

Conclusion

The Mass Production of Privilege and the Waning of the Hunting Manual

Why, you know an a man have not skill in the hawking and hunting languages now-a-days, I'll give not a rush for him: they are more studied than the Greek or the Latin. He is for no gallant's company without them; and by gadslid I scorn it, I, so I do, to be a consort for every humdrum: hang them, scroyles!

– Ben Jonson, Every Man in his Humour I.i

The golden age of medieval hunting manuals in England and France was brief, lasting only from the middle of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the fifteenth. During that time, three major manuals on the sport were written in French, one in English: Gaston Phébus' Livre de chasse (begun 1387), Gace de la Buigne's Roman des déduits et des oyseaulx (1359-1377), Henri de Ferrières' Les livres du roy Modus et de la royne Ratio (1354-76), and Edward of Norwich's Master of Game (before 1413). A much smaller but still important work was Hardouin de Fontaines-Guérin's verse treatise on stag hunting, Le trésor de vanerie (1394),¹ which was itself modeled on the thirteenth-century poem Chace dou cerf. Within the span of a hundred and fifty years, hunting manuals developed from the crude, cryptically sketched guidelines of William Twici's Art de vénerie into intricate and complex works of imaginative and imagination-stimulating literature.

¹ Hardouin, in honoring his predecessors, speaks of Gaston admiringly:

Mais maistre Jehan de Meun
Ne scéut onc d'estronomie
Tant non, ce croy, la part demie
Com ce bon Conte sceut de chasse

[“But master Jean de Meun never knew half so much about astronomy, I think, as the good count (of Foix, Gaston Phébus) knew about the hunt”] (Le trésor de vénerie, ed. Jérôme Pichon (Paris: Techener, 1855) 30-31.)

Then, for whatever reason – perhaps the declining influence of the nobility and aristocracy, perhaps the decline of the forests themselves – the astounding creativity and energy of cynegetical writers came to an end. There were no major original contributions to the genre after Edward. Later authors relied heavily on the conventions and contents of the medieval manuals, and the works of William Twici, Gaston, and Henri de Ferrières remained the models for imitators and borrowers for at least the next century.² Although the fifteenth century may not have produced any hunters as great as the legendary Gaston Phébus or any manuals as influential as Livre de chasse, it produced something that ultimately proved to be far more important to the history of the hunting manual: the printing press.

The introduction of printing created several new developments in the genre. Private medieval books were luxury items, symbols of sophistication and wealth; printed books, on the other hand, could be had by anyone for relatively cheap prices. This, in turn, meant that medieval manuals, once accessible only to the most elite audiences, were now available to non-aristocratic readers. The works of Gace de la Buigne and Gaston Phébus were each printed three times in the sixteenth century; that of Henri de Ferrières was reprinted six times between 1486 and 1560.³ The publication of the wisdom of the old masters meant that new manuals could be produced by authors who did not need to be either aristocratic or in the direct employ of aristocrats, and who probably did not always have first-hand knowledge of hunting. In the letter to the Earl of Shrewsbury that begins A Short Treatise of Hunting (1591), Thomas Cockaine reminds his patron that he is “a professed Hunter, and not a

² For a brief summary of the development of the French hunting manual over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Armand Strubel and Chantal de Saulnier, La poétique de la chasse au Moyen Âge (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994) 50-54.

³ Les livres du roy Modus et de la royne Ratio, ed. Gunnar Tilander (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1932) lvi-lix.

scholler,”⁴ a statement that confirms what a brief perusal of the genre already suggests: that many of the new hunting treatises *were* being written by “schollers,” or at least hack writers. The influx of relatively cheap and readily available books meant that the once-secret arts of hunting were suddenly public property, and the enormous popularity of printed hunting manuals – a popularity that did not begin to wane until the eighteenth century – suggested that many people were eager to gain this knowledge for themselves.

The medieval manuals sold relatively well once they were in print, but newly penned works tended to sell much better. Guillaume Tardif’s Livre de l’art de faulconnerie et des chiens de chasse (which, despite its misleading title, is a compendium of remedies for the various illnesses and injuries of hawks and dogs) was a phenomenal success, printed twenty-one times between 1492 and 1628, twice in Latin translation. Jacques de Brézé’s verse Le livre de la chasse du grans Sénéchal de Normandie et les Ditz du bon chien Souillard qui fut au Roy Louis de France, XI^e de ce nom quickly followed in 1494, but seems not to have been so popular as its predecessor, as it was only printed once.

The sixteenth century saw a sudden increase in the number of new titles, though most works did little more than hijack old material. Jacques du Fouilloux’s La vénerie et l’adolescence (1561) borrowed heavily from Gaston and was far more of a success than Livre de chasse itself; it was printed nineteen times between 1561 and 1754 and its material was incorporated into a number of other works,⁵ including Galiot du Pré’s Vénerie (1573), which took most of its material from du Fouilloux and some from Gaston. The most popular of all was surely L’Agriculture et Maison rustique of Charles Estienne and Jean Liébault, a compendium of diverse agricultural topics as

⁴ Thomas Cockaine, A Short Treatise of Hunting (London: Oxford UP, 1932).

⁵ Jacques du Fouilloux, La vénerie et l’adolescence, ed. Gunnar Tilander (Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967) 9-11.

well as treatises on hunting (again lifted from du Fouilloux), hawking, and fowling: it was printed over one hundred times between 1564 and 1702, and translated into Italian, German, and English.⁶

Printed hunting manuals were at least as popular in England as they were in France, despite (or because of) the fact that there had never been a strong English tradition of cynegetical writing. Until the arrival of the printing press, England had only produced a few hunting manuals in the native vernacular, all of them ultimately derived from French texts and none of them, except for Edward's Master of Game, comparable with the major Continental works. After printing was imported into England, the quality of the manuals was admittedly not much better, but their quantity increased at an enormous rate. The new technology made hunting manuals easily replicable and widely dispersible – and, it turned out, immensely popular with the new reading public.

The history of the printed manual in England is perhaps exemplified by the history of the Boke of Huntynge, the first printed manual in English and the one that went on to become the most influential. St. Albans Press, one of the first printing houses in England, produced seven books over the course of its short history (1479 to 1486). The first five were standard school or university texts in Latin. Somewhere around 1483, however, the press changed its tactics dramatically, perhaps because, as Rachel Hands suggests, such standard Latin texts were also published by competing foreign presses.⁷ The last two books were both texts in English, designed to appeal to a wider reading audience: the Chronicles of England and the “the bokys of haukyng and huntynge with other plesuris dyuerse as in the boke apperis and also of

⁶ Information on a number of cynegetical manuscripts and publications is found in R. Souhart, Bibliographie des ouvrages sur la chasse (Paris: P. Rouquette, 1886).

⁷ Rachel Hands, “Sir Tristram's ‘Boke of Huntynge’: The Case for the Rawlinson Manuscript,” Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen 210 (1973): 58-74.

cootarmuris,” better known as the Boke of St. Albans (1486). The latter compendium included the Boke of Huntynge, an anonymous early fifteenth-century manual whose material was culled from earlier English works on hunting.⁸ The Boke of St. Albans was clearly designed to feed off of class anxiety: not only did it exclusively treat aristocratic subjects, but it was a relatively “deluxe” book (despite containing some obvious typos), utilizing both red and blue letters and the earliest known example of color-printed woodcuts.⁹ Furthermore, the prologue to the Boke of Huntynge takes pains to emphasize both the exclusivity of the material and the audience reading it:]

Lyke wise as in the booke of hawkyng aforesayd are writyn and noted the termys of plesure belongyng to gentill men havynge delite therin, in thessame maner thys booke folowyng shewith to sych gentill personys the maner of huntynge for all manner of beestys, wether thay be beestys of venery or of chace or rascall, and also it shewith all the termys convenyent as well to the howndys as to the beestys aforsayd. (1-6)¹⁰

This preamble does little to introduce the almost incomprehensible material that follows. What it does manage to do, however, is to flatter its audience and create an aura of exclusivity about itself. From these introductory statements, we can deduce that either the primary intended audience was indeed composed of the gentry, or that the putative primary audience did not really exist and the work was intended for consumption by a more plebeian audience who very much wanted to think of themselves as “gentill personys.” The latter possibility is far more likely, of course:

⁸ There are strong similarities between the Boke of Huntynge and the English translation of William Twiti’s work (The Art of Venery); there are also a few similarities between the Boke of Huntynge and Master of Game, though none of them particularly persuasive. See Rachel Hands, English Hawking and Hunting in the Boke of St. Albans: a facsimile edition of sigs. a2-f8 of the Boke of St. Albans (1486) (London: Oxford UP, 1975) xxxix-xli.

⁹ Rachel Hands postulates that the printer hoped to be able to sell the two “halves” (the first “half” is concerned with hawking and hunting, the second with heraldry) of the Boke of Saint Albans separately, presumably in order to reach an even wider audience. See Rachel Hands, “Juliana Berners and The Boke of St. Albans,” Review of English Studies 18 (1967): 373-386.

¹⁰ All citations from the Boke of Huntynge are taken from Julians Barnes, Boke of Huntynge, ed. Gunnar Tilander (Karlshamn: Johansson, 1964).

those who are truly “gentle” hardly need to be repeatedly reminded of their rank – or, for that matter, to buy cheap printed books. It is only those who aspire upwards or who are still insecure about newly acquired wealth or status who need constant reassurance that they have indeed left the common rabble behind.

Despite its pretensions of grandeur, the Boke of Huntyng is little more than a list of cynegetical terms presented by way of a laborious end-rhyme doggerel that does nothing to either clarify or embellish the material. Whereas Livre de chasse and Master of Game were principally concerned with the narrative of the hunt and only secondarily concerned with cynegetical terminology, the Boke of Huntyng subordinates narrative to the minutiae of the huntsman’s speech and gestures. This tendency is most clearly seen in Chapter 22 (“Of the huntyng of the haare”), which is, in fact the only account of a hunt in the entire manual. Edward counts the hare the noblest of game animals and discourses at length on the finer points of its chase, but the author of the Boke of Huntyng is more interested in instructing his reader in how to appear to be the noblest of hunters:

The first worde to the houndis that the hunt shal owt pit
 Is at the kenell doore when he openys it.
 That all may hym here,
 He shall say “arere,”
 For his howndes wolde cum out to hastely.
 That is the first worde, my sonne, of venery.
 And when he hath couplyd his houndes ychoon
 And is forth with hem to the felde goon
 And when he has off cast his cowples at will,
 Then shall he speke and say his howndes till:
 “Hors de couple! Avaunt, sy, avaunt!” twis so,
 And then “So ho, so ho so ho!” thries and no mo,
 And þen “sa, sa, cy avaunt,” hie and no3t lowe,
 And then “sa, cy, avant, sa, cy, avaunt, so howe.” (237-250)

The text gives no suggestion of what it means to “couple” or “uncouple” the hounds, or precisely when and why one should do such things, or what the commands to the dogs mean, let alone all the other things that the huntsman is presumably supposed to be doing. It is quite likely that these grave omissions are at least partly due to the fact that the author does not know anything about hunting, either. The Boke of Huntynge does a poor job instructing the reader how to hunt but an excellent job teaching him how to sound like a hunter; he is, after all, urged to speak the proper terms “hie and no3t lowe,” not so that he may be understood by his dogs (if indeed he has any) but so “That all may hym here.” The text is, one might say, more concerned with the sound and appearance of knowledge than knowledge itself.

Regardless of its obvious shortcomings, the Boke of Huntynge must have provided precisely the sort of information its readers were searching for, because the Boke of St. Albans proved to be a perennial favorite. Its material was subsequently reprinted twenty-three times under various titles between 1496 and 1614,¹¹ and it was so popular that references to it are found even in “literary” texts.¹² Authors, compilers, and printers added (or, more rarely, subtracted) material as they saw fit; thus the work, which was already a compilation of four different treatises, and which likely originated from several different authors or sets of authors, acquired additional accretions as time went on. For the first reprinting of 1496, Wynkyn de Worde added “a good matere belongynge to horses: wyth other commendable treatyses” to the original material. In 1518, de Worde changed the configuration of topics a second time, replacing the sections on heraldry and coats of arms with one on fishing, to make a new compendium of sports, The boke of hawkyng, and hyntyng, and fysshynge;

¹¹ See Boke of Huntynge, ed. Tilander 5-6.

¹² Passages from the Boke of Huntynge are quoted in the anonymous play The Returne from Pernassus (1606), and it seems possible that Thomas Malory may have known an earlier treatise that was subsequently used by the compiler of the Boke of St. Albans; see Hands, English Hawking and Hunting, pp. xiii, lx.

this triad of subjects was subsequently adopted by most subsequent authors and editors of the material. In 1586, Edward Allde expanded the title to Hawking, hunting, and fishing, with the true measures of blowing. The development of portable, increasingly accurate firearms meant that William Gryndall could stretch the title still further, to Hawking, hunting, fouling, and fishing, with the true measures of blowing (1596). By the end of the sixteenth century, the medieval aristocratic sports only comprised half of the manual, and no one seemed to mind or even to notice.

Within a few years, other authors and publishers jumped on the bandwagon of what was proving to be a very successful business venture indeed. Two sixteenth-century hunting manuals enjoyed a modest amount of success: George Gascoigne's The noble art of venerie or hunting (1575), a translation of Jacques du Fouilloux's La vénerie,¹³ went through two printings; Sir Thomas Cockaine's A short treatise of hunting (1591), which borrowed some material from later versions of the Boke of Huntynge, was printed only once.

The trend in the seventeenth century – perhaps because the market was becoming saturated with single-subject texts – was towards creating compendia that covered as many subjects as possible, even though more subjects did not necessarily lead to higher sales.¹⁴ So authors and compilers combined treatises on hunting and hawking with a veritable grab bag of topics: fowling, fishing, trapping, shooting, agriculture, animal husbandry, silviculture, cockfighting, horse breeding, horse-racing, bowling, tennis, “ringing,” billiards, brewing, and, of all things, making fireworks. Some added abridgments of John Manwood's Lawes of the Forest (1596), or Acts of

¹³ Hands also suggests that Gascoigne also used the Boke of St. Albans to flesh out his translation (English Hawking and Hunting xlii-xliii).

¹⁴ For example, Nicholas Cox's The gentleman's recreation in four parts, which limited itself to hunting, hawking, fowling, and fishing (1674), went through six editions and twelve printings. On the other hand, Richard Blome's The gentlemans recreation in two parts (1686), which purports to include “an encyclopedy of the arts and sciences,” as well as treatises on various sports and games, was only printed once.

Parliament relating to field sports. One of the most comprehensive treatises, and perhaps the most popular of all, was Gervase Markham's Countrey contentments (1615). The full title of the work makes the claim that the book will not only teach the man of the country estate how to spend his leisure hours, but also instruct his wife in how to keep herself profitably busy while he is recreating himself.

Countrey contentments, in two bookes: the first, containing the whole art of riding great horses in very short time, with the breeding, breaking, dyeting and ordring of them, and of running, hunting and ambling horses, with the manner how to vse them in their trauell. Likewise in two newe treatises the arts of hunting, hawking, coursing of grey-hounds with the lawes of the leash, shooting, bowling, tennis, baloone &c. By G.M. The second intituled, The English husvwife: containing the inward and outward vertues which ought to be in a compleate woman: as her phisicke, cookery, banqueting-stuffe, distillation, perfumes, wooll, hemp, flaxe, dairies, brewing, baking, and all other things belonging to an houshold. A worke very profitable and necessary for the generall good of this kingdome.

We might consider Countrey contentments to be a transitional stage in the genre, somewhere in between the medieval manual-as-popular-literature and the modern manual-as-practical-instruction-book. Readers undoubtedly extracted a good deal of pleasant reading out of Markham's treatise, and it is quite likely that they found it more entertaining than instructive. After all, a woman would have learned to brew and bake from her mother, just as a huntsman learned to quest and give chase from his master or tutor, and neither had any real need of a primer on these subjects. But whatever pleasure it furnished must have been relatively tame: descriptions of bowling and wool-carding are less obvious sources of material for pleasant daydreaming than are descriptions of hawking parties and boar hunts.

The medieval authors tended to create imaginary audiences beneath the station of their real intended audiences: Gaston, as we have seen, pretended to write for the

honest and ignorant man who wished to learn how to hunt, and Edward claimed to write for the instruction of the royal huntsmen. The authors of the printed manuals, on the other hand, adopted the pleasing if rather thin fiction that their bourgeois audiences were “noblemen” and “gentlemen.” As early as 1486, the Boke of Huntyng claims that it contains only the most exclusive information for only the best people, “gentill men” and “gentill personys.” As once-restricted information became increasingly available to anyone who could pay for the price of a printed book, and as such books became increasingly commonplace, authors insisted more and more loudly on the exclusivity of their material and the social superiority of their audiences. “T. S.” (Thomas Snodham) reprinted Wynken de Worde’s version of the Boke of St. Albans and called it A iewell for gentrie (1614). Nicholas Cox’s The gentleman’s recreation in four parts (1674) was trumped by Richard Blome’s far more compendious The gentlemans recreation in two parts (1686). In the late Middle Ages, hired tutors had taught aristocratic and noble boys the knightly arts; now, however, a man could pick up a patrician education for a few coins with Gervase Markham’s reprinting of the Boke of St. Albans, titled The gentlemans academie (1595), or Robert Howlett’s The school of recreation, or, The gentlemans tutor (1684). George Gascoigne is particularly eager to underline the aristocratic, exclusive nature of hunting, which is

*a Noble sport,
 To recreate the minds of Men, in good and godly sort.
 A sport for Noble Peeres, a sport for gentle bloods,
 The paine I leaue 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.
 For my part (being one) I must needs say my mind,
 That Hunting was ordainèd first, for Men of Noble kind.
 And vnto them therefore, I recommend the same,
 As exercise that best becomes, their worthy noble name.¹⁵*

¹⁵ George Gascoigne, Proem, The noble art of venerie or hunting (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1611), Early English Books Online, 22 December 2004 <<http://ezproxy.library.cornell.edu:2976/home>>.

Gascoigne's words represent a complete *volte-face* from the medieval point of view. In Livre de chasse, Gaston declares that hunting makes nobility, not vice-versa; nor did the medieval manuals ever think it shameful to tell the story of the hunt from the point of view of beaters and other servants.

However, despite all of these sophisticated titles, the authors sometimes acknowledge, probably unintentionally, that their readers are *not* gentle; or, more accurately, their words suggest that the idea of "gentleness" has changed from that of an inherent condition of the soul (evinced by an unmistakable nobleness of spirit and honed by way of diligent application to the aristocratic sports) to a commodity that could be bought and sold like any other. The prologue to the Boke of Hawkyng (the second part of the Boke of St. Albans) reads, in part, "Therefore thys book fowlowyng in a dew forme shewys veri knowlege of suche plesure to gentill men and personys disposed to se itt."¹⁶ "Persons disposed" to read the book are apparently not quite in the same category as "gentlemen," but there is no question that they have the right to acquire "gentle" knowledge. However, less than a hundred and fifty years later, the subtitle of Thomas Snodham's A iewell for gentrie allows for no distinction between "gentles" and others:

Being an exact dictionary, or true method, to make any man vnderstand all the art, secrets, and worthy knowledges belonging to hawking, hunting, fouling and fishing. Together with all the true measures for winding of the horne. Now newly published, and beautified with all the rarest experiments that are knowne or practised at this day.

Although Snodham takes pains to emphasize the exclusive nature of his information – these are "secrets" of the "rarest" sort – he appears to consider the difference between

¹⁶ Juliana Berners, The Boke of St. Albans (St. Albans, Eng.: St. Albans P, 1486) Early English Books Online, 22 December 2004 <<http://ezproxy.library.cornell.edu:2976/home>>.

“gentry” and “non-gentry” as nothing more than a technicality: the former have read his book, the latter have not yet done so.

Thus, the early modern hunting manual continued to perform the same functions as had its predecessors: it provided material for fantasy and practical instructions for re-creating those fantasies in real life. Yet the fantasy itself had changed dramatically. The models for behavior were no longer the heroes of chivalric literature; now, they were the ordinary gentry. The readers of these manuals cared about money, status, privilege, and the proper appearance of a man who had all of the above, not about increasingly outdated notions of *chevalerie*. Consequently, the printed manuals were nothing but very practical “cheat sheets” that gave the *nouveaux riches* just enough vocabulary and basic knowledge of various sports and activities to look and sound like their social betters, regardless of whether or not they had access to a mews or a hunting preserve. As the memory of the Middle Ages waned, so did the relative importance of hunting, so that, by the seventeenth century, it was apparently considered no more important of a skill for the proper gentleman than was tennis or bowling. It was inevitable that the advent of the printed manuals, with their infinitely replicable fantasies and the thin but attractive veneer of privilege that those fantasies promised to provide, would mark the end of the medieval hunting manual as a genre and hunting as an exclusive sport of the aristocracy.