a similar level of slaughter by having deer dragged down by greyhounds. The same evening Queen Elizabeth shot three or four deer in a paddock at Cowdrey Castle, in 1591, she watched from a turret in the castle as greyhounds dragged down sixteen more bucks. Louis XV hunted two or three days a week. In the course of a fifty-year hunting career, he killed 10,000 deer. Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria hunted daily between 1555 and 1579. His shooting diary records the deaths of 4,783 deer.

If George Gascoigne did indeed watch the queen hunting at Kenilworth Castle in 1575, as seems likely, one wonders what secret thoughts about the fate of the deer he may have been harboring. In the context of his comments on the bayed deer that killed the Emperor Basil, and the deer that speaks at the moment of his death in The Noble Arte, it is easy to think of Gascoigne seeing the killing of the deer—passed over so briefly by Robert Lancham—as a moment of pathos that could not be expressed publicly. Yet he had in all likelihood just finished writing about it.

The poem asks the hunter to confront the ethical questions of the hunt directly: can you delight in pain? Ortega y Gasset calls this "the ethics of death." He argues, "Every good hunter is uneasy in the depths of his conscience when faced with the death he is about to inflict on the enchanting animal." At this moment he is confronted with "the enigma of the animal."

For Ortega y Gasset, such moments are part of the courage of the kill. In The Noble Arte, such moments result in the animal acting up or speaking up. The deer in this poem confronts us with the "enchancing animal."

In Gascoigne's poem, the defeated hart speaks not only to the hunter. He speaks to the poet or author of the manual, who feels it is not enough to hunt alone, but must teach others how to kill deer:

Why art thou not content, (o murdering cruell mind)
Thy selfe alone to hunt me so, which art my foes by kind.
But that thou most instruct, with words in skilfull write,
All other men to hunt me eke: O wicked wilie witte.
Thou here hast let to show, within this busie booke,
A looking Glasse of lessons lewe, wherein all hunts may looke.

The project of the manual—to teach men the proper forms, the proper language, and the proper meaning of the hunt—is turned upon itself. The hart appropriates the book Gascoigne is writing and reinterprets it as a "looking glass of lessons lewe" about the mistreatment of animals.

The hart reminds the hunter and the poet to see the deer not as an emblem or mere prey, but as a magical creature. The dying hart refers directly to the natural history of the hart in the manual itself, in chapter 41. He reminds the hunter and poet of his magical and wondrous features, since wounded deer are said to weep. He reminds the hunter and poet of the medicines the hart provides "that sundry griefes appease." The deer tries to rewrite itself in the imagination of hunter
The poem provides a magical "natural" history of the beast, one that gestures to the value of the hart as an enchanting and magical enigma.

At the end of the poem, the hart curses not merely hunters, but humankind. Gascoigne expands these lines from the original. The deer hopes that humanity will be swept up in war and have to abandon hunting. If any men continue to hunt, the heart wishes upon them the fate of Actaeon:

I crave of God that such a ghost, and such a fearful fear,
May sec Diana nak’d: and she (to venge her scorns),
May soon transforme his harriefull head, into my harmellesse hornes:
Untill his hounds may teare, that heart of his in twayne,
Which thus tormenteth us harmellesse Harts, and puts our hearts in poine."80

The myth of Actaeon—hunter turned to beast—is a familiar humanist trope, used to describe the loss of humanity and the degeneration into the bestial. Here it is a trope for revenge against all the slaughters of deer in the hunt, and all the insensibility of hunters.

From the hint of this poem in the French original, Gascoigne adds additional poems by the hare, the hart, and the fox. Something in this notion of allowing animals their own voices appealed to Gascoigne.

The other beasts also raise the ethics of killing animals for pleasure, and they move to the larger question of the animal. Each of them rewrites the relationship between predator and prey. "The Hare to the Hunter" opens with a direct engagement of the ethical question, and challenges the presupposition of human superiority:

Are minds of men become so voyd of sense,
That they can joye to hurt a harmellesse thing?
A sillie beast, which cannot make defence?
A wretch? a worme that cannot byte, nor sting?
If that be so, I thank my Maker than,
For making me, a Beast, and not a Man."81

The poem ends with the assertion:

So that thou shewst thy vaunte to be but vaine,
That bragst of witte, above all other beasts,
And yet by me, thou neyther gettest gayne
Nor findesth foodde, to serve thy glutemons feasts:
Some sporte perhaps: yet Grevous is the glee
Which ends in Bloud, that lesson learnt me."82

In addition to an emphasis on the pathos of the hunt, the hare suggests that beasts are superior to humans. The idea or meaning of the beast has become complicated.

"The Fox to the Huntsman" pleads his case by raising the question of representation. What if animals were to tell their own story? Yes, he says, Reynard steals chickens to feed his "brats." But then he asks:

Yea soft, but who says thus?
Who did the Lyon paint?
Forsooth a man: but if a Fox
Might tell his tale as quaint,
Then would he say againe,
That men as crafty be,
As ever Reynard was for theft."83

The question of voice and representation is raised again directly by the otter, where the whole question of animal representation is viewed as fundamental to the project of the hunt:

Why stand we beasts abashed, or spare to speake:
Why make wee not a vertue of our needs?
We know by proofoe, in wit we are to weake,
And weaker much, because all Adams seed,
(Which beare away the weight of wit indeed),
Do dayly seek our names for to distame [disdain],
With slanderous blotte, for which we Beasts be slaine."84

The poem challenges the presumptions of "master man."

These poems have not received a great deal of attention. Among those critics who write about them, there is some difference about their interpretation. Matt Carmill calls these poems "strange stuff to find in a handbook for hunters." He thinks, however, that perhaps they should not be taken too seriously. Perhaps they were included because the author and his readers "thought [them] funny." Yet Charles Proulx and Ruth Proulx, specialists in George Gascoigne, note the serious moral tone of these poems, in line with his conservative religious reform. Edward Berry believes that these poems reveal "the social and ideological tensions" in the culture of the hunt during the period.27 I would emphasize that this is a remarkable moment in the history of hunting. The animals themselves are allowed to contest not only their own persecution, but their own representation and the premises of the hunt itself. If only for these moments, they get a refigured role in the hunt as something other than the basis for ritual, sacrifice, or symbol. It is not just that human hunters
A hierarchical view was implicit in hunting and reinforced notions about the hierarchy of humans and other beasts. Yet there were elements in hunting that blurred the assumed boundaries. As antihunting sentiment grew, the terms of the hunt, centered on notions of humankind and the beast, began to lose their firm mooring. This is most noticeable in a work like George Gascoigne’s *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting*, which effectively raises the question of the animal, giving animals agency and voice. The hunt seems to deconstruct itself. By the end of the sixteenth century, the debate is not only about the effect of hunting on hunters, that is, the extent to which they trade their human dignity in the hunt. The ethical issues of killing animals for pleasure are directly joined, and these lead to broad metaphysical questions about the hierarchical assumptions implicit in the hunt. Paradoxically, hunting contributed indirectly to a radical rethinking of the nature of the beast and of its relationship to humanity. This was a blurring of boundaries that hunting itself enacted, enforced, and occasionally violated. Montaigne is the great voice of this view. Yet Gascoigne deserves more credit than he has received, at least for placing hunting rites and what might be called a proto-animal rights in dialogue with each other.

**CONCLUSION**

I have tried to show that, in addition to being a complex culture that encoded powerful political and social messages, the sixteenth-century English hunt was a site for contested discourses about animals, and by implication, humans.