

**Rural Sports: The Poetry of Fishing,
Fowling, and Hunting, 1650-1800**

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Abstract

“Rural Sports: The Poetry of Fishing, Fowling, and Hunting, 1650-1800” traces the evolution of poetry on the field sports over a 150-year span, with a view toward considering these poems in the first instance as sporting texts. This thesis analyzes sportsmen’s attitudes toward their activities, noting the larger social implications of their sporting performances. The thesis also seeks to classify and understand the poems as distinct literary sub-genres. Current sociological insights into angling and hunting help to illustrate the poems’ resemblances to one another, particularly Hobson Bryan’s concept of “recreational specialization” and Norbert Elias’s concept of “tension equilibrium.”

In providing a systematic survey of the rural sports poetry, this thesis argues that during successive stages of the period, poetry on certain sports came into vogue and then receded from fashion. This followed from historical and political developments but also from literary ones. The poetry on fishing after Izaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler* (1653) maintained a dialogue between pastoral and georgic elements, as the two modes offered scope for the experience of angling. In the eighteenth century, the writers of hunting verse balanced a passion for sport with social and political awareness; hence, they tended to employ the techniques of the prospect view and topographical poetry, intermixing descriptive elements with didactic ones in the georgic mould. As the century progressed, hunting and shooting were either reprovved in an increasing number of sentimental poems representing hunters as uncaring and pitiless toward animals or they were celebrated for their gentlemanly values and virtues in the manner of William Somerville’s influential poem *The Chace* (1735) and George Markland’s *Pteryplegia* (1727).

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Introduction

This dissertation is about fishing and hunting poetry published between 1650 and 1800. I aim to establish generic repertoires for the poetry of the two sports in that period and to contextualize that body of poetry within the literary developments of the era. I also undertake an analysis of the poems with a view toward arriving at a definition of “sport,” a complex term that had many meanings in the period and still does in the present. The idea of “sport” was a rapidly evolving one in the Restoration and eighteenth century, an evolution that raises many social and ideological issues, including who had access to sports and who could perform them.

Most importantly, I will consider the poetry in the first instance as sporting texts. This is not to say that fishing and hunting poems have hitherto been unnoticed critically. However, most literary historians who have considered verse on rural sports have chosen to do so from political, legal, or ecocritical points of view. They have tended to read rural sports as expressive of other interests, rather than attending to how the speakers in the poems, particularly those who were active participants in the sports themselves, conceived of their activity as sport. My project here is to analyze the sportsmen’s attitudes in relation to the larger social implications attached to the performance of their sports. I build on the work of Donna Landry, who historicizes the process by which the countryside was figuratively invented in the hunting and walking literature in the period.¹ I test Eric Rothstein’s observation that there was a profound ambivalence in hunting literature, as the sport’s heroic features co-existed with an emerging sentimental outlook that deplored the killing of

¹ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking, and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

animals.² And I expand upon how Nicholas D. Smith's concept of the "fishing career" (an account of the stages in the evolution of the individual sport fisherman) corresponds with eighteenth-century fishing treatises.³ Many other critical studies have touched upon one or another of the fishing or hunting poems, occasionally providing compelling insights into the subject. But none of the existing critical literature has done what I aim to do here: provide a systematic survey of the fishing and hunting poems from 1650 to 1800, treating them as distinct literary sub-genres. In this introductory chapter, I should like first to provide a historical and theoretical context for the study of sport in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, followed by a consideration of the literary questions, particularly how we might conceive of fishing and hunting poetry as poetic sub-genres with distinctive modal features and thematic concerns.

I. Eighteenth-Century Sport and the Gentleman

It has often been observed that a society's sports and games reflect and refract its ideals, values, and hopes. The cultural impact of sports and the passions they arouse are particularly evident in our times. But the same was also true of earlier historical periods. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, approached athletic games as aspects of cult, as training for warfare, and also as ends in themselves – in short, as activities engaged in for intrinsic as well as extrinsic motives. A keen interest in sport was also evident in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain. In many ways, our modern sporting landscape emerged over the long eighteenth century. Sport historians often view this period as a time of transition

² Eric Rothstein, "Discordia Non Concors: The Motif of Hunting in Eighteenth-Century Verse," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83 (1984): 330-354.

³ Nicholas D. Smith, "Angling Literature 1653-1800: Friendship, Socialization and the 'Fishing Career,'" *Aethlon* 19 (2001): 109-124. All subsequent references to Smith in this introduction are hereafter cited in text.

from what has been labeled “traditional” sport – festive games and activities rooted in local communities and holidays – to “modern” sport, where sporting activities increasingly attracted paying crowds, and thus, in the words of sports historian Dennis Brailsford, “presaged the wholesale development of commercial sport.”⁴ This historical theory of transition argues that the formal codification and national administration of sport are the key developments in the movement from traditional to modern sports. Richard Holt observes that following this formative period, “Violent, disorderly, and disorganized sports gave way to more carefully regulated ones adapted to the constraints of time and space imposed by the industrial city, embodying the Victorian spirit of self-control and energetic competition as well as taking advantage of the development of railways and the mass press.”⁵

While this trend gathered momentum with the Victorians, the regularization of sporting activity extends as far back as the early eighteenth century. J.H. Plumb has drawn attention to the “commercialization” of leisure in the period, as theatre, music, dancing, and sport became cultural pastimes consumed by the prosperous gentry and the newly leisured commercial classes, activities that the increasing availability of cheaper newspapers and books helped to publicize.⁶ Newer sports, such as cricket and boxing, emerged: the first cricket pitches were built in the early eighteenth century and the first boxing hall opened in 1719. The written rules of these two sports were first laid down in the 1740s, establishing their legitimacy within a developing spectator culture.

At the same time, a more traditional sporting culture continued to exist at the local level with the festive culture of parish wakes, civic fairs, and celebrations. The customs

⁴ Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 41.

⁵ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British Nation: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 2-3.

⁶ J.H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England* (Reading, England: U of Reading P, 1973).

governing these events were orally transmitted, and local habits and precedents were the determining factors of play. Robert Malcolmson argues that such traditional recreations, from which modern sport differentiated itself, continued throughout the period:

The fact that society retained its basic agrarian character ensured that the seasonal cycles would continue to shape people's consciousness and, as a result, that those festive intervals which were closely associated with the agricultural calendar – Plough Monday, spring-time celebrations, harvest feasts, autumn fairs – would remain vitally important to most labouring people.⁷

These festivals allowed various kinds of athletic contests and games, including early forms of football. Matthew Concanen's *A Match at Foot-ball: A Poem in Three Cantos* (1720) reveals football's roots as a traditional sport – it represents a football match as the centerpiece of one such gathering.⁸ The festivals also occasionally offered a pretext for unruly behaviour such as gambling on the spectacles of cockfights, and the baiting of bulls, bears, and other animals was widespread at such fairs and celebrations. However, modern industrial society was encroaching on the traditions and games of the small rural communities. Oliver Goldsmith laments in *The Deserted Village* (1770) that the town of Auburn is no longer animated by these lively festival games and celebrations: “Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn.”⁹

⁷ Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973), 14.

⁸ Matthew Concanen, *A Match at Foot-ball: A Poem in Three Cantos* (Dublin: 1720). Early forms of football do not distinguish between the handling we see in rugby union and the hands-free form of association football (soccer). Football in the eighteenth century was rough, unruly, and unorganized. The different forms did not become separated and codified until the mid nineteenth century.

⁹ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village, a Poem* (London: 1770), 8.

While it was not unheard of for social elites to participate in or promote such games, the gentry typically turned to the rural sports of hunting and fishing. Hunting displayed the status and control the nobility and gentry maintained through land ownership, which confirmed their legal right to hunt after the passage of the Game Act of 1671, a law that remained in force until its repeal in 1831. This act stipulated that only landowners with freehold land worth 100 pounds per annum or leasehold land worth 150 pounds per annum were allowed to shoot game. Such a privilege bestowed many advantages on those who were qualified: the game laws underscored the value of land-ownership, as opposed to other kinds of wealth, for the property qualification technically excluded all others from participation in the hunting of game and even from ownership of weapons used for that purpose. Predictably reflecting this division in the sporting activities of different social classes, poets and painters focused almost exclusively on the sports engaged in by the gentry. In terms of their literary treatment in the eighteenth century, the more “genteel” sports formed a subject for pastoral or georgic modes of treatment, while the more popular sports that emerged after 1740 were typically considered in a burlesque or mock-heroic manner.

Thus, in the period prior to 1740, before spectator sports really took hold in the national consciousness, hunting and fishing stood almost alone in literary representations of sport, apart from such occasional exceptions as Concanen’s football poem, a poem that itself focuses on village and rural life. In examining these fishing and hunting texts, as well as later literary treatments, we can see that distinctions of class, gender, and politics influence heavily the representations of sport. Indeed, what it meant to be British was partly at stake, for the growth of a national consciousness was often expressed in sports writing. Sport has always constituted an emblem of certain kinds of social and moral values, be they courage, combativeness, fairness, or any number of morally admirable human qualities claimed by

various sectors of society. Thus, sport becomes involved with the representation of “virtue” and civic identity. The term “sportsmanship” has its roots in these attitudes, and definitions of masculinity and “the gentleman” are closely tied to them.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the gentleman, according to John Barrell’s definition, was a man who was deemed to be qualified for positions of political and intellectual leadership because he could “claim the public virtue of disinterestedness.”¹⁰ The gentleman had no involvement in a specific profession or trade because it was thought this partiality would limit his comprehensive view of the whole of society or incline him to see things from an interested perspective. The landowner, because he was in possession of “permanent,” heritable property was assumed to have a concern for the permanence of the polity; hence, he was given the right to vote by the English constitution. Barrell clarifies this rationale: “In theory, if not in practice, the property qualification was pitched high enough to ensure that the owner of property in land who was also enfranchised, would not need to cultivate his lands himself, but would have the leisure to devote himself to a consideration and comprehension of the public’s interest as well as his own” (33). Leisure thus had a vital role in determining what entailed gentlemanly behaviour. It is on this point that Edmund Burke criticizes the French in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, because they have allowed men of “professional and faculty habits” to control the National Assembly. To make his point he cites Ecclesiastes 38: “The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure; and he that hath little business shall become wise.... How can he get wisdom that

¹⁰ John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 22. Hereafter cited in text.

holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad; that driveth oxen; and is occupied in their labours; and whose talk is of bullocks.”¹¹

It is no coincidence for this study on sport that Alexander Pope and his interlocutor Lord Bolingbroke in *An Essay on Man* “leave all meaner things,” taking up a position of leisure in order to “expatiate free o’er all this scene of Man.”¹² This preamble to Pope’s philosophy on the great chain of being and man’s place in the cosmos and in human society takes the form of an extended hunting metaphor:

Together let us beat this ample field,
 Try what the open, what the covert yield;
 The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore
 Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;
 Eye Nature’s walks, shoot Folly as it flies,
 And catch the Manners living as they rise;
 Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;
 But vindicate the ways of God to Man. (ll. 9-16)

The two men “beat” the field, “shoot” down folly, and “catch” social manners as sportsmen, as men who have occasion to perform this undertaking. This conception of the gentleman as a leisured individual is constantly on display in the poetry on sport. Poets explored sport’s relation to leisure and how the performance of a sport constituted a search for the good life that extended to their other duties in society. Over the eighteenth century, “the gentleman” came to be conceived as a broader social category that increasingly took in more than just

¹¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1987), 138. First published 1790.

¹² Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man,” in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed., Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 120-157, ll. 1, 5.

titled men, and this is reflected in the poetry under examination here. Pope's own gentleman at the end of the poem is a "happy man," characterized by his virtues rather than his status. The figure of the sporting gentleman was thought to embody in his sporting attitudes and behaviours the ideals on which English society was built. At times, this notion was contested, but in this study he is the central figure through whom we see how sport was a part of a larger social dynamic.

II. Defining Sport

In his dictionary of 1755, Samuel Johnson defined sport as "Play; diversion; game; frolick and tumultuous merriment."¹³ Historian of Greek and Roman sport Harold A. Harris echoes this definition: "By derivation, the word 'sport' covers every diversion by which a man disports or amuses himself in his leisure time; it is essentially the antithesis of work."¹⁴ These formulations define the term very broadly but do not encapsulate all the nuances and subtleties of how we conceive of our leisure activities, our play, our games, our physical education, our athletics, and our professional competitions. Clearly, there are multiple gradations among the activities, more categories than Johnson or Harris suggest in their definitions. The game of chess, for example, fits both men's descriptions of a sport, but most of us would not intuitively classify it as one, even at the most competitive level. In practice, defining sport has been an ongoing problem. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* lists over twenty definitions of the word "sport."¹⁵ And seemingly every writer on the history or philosophy of sport runs into linguistic and conceptual difficulties in attempting to define the

¹³ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Arno Press, 1979). Reprint of the 1755 edition printed by W. Strahan, London.

¹⁴ Harold A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 13.

¹⁵ "sport, n." *OED Online*.

term. We talk about playing cricket or football, but we do not talk about playing boxing or hunting. Is this a linguistic anomaly, or should some sports be considered “play” and others a different kind of pursuit? This problem is compounded if we consider other factors, such as differences in historical period and social class.

If we look at the term historically during the late-seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the term “sport” in Britain came to refer commonly to the field sports, which simply means the traditional rural blood sports of hunting, shooting, and fishing. By comparison, the list of sports covered in the seventeenth-century *Book of Sports* is far more extensive. This declaration, first issued nationally by James I in 1618 and reissued by Charles I in 1633, lists activities not permitted on Sundays and other holy days.¹⁶ Archery, dancing, leaping, and vaulting were allowed, for example, but animal baiting and bowling were not. After the Civil War period, however, these activities came to be defined as games, whereas the classically sanctioned pursuits of creatures of the air, water, and field (encompassing three of the four elements) were classified as sports. This had become a firm division by the time William Somerville wrote his *Hobbinol, or the Rural Games* (1740) and *Field Sports* (1742).¹⁷ We see in the titles of these poems that “games” and “sports” were understood as separate categories. *Hobbinol* is a burlesque poem in three cantos depicting the dancing, piping, and fiddling of the May Games, featuring such activities as cudgel-playing and smock races. *Field Sports* describes many different hunting and fowling pursuits. This is a useful limiting means to delineate my thesis: in this study I will be looking at the field sports, leaving aside the rural games of the countryside.

¹⁶ *The King's Majesty's Declaration to his Subjects, Concerning the Lawfull Sports to be Used* (London: 1618); Charles I's reissue: *The King's Majesty's Declaration to his Subjects, Concerning the Lawfull Sports to be Used* (London: 1633).

¹⁷ William Somerville, *Hobbinol, or the rural games. A burlesque poem in blank verse* (London: 1740); William Somerville, *Field-sports. A poem* (Dublin: 1742).

But this remains a very superficial definition of “sport.” Thus, I propose to explore some of the ways we might conceive of sport in the Restoration and eighteenth century, beginning with current-day theoretical discussion that can enrich our view of what the activities entailed then. One theorist who has been an important catalyst for the study of sport history is the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga. Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* details the conditions of “play” and how it pervades social and cultural expression, ranging from art and language, to law and philosophy (to name some of his categories).¹⁸ Huizinga’s articulation of four conditions that constitute play provides a useful basic framework from which we can build an understanding of play as an essential constituent of sport. First, play is voluntary: it is an activity we choose to engage in or not. Next, play is “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly” (32). Put simply, it is set apart from all the essential activities we must perform in our daily lives to survive, particularly work. Huizinga’s third condition is that play has limits of time and place. Play begins at a certain time and then it ends; play takes place in “play-grounds” – we can play in fields, in arenas, on card tables, on the stage, and even in our minds (play takes place quite literally in a “world apart”). Huizinga’s final condition is that within such spaces, rules of play are followed: “All play has its rules. They determine what ‘holds’ in the temporary world circumscribed by play” (30). In this setting, the player who breaks the rules or, even more crucially, ignores them is viewed with sharp antagonism within the sphere of play.

These four conditions are a good starting point, as we would all acknowledge that sport starts as play, and each of the poets I look at engages on some level with the status of

¹⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Temple Smith, 1979). Hereafter cited in text. References are to page numbers of this edition.

their activities as play. We can even think of literature as play, as opposed to literature as work, in the period; indeed, the authors of sporting literature in my study tend to be gentlemen – amateurs rather than professionals – with some obvious exceptions that I will treat in due course. But Huizinga’s conditions still leave much unanswered in defining sport, as play in its rudimentary form can take shape simply as daydreaming or child’s play. These hardly constitute “sport” in the sense we have come to understand it, nor do they serve to address adequately what is going on in the body of poetry I analyze here. There is a necessary structural component to the play of sport, a level of intention and organization that elevates it above pure play. Hence, Bernard Suits has formulated what he argues is the essential constituent of game-play: “the selection of inefficient means,” or, to put it more simply, a deliberate setting of unnecessary obstacles.¹⁹ In football (soccer), for example, it might be more efficient to pick the ball up and carry it into the goal. But the sport’s essential limiting obstacle is that the use of hands within the field of play is prohibited. It sets the foundation upon which the rules, strategies, and even the experiences of the game are built. Each type of game, from the most basic to the most complex, necessarily has such limiting means.

The conception of game-play allows us to understand how participants engage in their activities, from the most recreational of participants to the most competitive of athletes. To do this, John Byl has built on Huizinga’s and Suits’s definitions to classify the terms commonly used to denote the competitive levels exhibited in our activities. He argues for the following categories:

Playful game = A greater commitment to play than to successfully

¹⁹ Bernard Suits, “What is a Game,” in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, eds. Ellen W. Gerber and William J. Morgan (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1979), 11.

overcoming the unnecessary obstacles.

Sport = A roughly balanced commitment to play and to successfully overcoming unnecessary obstacles.

Athletics = A greater commitment to successfully overcoming unnecessary obstacles than to play.²⁰

Byl's criteria to determine whether an activity is a playful game, a sport, or athletics, depend foremost on the participants' attitude. As an example, a game of football can be engaged in as a playful game, where the participants kick the ball around and perform the skills of the activity, without really following the rules or caring whether the ball goes in the net, and without keeping score. It can also be pursued as a sport, where the score is kept and the rules closely adhered to, but the spirit of the game is such that it is equally important that all participants are having fun. Finally it can be performed as athletics, where the outcome is the most important part of the game, and all the participants are striving to win. The participants' outlook on the activity thus determines how the sport is played and how it becomes the focus of the social interaction of which it is a part. There are different configurations of ideologies, attitudes, institutions, and relations in evidence at each level, and so in looking at the level at which people engage in their activities, we can learn about assumptions they hold about their lives, their status, and their involvement. In the works I analyze in the study that follows, I will be looking to determine the level at which the writer or participant is engaging in his or her rural sport.

²⁰ John Byl, "Coming to Terms with Play, Game, Sport, and Athletics," in *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. Paul Heintzman, Glen A. Van Andel and Thomas L. Visker (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1994), 157. I have reproduced this from Byl's schematic model for active play or games.

III. A Sociological Model for Understanding Fishing and Hunting

There are elements of rural sports that are as characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as they are of today, notably the pleasure derived from hunting and fishing and the competitive drive exhibited by their participants. Likewise, many technical principles have withstood the passage of time, as well as the recreational commitment sportsmen have tended to make to their sport as they become seasoned practitioners. One critic has made progress in pursuing this connection. Employing sociological work on the sport of fishing, Nicholas D. Smith argues that the principle of the “fishing career” is comprehensively illustrated in seventeenth and eighteenth-century fishing treatises. In these, we can see a correspondence between how angling is conceived of today and how it was represented in the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, Smith’s purpose for using sociological theory is very similar to my own in this study, to “plot the early trajectory of the sport’s development, providing a novel insight into angling’s complex social and cultural history” (109). I depart from Smith, however, in the subject matter of my investigation. Rather than looking at eighteenth-century prose angling treatises to understand the sociology of the sport during that time, I look instead at the verse poetry that makes angling or hunting its subject matter. The literary means used by the authors of poetry as opposed to treatises are quite different, though I note that many of my conclusions on the representation of the sports dovetail with those of Smith. But my focus remains with the poems themselves, and these poetic concerns frame my discussion of the sporting material and provide their own points of interest.

The sociologist whose conceptual model illuminates the values of modern-day anglers most usefully is Hobson Bryan. His research entailed interviews with recreational trout fishermen in and around Yellowstone National Park in the mid-1970s, as well as

observation of and participation in their activities. In his analysis of this research, Bryan formulated a conceptual framework in which we can place a recreational fisherman according to a broad range of sporting behaviours, preferences, and orientations. He later applied his findings to other sports, including hunting, to which I will return at the beginning of Part 2 of this dissertation. Bryan's framework is developed around the concept of "recreational specialization," which is conceived of as a "continuum of behavior from the general to the particular."²¹ Based on anglers' levels of participation, the techniques they use, and the settings they enjoy best, he argues that we can create a "fishermen typology" that categorizes anglers into four groups on a specialization continuum from general to particular:

1. Occasional Fishermen – those who fish infrequently because they are new to the activity and have not established it as a regular part of their leisure, or because it simply has not become a major interest.
2. Generalists – fishermen who have established the sport as a regular leisure activity and use a variety of techniques.
3. Technique Specialists – anglers who specialize in a particular method, largely to the exclusion of other techniques.
4. Technique-Setting Specialists – highly committed anglers who specialize in method and have distinct preferences for specific water types on which to practice the activity. (178)

The typical transformational process that a fisherman undergoes over the course of his sporting experiences is one of gradually increased specialization through the types listed.

Bryan's conclusions show fishermen moving through successive stages of what he terms the

²¹ Hobson Bryan, "Leisure Value Systems and Recreational Specialization: The Case of Trout Fishermen," *Journal of Leisure Studies* 9 (1977): 175. Hereafter cited in text.

“fishing career”: “Socialization into the sport is cumulative – in other words, fishermen typically start with simple, easily maximized chances of a catch, then move to more involved and demanding methods the longer they engage with the sport” (182). The fishing career fits conceptually with a sporting taxonomy supplied by John R. Kelly, who observes that some recreational activities can be conceived of as a lifelong process of leisure socialization. Thus, in certain sports – typically the outdoor or “conquest sports,” including hunting – we can employ a “developmental approach to leisure careers” in which participants acquire skills and relationships within the sport over the course of their lifelong engagement with it.²² Sportsmen conceive of their activities differently depending on their stage of acculturation to their sport. Each stage carries different assumptions and behaviours.

In proposing to compare the present with those earlier time periods, our making use of a conceptual framework superimposed on an earlier historical reality might lead to charges of reductionism or anachronism. Smith answers this concern by noting that the sporting elements of the activity remain much the same: “the sport of angling is the product of a civilized society that has its roots in a culture of leisure ... that stretches back in England at least to the fifteenth century.”²³ In short, insofar as our modern understanding of the sport emerges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (or even earlier), we can apply modern theoretical models to angling in the period. Though much has changed since Izaak Walton’s time, I would argue that *The Complete Angler* more or less heralded this change to a modern understanding of the sport. The mid-seventeenth century is the period when angling became truly codified as a sport in England. This occurred largely through the numerous fishing texts

²² John R. Kelly, “Socialization Towards Leisure: A Developmental Approach,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 6 (1974): 185.

²³ Nicholas D. Smith, “Angling Literature 1653-1800: Friendship, Socialization and the ‘Fishing Career,’” *Aethlon* 19 (2001): 115.

produced at the time, as those who engaged in the activity established a set of values and procedures that continue to be operative today, albeit influenced by technological innovation and performed in different locations. For example, Charles Cotton's description of fly fishing in his continuation of *The Compleat Angler* of 1676 still resembles current techniques of fly-casting, even though our present-day techniques have evolved technologically with the use of heavy dressed silk lines invented two centuries after Cotton cast (and wrote) his lines.

Moreover, in those descriptions and representations of the sport we can see values and ideals that bear a striking resemblance to the fishing of today. Fishing writer Arnold Gingrich endorses Cotton's instruction for its continued applicability: "Except for the length of rod imposed by his lack of a reel, everything he says about trout fishing is as validly applicable today as it was three centuries ago."²⁴ I would not wish to deny that, in very broad ways, conceptions of leisure and recreation have changed over the centuries, as reasons for retirement to the country in the middle of the seventeenth century are markedly different from the attractions of the countryside in an urbanized, industrial society. But my focus here is foremost on how the sport was practiced and valued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and to that end, many of its similarities to current leisure attitudes and applications are a useful entry point for my discussion. Recognizing these broad similarities will enable us to see important political and social particularities and differences between then and now all the more clearly.

An apt illustration of eighteenth-century conceptions of how a fisherman matures over time is Herman Boaz's popular 1789 song *The Angler's Progress*, a popular reflection

²⁴ Arnold Gingrich, *The Fishing in Print: A Guided Tour Through Five Centuries of Angling Literature* (New York: Winchester Press, 1974), 49.

of fishing ideals.²⁵ In a song of six stanzas, we see the speaker's progression through Bryan's four fishing typologies above. At the first stage, "When I was a mere *School-boy*," the speaker uses the rudimentary equipment of "An osier Rod, some Thread for Line, a crooked Pin for Hook." He is not discriminating as to where he fishes – "I *angled* in every little brook" – an outlook that corresponds exactly to the general attitudes displayed by Bryan's "Occasional Fisherman," who tends to be new to the sport and is primarily interested in catching any kind of fish, using any tackle at his disposal, and venturing into any body of water available.

The second stage corresponds to an increase in seriousness. His equipment has now been purchased – "I bought some farthing hooks, and eke a Horse-hair line; / A Hazel Rod, with Whalebone Top" – and, much like Bryan's "Generalist," he uses a variety of methods, as he angles "with a float; And where [he] could not fish from Shore, [he] angled from a Boat." Moreover, he fishes for different species using different lures: "*Bream, Chub, Barbel*, next I sought, their various Hunts I try'd / With scowr'd *Worms, Greaves, Cheese, and Paste*, and various Baits beside." He also begins to display a competitive spirit, vying "my Play-mates to outshine." The speaker's evolution and socialization as an angler proceeds further with his purchase of even better equipment and his growing awareness of his pre-eminence among fellow anglers:

With Hooks of *Kirkby-bent*, well-chose, and Gut that's round and fine,
 So by Gradations thus I rose to fish with running Line:
 A Multiplying Winch I bought, wherewith my Skill to try,
 And so expert myself I thought, few with me now could vie.

²⁵ Herman Boaz, *The Angler's Progress* (London: 1789).

With the next stage, the speaker has become Bryan's "Technique Specialist," as he has chosen a particular method to the exclusion of others: "My Mind on *Trolling*, now intent, with live and dead *Snap-hook*; / I seldom to the Rivers went, but *Pike* or *Jack* I took." The final stage reflects the speaker's graduation into the class of "Technique-Setting Specialist," as he has become a highly committed angler. He now fishes for the most-respected and prestigious species, trout, greyling, and salmon, and he allocates much of his leisure time to their pursuit. In addition, he illustrates Bryan's contention that "increased specialization implies a shift from fish consumption to preservation and emphasis on the activity's nature and setting" (Bryan 174). We see this in the song's final stanza, which makes a plea for conservation:

So now to close this charming scene, which none but Sportsmen feel,
Be sure you keep the *Golden Mean*, nor arm your Hearts with Steel:
The Fish with Moderation take, and to the FAIR BE KIND;
And ne'er with them your promise break, but Virtue keep in Mind.

By this point in the speaker's fishing career, he is an expert, he has determined his personal angling codes, and he contributes to the maintenance and health of the sport, in which he has an increased personal stake. Thus, we see at the end of the song an eighteenth-century version of conservation and stewardship, one that is remarkable for its gendered stance – the fish are labeled "the FAIR." The duty of the fisherman is a form of gallantry: men protecting their families in a paternalistic fashion.

By the eighteenth century, the sport of angling had established a highly-structured value system. The sportsman's personal angling codes reflect much about his attitudes toward the sport and all experiences associated with it. Indeed, there is a discernable class hierarchy on display through the progressive phases. Typically, those who advance furthest

in their fishing careers are those who have the means to make leisure and recreation a significant part of their lives. In my investigation of fishing poetry, my objective is to determine from the literature itself, and also authorial biography (where available), the degree of specialization the writer brings to the activity, ranging from the Occasional Fisherman to the Technique-Setting Specialist. Such knowledge of the poet's orientation to and behavior in the sport is in turn reflected in the literary modal values brought to his writing. Whether the poet infuses his work principally with pastoral sentiment or georgic functionality reveals a great deal about the meaning and significance he attaches to the activity of angling. A simple pastoral delight is reflective often of a fisherman whose principal focus is simply an enjoyment of the scene. A more georgic orientation is usually associated with the specialist instructor. In fact, the two mindsets are vital to the sporting experience of angling: the experience of pure pleasure versus the work and skill of arriving at that state of pleasure. Thus, there is room for both modes – pastoral and georgic – in the piscatory verse tradition that followed Walton, a dynamic I explore more fully in the fishing chapters that follow. The significant reorientation of piscatory writing undertaken by Walton is one tied unequivocally to sport: moving the domain of the fisherman from the worker at sea to the man of leisure playing in England's rivers. The consequence of this move was that the piscatory mode of pastoral, which had been the vehicle to describe sea fishing following Italian Renaissance poet Jacopo Sannazaro's *Eclogae Piscatoriae* (1526), began to be conflated with the sport's rudimentary processes of learning a body of specific skills for the specific demands of the activity. Here writers began to turn to the georgic mode.

IV. Genre

Those who play or watch a sport have expectations about its rules of play, its displays of excellence, and even its aesthetic qualities. The success of a sporting experience is a function of the degree to which such expectations are titillated, played with, and met. What are sports if not shared types of meanings, of arbitrarily agreed upon standards and expectations? They are sets of conventions, and readers of sports literature enter into the field of play with them at the ready. In trying to interpret them, we must therefore come to some proper understanding of how they are being played, what these expectations and conventions are. Genre criticism explores interesting parallels to these elements of sporting activity. In criticism that makes genre the primary means by which it analyzes texts, it is assumed that the reader's awareness of a genre and its features shapes his or her understanding of a text. As Northrop Frye observes, "The purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them."²⁶

As Frye notes, there is a much more complicated relationship among texts than a simple classificatory one in which they are grouped together based on shared features. Following the work of Russian Formalist Yuri Tynianov, David Duff argues that "across time, genres 'evolve' through alterations in the distribution of forces within them."²⁷ This results in an ongoing process in which texts are constantly interacting with each other:

²⁶ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 247-248.

²⁷ David Duff, "Maximal Tensions and Minimal Conditions: Tynianov as Genre Theorist," *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 554. Hereafter cited in text.

Dominant elements lose their potency, and minor features acquire new strength and structural significance. This constant shifting of the balance of power within each genre is mirrored in the relations *between* genres: genres compete with one another, vying for positions of dominance within an ever-changing hierarchy of genres, and transforming, absorbing, or displacing one another in the process. (554)

We must therefore look at processes that occur historically in order to conceive of a genre. Ralph Cohen describes the relation thus: “A genre does not exist independently; it arises to compete or to contrast with other genres . . . so that its aims and purposes at a particular time are defined by its interrelation with and differentiation from others.”²⁸ The relation between pastoral and georgic, for example, is a prominent feature in the literature on fishing in the period I examine. The historical process by which the georgic mode became dominant in the eighteenth century has been more fully developed in Anthony Low’s *The Georgic Revolution*.²⁹ And the argument among eighteenth-century writers and critics over the function of pastoral has been well documented. But the way in which the georgic and pastoral modes submit to historical development in the context of sporting poetry is its own story. To tell it, we need to look at the texts both synchronically and diachronically in order to fully conceptualize and articulate how they are operating as literary works. That is, we need to look at how the poems relate to each other at a given point in time and also address how they are a part of historical change.

To begin, we can look to Alastair Fowler’s categories of generic theory to form a framework for the primary texts I will be examining. Fowler argues with Frye that genres are

²⁸ Ralph Cohen, “History and Genre,” *New Literary History* 17 (1986): 207.

²⁹ Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).

not mere descriptive tags but types that are fundamental in both creating and understanding literature. He posits that genres are “in a continual state of transmutation. It is by their modification, primarily, that individual works convey literary meaning.”³⁰ Fowler is vitally aware of the historical nature of generic change, but he is most useful in providing a vocabulary with which we can examine the specific works based on their synchronic interrelations with one another. The way to do this is by establishing a “generic repertoire,” to use Fowler’s term, for each grouping of texts to be examined – for each sport, in this instance. Fowler defines the repertoire as “the whole range of potential points of resemblance that a genre may exhibit. Although the process whereby we identify genre is a hermeneutic, retrospective analysis can arrive at many characteristic features. Every genre has a unique repertoire, from which its representatives select characteristics” (55). It is important to note that these distinguishing features can be either structural or thematic.

Based on the make-up of texts’ repertoires, Fowler subdivides the term “genre” into three main categories. The first is designated “kind,” which, in simple terms, constitutes the most common genres such as epic, tragedy, and the novel; they are usually identified by their external structure. The second category is “mode.” Modes are the transformations of kinds in which generic features that were originally primary determinants of texts of one “kind” become secondary or “modal” determinants of those of another. Modes are usually referred to in their adjectival form, though not always. Any kind of work may be extended as a mode. Thus, to use the term “pastoral” as a noun is to refer to its kind, and to use it as an adjective is to address its mode. For the most part, this thesis will be examining the latter, as generic

³⁰ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1982), 24. Hereafter cited in text.

transformation in the poetry of sport during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries played with modal features.

This type of generic play brings us to Fowler's third category, which he designates "sub-genre." A sub-genre is comprised of the various subcategories of kinds. The division of kinds into sub-genres often goes by subject matter or motifs. It is here especially that we can place sports poetry critically within the literary generic framework, as the subject matter of sport – and in particular the various sports that make up the period's sporting activities – comprises the kinds of works under investigation: the sports sub-genre, or more specifically the angling sub-genre or the hunting sub-genre, or even the more specific types of those activities. In attaching modal features to the sub-genres, we can see literary trends at play, as a work engages with the generic components of other works in its sub-genre.

I should add that there is a classical tradition of hunting and fishing texts, most of which would have been readily available in recent editions to seventeenth and eighteenth century readers. These classical texts on the field sports were influenced by Virgil's *Georgics* and themselves fall into the following subcategories: cynegetic (hunting with dogs), ixeutic (fowling), and halieutic (fishing), though occasionally the term "cynegetic" includes the other two. The list of classical authors who mention sports is extensive.³¹ I will here review only the classical writers who specifically wrote cynegetics, ixeutics, or halieutics.

Xenophon wrote the first cynegetic work in 391 B.C., and he focused principally on procedures for hare hunting and the maintenance of hounds. He also lists the benefits to be derived from hunting, namely discipline achieved through hard work and training for

³¹ For a complete list see A.J. Butler, *Sport in Classic Times* (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, 1975), xi.

warfare. In A.D. 8, Grattius wrote his *Cynegetica*, of which 541 hexameter lines are still extant. His focus is primarily on breeds of dogs. He names sixteen breeds and describes their traits, a significant increase from the mere two breeds of which Xenophon was aware. Arrian's *Cynegeticon*, written c. A.D. 130, was conceived as a supplement to Xenophon, accounting for the advances in breeding as well the greater awareness of hunting styles across Europe. He more overtly understood the sporting value of the chase. In describing his preferred type of hare to pursue, he outlines his expectations for a chase: "true huntsmen do not take out their hounds to catch the creature, but for a trial of speed and a race, and they are satisfied if the hare manages to find something that will rescue her."³² If the hare has offered a good contest, Arrian admits he sometimes calls off the hounds out of admiration for the adversary: this is evidence of his sporting inclination.

The next classical author, Oppian, is unique for the purpose of our study here. He wrote both a *Cynegetica* and a *Haliutica* between 212 and 218 A.D. His *Cynegetica* adds further to the number of hound breeds, though most of the text borrows from his predecessors' instructions, suggesting Oppian had not personally experienced the hunting he describes. His *Haliutica* might disappoint the sportsman looking for instruction, as fishing in classical times meant primarily sea fishing for subsistence purposes. Oppian's catalogue of marine life is astounding. However, he privileges hunting over fishing as a sport: "Pleasure more than sweat attends the hunt," he explains, as opposed to the experience of fishermen, whose "labours are uncertain, and unstable as a dream is the hope that flatters their hearts."³³ And finally Nemesianus also wrote both a *Haliutica* and a *Cynegetica* c. 283 A.D., though

³² Arrian, "On hunting," in *Xenophon and Arrian: On Hunting*, ed. A.A. Phillips and M.M. Willcock (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 109.

³³ Oppian, "Haliutica, or Fishing," in *Oppian, Colluthus, Thyphiodorus*, trans. A.W. Mair (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1928), 203.

unfortunately only 325 hexameter lines of the latter remain. The surviving section describes horseback riding, suggesting his hunt took place on horseback with nets in the pursuit of hares, as well as larger game.

These classical texts created a tradition of hunting and fishing poems to draw upon. They share many of the instructional features in Virgil's *Georgics*. Apart from Xenophon, who wrote before Virgil, the writers were likely heavily influenced by Virgil, even though Virgil only briefly mentions field sports in his *Georgics*:

And do not underrate the care of dogs:
 Brisk Spartan pups and keen Molossian hounds,
 Feed both on fattening whey. With them on guard
 No need to fear thieves in the stalls at night,
 Or wolves' attacks, or stealing up behind you
 Iberian bandits. Often too with hounds
 You'll chase the shy wild asses, course the hare,
 Or hunt the doe with hounds. Often you'll drive
 Wild boars ejected from their forest wallows
 By a baying pack, or over mountain heights
 Force a huge stag with clamour into the nets.³⁴

This passing mention of hunting in the *Georgics* did not inspire any direct imitation in eighteenth-century poets, apart from a recognition that Virgil endorses such activity as worthy of consideration alongside the practical aspects of agriculture in a poem celebrating rural life. Unlike pastoral poems, which celebrate leisure, georgic poems are about people

³⁴ Virgil, *The Eclogues and The Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 102 (Book III, 404-413).

involved in labour, and they are usually in some measure “how-to” poems. In the eighteenth century, a number of poets wrote georgics describing utilitarian agricultural arts such as sheep-herding or cider production. Such works undertake in part to expound a branch of knowledge or art, and the field sports tend to fall into this category. More than any other poetic genre, georgic poetry formed the basis for the sporting poetry I will be examining here.

V. Outline

This dissertation is divided into two parts: the first on fishing and the second on hunting, which also includes a chapter on shooting (fowling). The chapters within the two parts survey the poems chronologically. I argue that the poetic treatment of sport during the Restoration and eighteenth century can be divided into two distinct stages, the first dominated by angling poems, followed by a transition early in the eighteenth century to hunting and shooting poems. I link these trends to historical and cultural developments in the practice of sport and society at large at the time. In making such connections, I note that there were substantial divergences among the styles and modes of writing on each sport. These differences can be explained partly by the literary styles that prevailed at the time of writing. Because the sport of hunting was denied to the great majority of the population as a result of the Game Laws, in the last half of the seventeenth century the sport of fishing filled the vacuum, as it were, particularly for those who resided in the city and visited the country to pursue their sporting pleasures. If we add to this development the influence of Izaak Walton’s tremendously popular *Compleat Angler*, we can begin to account for the upsurge in fishing literature during the Restoration period. We can detect this trend particularly in the final decade of the seventeenth century, when three major fishing texts were published:

Simon Ford's *Piscatio* in 1692 (which was translated many times in subsequent years), followed by J.S.'s *The Innocent Epicure* in 1697, and John Whitney's *The Genteel Recreation* in 1700. All these poetic treatments of fishing operate similarly to *The Compleat Angler* in interspersing georgic instruction with pastoral play. By contrast, I have found only a few minor and fragmented treatments of hunting in the first thirty years after the Game Act was first passed.

In the hunting section, I argue that the reason for the scarcity of poetic treatments of that sport in the second half of the seventeenth century was the traditional association of hunting with royalty in a time when the institution of the crown was hotly contested. A seminal text in this connection is John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1655). In that poem, the representation of the royal stag hunt reverses traditional tropes in what can be read as a shocking allegory of the trial and execution of the king during the Civil War. The effect of the poem on the tradition of hunting poetry was that for the next half-century almost no one wrote poems on hunting, turning instead to fishing. It was not until the early eighteenth century with Alexander Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713) and John Gay's *Rural Sports* (1713; 1720) that hunting was again represented poetically as part of a celebration of English nationhood. Following those poems, there was a substantial increase in the number of hunting poems in the decades that followed. This rising number coincides with changes in attitude toward the types of hunt undertaken by the squirearchy of the period. In particular, the popularity of stag and hare hunting waned, while fox hunting became very popular. The speed of the chase is far greater with the fox than with a hare, and the killing of vermin fox was less worrisome to those who were predisposed to sentimentalizing the slaying of the beautiful stag or the vulnerable hare. Moreover, there was no property qualification for fox

hunting, so the sport established itself increasingly as the century wore on, attracting farmers, tradesmen, urban gentlemen, and even rural gentlemen in great numbers.

We can see clearly in fox hunting a shift in attitude regarding hunting's function in society. There was a decreasing emphasis in the poetry on a display of royal power in killing the stag and more of an emphasis on what I would call the purely sporting aspects of the activity. In his analysis of the central place of fox hunting in the evolution of modern forms of sport in England, social historian Norbert Elias has coined the term "tension-equilibrium" to express the idea that the basic figuration of a sport is "designed to produce as well as to contain tensions."³⁵ That is, the prolonged period of suspense and anticipation where the outcome of the competitive engagement remains in doubt is the true draw of sport. In earlier times, the pleasure of the kill took precedence over all other aspects of the hunt. But with the fox hunt in the eighteenth century, the killing of the fox was done by the hounds, acting as surrogates for the men who trained them, and the fox was not eaten by the hunters. Thus, the pleasure of the pursuit itself had become the principal source of entertainment and central to the exercise. Ultimately, killing the fox remained the event's climax, the moment when the tension was at its highest and then released in an invigorating, inspiring, or even cathartic conclusion. In Elias's elaboration of this circumstance, we can note how hunting had evolved in the direction of the modern conceptions of sport outlined above in this introduction, particularly the concept of inefficient means or artificial difficulty:

In relation to all the other ends of hunting, the tension of the mock battle itself and the pleasure it gave to the human participants had reached a high degree of autonomy. Killing foxes was easy. All the rules of the hunt were designed

³⁵ Norbert Elias, "An Essay on Sport and Violence," in *Quest for Excitement*, ed. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 159.

to make it less easy, to prolong the contest, to postpone victory for a while – not because it was felt to be immoral or unfair to kill foxes outright, but because the excitement of the hunt itself had increasingly become the main source of enjoyment for the human participants. (176)

Hunting in the eighteenth century had been transformed into a specific pastime. It had evolved to the point where the overcoming of unnecessary obstacles had trumped utilitarian motivations: the killing of prey only served the practical utility of saving chickens from the predatory foxes. Importantly, this element of tension-equilibrium is on display to various degrees in all the hunting poems under examination. Hence, in my analysis of the hunting poetry, I identify tension-equilibrium, along with degrees of recreational specialization, as a central thematic constituent of its generic repertoire.

With such objectives in mind, I argue that works of sports literature contribute to a better understanding of genre in the eighteenth century, as the neoclassical impulse of the period to transform disorder into harmony often mirrors sport's fundamental characteristic of the ordered chaos of rule-based violence. Indeed, we can use the influential phrase *concordia discors* to describe in metaphorical terms the way many sports tacitly organize their rules and basic structures of play. This notion appealed greatly to eighteenth-century Britons as a means of understanding how their experiences were shaped and understood. My study thus has a parallel purpose in investigating the fields of sport and literature. It is an investigation of eighteenth-century genre through the lens of sports history, and an investigation of eighteenth-century sport through the lens of literary generic theory.

PART 1. Fishing

Chapter 1. Izaak Walton and Angling Specialization

In Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, the mentor figure, Piscator, asks his student, Venator – and by extension the reader – to consider, “is it not an Art to deceive a *Trout* with an artificial flie?”¹ Of course, in Walton's day, to speak of an “art” was to refer to the skill of an action, as expertise to be acquired and practiced, just as one practices the art of gardening or metallurgy. But for us, three hundred and fifty years after the *Angler's* initial publication, the term “art” connotes first and foremost the fine arts, of which one branch is literature, particularly aesthetic and imaginative texts such as verse poetry, drama, or fiction. The contrasting and evolving definitions of art, in both senses of the word, lie at the heart of what makes a work such as *The Complete Angler* a challenging text to discuss critically. Despite its popularity over the centuries, it has not been until the last few decades that it has received really serious critical attention.

In the only full-length study of the *Angler*, John R. Cooper considers the various generic and modal traits this work displays. For Cooper, much of the criticism on the work prior to his time of writing in 1968 had been “singularly inadequate” because critics tended not to be able to place the work critically within traditional generic categories.² He notes that in the years after its original publication, the *Angler* was read, in effect, as “two books, one the wholly practical and informative handbook, and the other comprising those passages of narration, or pastoral description, and of moral and religious meditation wherein the charm of the book and its value as literature are felt to lie” (5). These “two books” were each seen through one of the two critical lenses of instruction and delight prescribed by Horace: the

¹ Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler 1653-1676*, ed. Jonquil Bevan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 190. This volume contains both the 1653 original version and the 1676 5th and final version. Hereafter cited in text. All references are to the 1676 version.

² John R. Cooper, *The Art of the Compleat Angler* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1968), 4. Hereafter cited in text.

instructional manual on fishing and the delightful narrative of Piscator and his pupil enjoying their sporting adventures. While more recently the question of what defines “literature” has toppled such neat distinctions, it is worth reminding ourselves that right through the eighteenth century, as E.D. Hirsch notes, the term *literature* signified “everything worthy to be read, preferably the best thoughts expressed in the best manner, but above all the best thoughts.”³ It was not self-evident to a seventeenth or eighteenth-century audience that there could be a clear distinction between wholly scientific discourse and purely aesthetic and imaginative writing. It was not until the Romantics and, in particular, Wordsworth’s distinction between poetry and “matter of fact, or science” that the cleavage between imaginative and preceptive texts emerged tangibly.⁴

Despite Cooper’s complaint about the paucity of criticism on Walton’s famous “recreation of a recreation,” the work itself has been beloved and highly influential since its initial publication in 1653, as the nearly four hundred editions, reprints, and translations published since serve to indicate. The popularity of Walton’s text as a prose narrative on the principles, techniques, and delights of angling succeeded in elevating the sport’s stature and with it the activities and dispositions of the men who made it a practice. Importantly, the attitudes of these men define for Walton a particular type of sportsman, one who is both contemplative and active in regards to his pursuits, embodying a spirit of growth and development befitting gentlemanly virtue. This sportsman shares his knowledge enthusiastically with those who want to learn. This ethic was predominant in the sporting ethos of the Restoration and the eighteenth century, and it is reflected in the generic and

³ E.D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976), 140.

⁴ William Wordsworth, “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads” in *Wordsworth’s Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957), 120.

modal features of the poetry that followed the *Angler*. Even though it is a prose rather than a verse text, the *Angler* is my starting point because of the influence it exerted on the angling poetry that followed.

The state of Walton criticism has advanced markedly since Cooper's study, and a brief examination of it enables us to see how the representation of fishing in the *Angler* filtered down to the works that followed, the poetry in particular. Many of the commentators who have moved beyond mere appreciation of the text to study the *Angler* critically have assessed its generic complexity, producing an unsurprisingly broad range of positions and verdicts on where to place it. W. J. Keith, who traces a tradition of "non-fictional" rural writing from the seventeenth century up to the present, is one such critic. Following our post-Romantic sensibilities regarding literature, Keith asserts rural literature's essential difference from pastoral verse, and he champions Walton's work as an eminent example of the rural tradition. He calls the *Angler* "the earliest important example in English of non-fiction rural writing."⁵ For him, there is a clear difference between rural and pastoral literature, though he acknowledges that in *The Compleat Angler* "we find the same tendency to view country and town in terms of simple and complicated that is a prime feature of pastoral" (4). Keith locates the difference between pastoral and rural writing in the differentiation between writing in verse and writing in prose, essentially resulting in a prose georgic of sorts. According to Keith, "non-fiction rural writing in prose fulfils a similar need in recent literary experience to that of the georgic in earlier times. At all events the tradition of the georgic is manifestly closer to the spirit of the rural tradition than is that of pastoral" (5). But Keith ascribes predominantly georgic modal features to his conception of rural writing in general, and to the

⁵ W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974), 4. Hereafter cited in text.

Angler in particular, without taking into account just how important pastoral models were for writers such as Walton and those who followed him. While perhaps it is the case that the georgic is close to the rural tradition in the sense that it tends to contain practical instruction, this formulation underrates the imaginative-aesthetic elements in Walton's *Angler* and indeed those in Virgil's *Georgics*. Neither work can be classified neatly as non-fiction. With this in mind, in order to sidestep a sterile debate of generic classification, I have chosen to examine the thematic content of the literature in this study on the assumption that questions of form will be illuminated along the way. In particular, I wish to avoid the anachronistic term "non-fiction" in discussing fishing literature because Keith's model does not account for how genres interrelate and change over time.

To class the *Angler* as a "how-to" manual is to miss the point. Similarly, to dismiss the pastoral element in the work is to ignore the fact that, ever since it was published, the work was often read in terms of its pastoral attributes. In one of many complimentary references to the *Angler* in his letters, Charles Lamb recommends the work to Coleridge by declaring, "the dialogue is very simple, full of pastoral beauties, and will charm you."⁶ And famously, William Hazlitt hailed the *Angler* as "the best pastoral in the language, not excepting Pope's or Philips's."⁷

The book's rural setting and fanciful play mark it as participating in the pastoral tradition, as do the singing matches and the dialogue that make up much of the action. The attitude signaled in the following meditation by Piscator is a case in point:

⁶ Charles Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb* vol. I, ed. E.V. Lucas (New Haven, 1935), 21.

⁷ William Hazlitt, "On John Bunce," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* IV, ed. P.P. Howe (London: 1930), 56.

I could there sit quietly; and looking on the water, see some fishes sport themselves in the silver streams, others leaping at flies of several shapes and colours; looking on the hills, I could behold them spotted with woods and groves; looking down the meadows, could see, here a boy gathering lilies and ladysmocks, and there a girl cropping culverkeys and cowslips, all to make garlands suitable to this present month of May. (300)

The mood is unmistakably pastoral, and it gives the kind of picture of rural life that must have gratified Romantic sensibilities.

But in the *Angler*, a movement toward a more georgic conception of the material is also afoot. This is evidenced elsewhere in the text in the realistic descriptions, the detailed instructions on how to catch fish, and even the recipes for cooking fish, which are features clearly indebted to georgic. And so a curious convergence of generic impulses – which is perhaps best described by Rosalie Colie as “playing off two generic styles against one another, sometimes in concert, sometimes in opposition” – is evident in the *Angler*, one that has important consequences for the piscatory subgenre.⁸ David Hill Radcliffe notes this tension, observing that Walton’s “strategy of rendering pleasure innocent and innocence pleasurable requires a mixture of genres.”⁹ The nature of the mixture is such that the two seemingly distinctive modes of pastoral and georgic enter into a kind of dialogue.

Of course, there are several fundamental differences between the traditions of the georgic and the pastoral. Bearing in mind the particular context of fishing, rather than farming and herding, Cooper expresses the distinction in terms of human social interaction:

⁸ Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), 75.

⁹ David Hill Radcliffe, “‘Study to Be Quiet’: Genre and Politics in Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992): 108.

“the pastoral tends to depict primarily simplified, idealized social relationships rather than the work of the husbandman. The traditional device is the creation of a society of shepherds (or fishermen, as we have seen) in which human relationships and values may be depicted in their simplest form” (65). Even though pastoral can be very serious thematically and deal with powerful emotions, there is almost always a conspicuous facet of play in pastoral literature, and this is no less true of the *Angler* and of angling poetry. We see at times in the *Angler* the simplicity and pure joy of the pursuit, albeit interspersed frequently with notes of realism and earthiness that hark back to the georgic. Indeed, the two mindsets are vital to the sporting experience of angling; it encompasses both the feeling of pure pleasure and the work and skill needed to achieve that state of pleasure. Thus, there is a call for both modes, pastoral and georgic, in the piscatory verse tradition from Walton onward.

In fact, Walton’s representation of the activity in purely sporting terms is historically significant, as prior to him the tradition of fishing literature generally followed the mould of Phineas Fletcher’s *Piscatory Eclogues* (1633), which idealized fishermen at sea, equating them with the pastoral shepherd tending his flocks. The only notable exception is John Dennys’s *The Art of Angling* (1613), a pastoral on angling from which Walton quotes in his first chapter. The key alteration in Walton’s *The Compleat Angler* is that the fisherman becomes a man of leisure playing in England’s countryside. In this study, I distinguish between fishing verse depicting sea fishing and the sporting variety performed in England’s lakes and rivers. The former is tied to fishing as a livelihood, where the latter is sporting. In the writing on fishing that followed Walton, pastoral sentiments are usually conflated with georgic instruction on learning a body of specific skills for the sporting variety of fishing. Often, the nature of the writer’s sporting interests and behaviour is reflected in the degree to which he chooses his modal features, be they primarily pastoral experiences built around the

idealization and simplification of human society, or primarily georgic ones built around instruction in practical activity.

The term “angler” is interchangeable with “sport fisherman,” denoting one who fishes primarily for sporting reasons rather than as a livelihood. And the performance of fishing as a sport differs significantly depending on the body of water and the practitioner involved. At its most basic level, according to fishing historian Charles F. Waterman, what separates the sport from commercial or subsistence fishing is simple: “fishing for sport involves carefully imposed personal handicaps.”¹⁰ Large commercial nets are without question the most efficient way to collect a healthy catch. But through experience and effort, the angler settles upon the method from which he or she derives the greatest pleasure. Often, a difficult or untried method in a challenging setting is what attracts an experienced angler. Or perhaps the repeated application of the simplest of techniques in a favourite fishing hole best suits his or her fancy. The series of choices one makes in going about one’s fishing – what Waterman calls “personal angling codes” (1) – is a perfectly adapted example of Bernard Suits’s notion of the overcoming of unnecessary obstacles as the defining element of sporting practices. Thus, types of fishing are like genres, with formal codes and conventions. Fishing for sport is itself a “formal” activity, bound by rules that impose difficulty, not unlike submitting oneself to the discipline of writing heroic couplets, for example.

Angling is, with this sporting definition in mind, about the pursuit of pleasure in a rural setting. The way it is enacted by the angler can take many guises; the individual’s intentions and desires shape in very substantial ways how the sport is conceived and performed. In fact, we can look specifically to the varying attitudes of the sport’s

¹⁰ Charles F. Waterman, *A History of Angling* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Winchester Press, 1981), 1. Hereafter cited in text.

practitioners (and here expressly its poets) for telling insights into the sporting ideals that inform their culture. Such attitudes are frequently perceived as individual in nature, given the variety of styles and practices one can encounter. For example, solitude and silence are often associated with angling. However, fishing with a friend (or engaging with “the brotherhood of the angle,” to invoke Walton) adds a social dimension to the sport’s cultural codes and ideals. In fact, the proper way to engage with others in one’s practice of the sport is a recurring topic for consideration in angling discourse, and in verse poetry in particular. And taken to its logical conclusion, the writing on the sport becomes a means for such interaction with the larger angling community – it acts as an expression through which one can engage with the brotherhood to share insights, methods, values, and experiences.

The sub-genre of angling literature, although undoubtedly belonging to the larger literary-historical tradition, has its own literary standards and delights. It is a common sentiment among fishing writers that some of the best fishing is to be found not in the water but in print. This conflation of the printed word with the physical act is usually a prominent feature in the imagination of those enthusiasts who both practice and write about the sport. Beginning with the earliest writers of fishing literature, the associative bonds between performing the action and reading or writing about it are foregrounded and are made the means of evaluation and appreciation. We can even note here a connection between fishing verse and the manner in which Virgil conflates farming labour and poetic labour in the *Georgics*, where Virgil uses the Latin word “versus” to mean both “furrow” and “verse.” Just as the farmer ploughs a straight furrow and doubles back to plough the next one, so the poet “ploughs” his verses, building up a poem. Writers of piscatory verse envisage a similar process, albeit one that is adapted to a different context.

In truth, the amount of poetry on fishing is slender compared to the remarkable number of treatises on the sport over the centuries. *McClane's New Standard Fishing Encyclopedia* estimates that if one were to compile a bibliography of fishing texts written from antiquity to the present, there would be in excess of 5,000 titles.¹¹ Most of these texts would not qualify as “literary” in the sense we today use that term. And the qualities that make for great writing in the genre differ in substantial ways from some traditional literary ideals. In his survey of five centuries of fishing literature, popular fishing writer Arnold Gingrich addresses this point:

a book can fall considerably short of measuring up as a literary masterpiece, and still contain the wherewithal to enchant the angler. Let it diffuse the whiff of authenticity, that is to the fisherman the perfume of credence, and let it exude a modicum of charm, to endow things as they are with an aura of things as they ought to be at best, and you convey that sense of recognition value that makes the fisherman nod his head, and maybe touch his temple, as if to say, “I must remember this.”¹²

Authenticity, charm, an aura of idealization, and recognition value – these elements are privileged foremost by anglers reading about their sport. Thus, in examining fishing literature, placing the fishing sub-genre within the larger context of literary history, we should not forget its primary aims and the values of those who are principally drawn to it as subject matter.

¹¹ A.J. McClane, ed., *McClane's New Standard Fishing Encyclopedia and International Angling Guide* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 547.

¹² Arnold Gingrich, *The Fishing in Print: A Guided Tour Through Five Centuries of Angling Literature* (New York: Winchester Press, 1974), 3.

When it comes to these ideals, *The Compleat Angler* stands as the prime exemplar, as the work that continues to instill in readers the kind of stimulation Gingrich articulates. But the precise element that makes it so charming and appealing is slightly more difficult to ascertain. Anna K. Nardo analyzes how the *Angler* achieves its effects on its readers, focusing particularly on the phenomenological aspects of the work, wherein “the book is about play, was written in play, and invites its reader to play.”¹³ For Nardo, the play function in the work collapses the writer-reader-fisherman divide, as learning about the art of angling through reading provides an opportunity for play similar to that offered by fishing itself, serving to “challenge the real and the vicarious sportsman” in a pursuit of pleasure afforded him or her in the fictional play setting (307). Fundamentally, then, reading about fishing becomes analogous to the actual experience.

Following Nardo, John R. Miller takes this notion of affective readerly experience a step further to posit that the *Angler* suggests an even more involved process for the reader, in which “Piscator offers Venator (and the reader) not merely experience and knowledge, but initiation into the ‘brotherhood of the angle,’ and thus a kind of personal transformation.”¹⁴ This transformation occurs as readers engage simultaneously with the book’s instruction in the skills of angling and with the challenge of achieving the Christian piety that Walton values. The work attempts to accomplish this realization in two ways: “by figuring such a transformation in its representation of the activity of fishing, and by offering the reader an actual transformative experience through reading” (26). Miller rightly envisages Walton conceiving of his reader absorbed in his book, perhaps on a rainy day, just as, in the *Angler*

¹³ Anna K. Nardo, “‘A Recreation of a Recreation’: Reading *The Compleat Angler*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 79 (1980): 304. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁴ John R. Miller, “Reading as Pastoral Experience in Walton’s *Compleat Angler*,” *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy* 53 (2005): 26. Hereafter cited in text.

itself, Piscator provides a lengthy discourse for Venator while they endure a rain shower sitting under a sycamore tree. Miller explains: “both interludes offer discourse on fishing as a substitute for fishing.... The substitution is possible because both activities, fishing and reading, offer similar rewards” (33). Once the reader is initiated, he or she has access not only to the body of knowledge imparted in the text, but to “a particular kind of experience, the beguilement of worldly time offered by fishing and by reading” (37). More than with most works, the reader is invited into the *Angler* and is expected to share in a communal experience.

Other critics have made this literary-communal aspect the basis for a more political reading of the text, one that articulates ideologically compatible social networks. Downplaying the element of escapism in the *Angler*, Steven N. Zwicker argues for an overtly political reading of the work, asserting that the *Angler* “gave classic expression to the culture of sequestered royalism.”¹⁵ Even though Walton presents his work as “innocent, harmless mirth” (Walton 169), Zwicker suggests that this claim is diversionary and that the work is rather “more self-conscious and more contestative than has often been allowed,” a polemical text with clearly partisan leanings, opposing militant Protestantism (61). Gregory Semenza takes this view a step further to argue that Walton offers a literary experience in protest against specific political policies that threatened his sport: the *Angler* functions “as a surrogate for the pleasures threatened by the bans on sporting activities. From the opening pages of the *Angler*, the reader is released into a vast space of absolute play, carved out in contradistinction to the suffocating confinement of Interregnum society.”¹⁶ The banning of

¹⁵ Steven N. Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), 60. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁶ Gregory M. Colon Semenza, *Sports, Politics, and Literature in the English Renaissance* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2003), 147. Hereafter cited in text.

sports was a frequent interdiction in Oliver Cromwell's England, and Semenza argues that Walton politicizes his views in the form of a celebration of his sport. The harmony displayed by the brotherhood signifies a positive representation of the communal aspects of fishing, aspects into which the reader is drawn and initiated. Semenza explains:

Walton's enthusiastic celebration of sport with few, if any, negative connotations has blinded us to the fact that, in the seventeenth century, sport was more often judged according to its context than its content. In the *Angler* he presents a lawful sport in an unlawful context, suggesting that the primary basis for legislation against communal sports during the Interregnum was, at best, groundless. (156-157)

Zwicker and Semenza make a convincing case for the politicization of the text, and Semenza even asserts as his examples some of the distinctive sporting features of the *Angler* – some of its content rather than its context – which many of Walton's readers have overlooked.

As a noteworthy example of that content, we can here turn to the features of the work that define it first and foremost as a sporting text. Even though Walton's normative character, Piscator, stands in for many of the pious virtues associated with Christianity, he is still wired with a keenly competitive drive. In a conspicuous expression of rivalry, Piscator utters a maxim to his pupil Venator that seemingly contradicts much of the rest of the work by conveying a more externalized sporting obsession than the harmonious and stoic philosophy he voices elsewhere in the narrative. "I will tell you, Scholar," testifies Piscator, "I once heard one say, *I envy not him that eats better than I do, nor him that is richer, or that wears better clothes than I do. I envy no body but him, and him only, that catches more fish than I do*" (348). This spirited declaration of a competitive urge serves to distinguish angling from other, non-sporting, and presumably more destructive competitive concerns – Piscator

can only envy a superior fisherman. Thus, fishing is a domain that stands fundamentally apart, literally out in the countryside, as a world distinct from the purview of the men who compete daily for other measurable forms of gain and prestige. Angling has quite different sorts of drives. It is competitive, but that competitiveness, that egotism, is represented not as sinful or destructive but as respectable and productive.

In looking at the text itself, we can see how this blameless sort of competition manifests itself in the interaction between the two principal characters. Even though the relationship between Piscator and Venator is a master-pupil one, with its repeated insistence on teaching and learning, the competitive impulse still prevails, even constituting a considerable part of Piscator's pedagogical method. Piscator begins the initiation of his trainee with a demonstration of some difficulty, and he wagers with his student that he can pull it off. Upon seeing a school of twenty chub, he boasts he will "catch only one, and that shall be the biggest of them all: and that I will do so, I'll hold you twenty to one, and you shall see it done" (215). Even though he doubts the exploit can be accomplished, Venator is impressed by Piscator's supreme confidence, so he takes the favourable odds and agrees to the bet. But sure enough, even though the endeavour proves a "tryal of [his] skill," Piscator catches the exact chub he had pointed out, winning the bet and establishing his proficiency as a master angler.

The element of the contest is what repeatedly propels the narrative forward. Even though it is his pupil's first fishing outing, Piscator challenges Venator to see who can be the first to get a bite when they move to a new location. The two impulses of instruction and competition are again entwined in Piscator's direction: "my advice is, that you fish as you see me do, and let's try which can catch the first Fish" (252). Predictably, Piscator's line quickly produces one trout and then another, prompting Venator to allege the excuses that he

has “no fortune” and that “yours is a better Rod, and better tackling” (252). In response, Piscator proposes that they switch rods; this, however, only results in another brace of fish for the master. Venator continues to claim he is unlucky, which finally prompts Piscator to explain to the student through parable and explication that fortune has nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it is all in the technique: “you have no skill to know how to carry your hand and line, nor how to guide it to the right place: and this must be taught you (for you are to remember I told you, Angling is an Art) either by practice, or a long observation, or both” (253). The teacher then proceeds to give detailed technical instruction to his student, particular to the location, bait, and fish of the present situation. But the lesson has resonance for the student because of the competitive engagement between the two fishermen, evoking the old sporting adage that we learn more from our defeats than our victories.

As a final competitive display, the men meet at the end of the day to count their catches and boast of their accomplishments. Upon meeting up at the inn, Piscator makes his fortune known to his acquaintances:

Well, brother *Peter* and *Coridon*, to both of you; come drink, and then tell me *what luck of fish*: we two have caught but ten Trouts, of which my Scholar caught three; look here’s eight, and a brace we gave away: we have had a most pleasant day for fishing and talking, and are returned home both weary and hungry, and now meat and rest will be pleasant. (330)

In reply, Peter reports that he has not had “an unpleasant day, and yet I have caught but five Trouts,” for he and Coridon have spent half the day in an alehouse out of the rain (330). The fact that Peter reports a comparable tally suggests that he is in the same class of fishermen as Piscator and thus worthy of the respect displayed to him in the celebratory scenes that round out the evening in the alehouse.

Even though the competitive facet of the work stands as a primary marker of its sporting appeal, we can go further in exploring how *The Compleat Angler* functions as a literary-sporting text. There is much to learn about the *Angler* (and indeed all angling literature) by way of modern sociological insight into the sport. Hence, in the introduction I outlined Hobson Bryan's formulation of the "fishing career," the conceptual framework in which fishermen enter as Occasional fishermen and progress through the phases of Generalist and Technique Specialist as they become increasingly proficient in method and involved in the social components of the sport. We can observe this socialization process in *The Compleat Angler*, as the "young Angler" Venator is initiated into the brotherhood (318). Piscator takes on the role of Technique-Setting Specialist, as the teacher figure who shares his knowledge and embodies the characteristics respected and esteemed by the angling community. He shares his knowledge with the beginner and initiates his first experiences in the sport. After Piscator's demonstration of catching a specific chub at 20-to-1 odds, he has his student send another line down that same hole, where he clearly knows a score of chub is congregating: "I am glad to enter you into the Art of fishing by catching a *Chub*, for there is no Fish better to enter a young angler, he is so easily caught" (219). Piscator's logic is obvious, and it anticipates Bryan's explanation that novices characteristically target the locations with the highest probability of success. In this way, they accelerate the small thrills and delights of making a catch, particularly one's first catch. Sure enough, Venator emerges with a bite: "Look you, Master, what I have done, that which joys my heart, caught just such another *Chub* as yours was" (220). Following this rationale, Venator's education continues with an attempt at catching a gudgeon, to which Piscator assigns a similar degree of difficulty: "he is an excellent fish to enter a young Angler, being easie to be taken with a small red worm, on or very near the ground" (327). After the gudgeon comes the ruffe,

which “is also excellent to enter a young Angler, for he is a greedy biter, and they will usually lie abundance of them together in one reserved place where the water is deep, and runs quietly; and an easie Angler, if he has found where they lie, may catch forty or fifty, or sometimes twice so many at a standing” (328). The choice of fish Piscator makes in instructing his pupil reflects the early stage of the specialization process that facilitates Venator’s socialization into the sport.

Indeed, in his accounts of other fish, Piscator frequently mentions how difficult they are to catch. For example, at this early point in his student’s fishing career he steers Venator clear of the carp: “if you will Fish for a *Carp*, you must put on a very large measure of *patience*; especially to fish for a *River Carp*: I have known a very good Fisher angle diligently four or six hours in a day, for three or four daies together for a *River Carp*, and not have a bite: and you are to note that in some ponds it is as hard to catch a *Carp* as in a *River*” (296). But Piscator expresses his enthusiasm for the barbell as a worthy fish to pursue, at such time when Venator’s skills will have matured: “the *Barbel* affords an *Angler* choice sport, being a lusty and a cunning Fish: so lusty and cunning as to endanger the breaking of the Angler’s line” (323-324). Such a challenge is appealing to an experienced angler, and so the barbel is a fish for Venator to pursue at a later date. Likewise, it is appealing for the experienced fishermen to pursue some fish that might not make particularly good eating, and Piscator goes out of his way to discuss these: “My purpose was to give you some directions concerning *Roach* and *Dace*, and some other inferiour Fish, which make the Angler excellent sport, for you know there is more pleasure in Hunting the *Hare* than in eating her” (330). For the experienced sportsman, the chase is the purpose of the activity, as expressed in the analogy of hunting the hare. The mature angler derives his or her pleasure foremost from the sport, or the tension-equilibrium, rather than the consumption of the animal, an attitude we

will explore further in the chapters on hunting to come. Ultimately, Piscator's explanations of the various fish reflect a hierarchy of the most-prized fish for anglers to take, ranging from the salmon, "accounted the King of the fresh-water-fish" (274), and the trout, "a fish highly valued" (224), down to the many breeds and varieties that give "the Angler no sport" (320).

The sport of angling's highly-structured value system has long been established, and *The Compleat Angler* serves as my starting point because these values figure so prominently in Walton's narrative, descriptions, and instruction. Whether a poem is infused principally with pastoral sentiment or georgic functionality articulates in substantial ways what significance the poet attaches to his sport. A fisherman whose principal focus is mainly on an enjoyment of the scene might tend toward describing it as a simple pastoral delight. A specialist instructor, such as Walton's Piscator, is more predisposed to a georgic orientation because of the instructive potential of the georgic mode, though, as *The Compleat Angler* shows us, there is not a straightforward division between the two categories of pastoral and georgic.

The poetry on fishing after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 reflects Walton's idealization of the life of a leisured gentleman who devotes himself to philosophic introspection through his rural retirement. In this view, meditative country life became the best means of achieving true religious insight, the aim being self-knowledge reflected in an adoption of stoic reason over passion, soul over flesh. Royalists could thus follow classical precedent to engage in productive leisure, imagining their poetry as the "fruit" of their work so that their recreation could be countenanced as a productive phase of rest. The four poets I examine in the next chapter are linked in that commitment, but they embody in different ways the literary and philosophical transitions that characterized the post-Restoration period. Charles Cotton and Thomas Heyrick continue to adopt the characteristically Renaissance

poetic feature of creating visual images that coincide with the thematic content of their poems. Their emblematic poetry contrasts with an increasingly descriptive and empirical strain of poetry observable in J.S. and Richard Whitney. Furthermore, the work of these four poets was tinged with a neo-Epicurean hue, as the period saw a revival of that ancient philosophy, which was seized upon as a mode to idealize and rationalize the way of life of the retiring gentleman performing his sport.

Chapter 2. After Walton: The Happy Man and the Golden Age of Angling Verse in the 1690s

We can better understand the gentlemanly pleasures of the countryside, I believe, by theorizing how pleasure in more conceptual terms was understood in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A valuable lens through which to examine the fishing poetry of the period is Maren-Sophie Røstvig's extensive overview of the *beatus ille* or "Happy Man" tradition. We can place the fishing poems alongside other seventeenth and eighteenth-century poetry that idealizes the retired rural dweller or the husbandman as the happiest of men and therefore as a model for others. Clearly, transmitting the delights of the rural setting is a vital facet in articulating the angling experience, and Røstvig makes explicit the connection between pleasure and rural life in explaining the reach of the Happy Man ideal: "Whenever a poet attributes an important part of his happiness to his experience of the rural scene, the *beatus ille* tradition merges with the tradition of the descriptive poem. It is scarcely possible to draw a sharp line of distinction between the two, nor is it desirable."¹

According to Røstvig, there are many classical sources for the tradition of the Happy Man, but far and away the two most important passages are Horace's second Epode and Virgil's praise of the *agricola* in *Georgics* II: "The nature of the entire tradition can be deduced by these two passages alone. Their introductory words were echoed by English poets in every possible phrasal variation and were so well known that they sufficed as thematic indication" (41). Much of the angling literature of the seventeenth century makes such thematic and structural connections overt. For example, appended to Tipping

¹ Maren-Sophie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphosis of a Classical Ideal*. Vol. 1. (Oslo: Norwegian UP, 1962), 9. Hereafter cited in text.

Sylvester's translation of Simon Ford's "Piscatio" is an ode that begins, "Happy, who rules with skilful wile."² Similarly, preceding J.S.'s *The Innocent Epicure*, the author has included an imitation of Horace's tenth Epistle, a celebration of the simplicity and charm of country life, in which Horace is perfectly content except for the fact that a friend is not with him in the country but remains in the city.³ And in *The Genteel Recreation*, John Whitney loses no time in identifying his thematic intentions, announcing this theme in his opening line: "Happy's the man blest with a moderate state."⁴ All these works incorporate the Happy Man ideal by condemning the false pleasures of the world, associating these with life in town and at court, in contrast to the enduring happiness attached to a rural experience.

Røstvig adds that the "graded formality" of the seventeenth century helps to explain why seventeenth-century writers were drawn to the classical ideal of the Happy Man, as "troubled periods will often favour a cultural or chronological primitivism, ascribing happiness to earlier periods or to a life of rustic simplicity which mirrors the purity of earlier ages" (19). For a poetic tradition to become truly meaningful in an era, its motifs – in this case those of the Happy Man – need to communicate a fundamental desire on the part of the individuals of that era. Clearly, the trauma of civil war and the rancorous political climate of much of the seventeenth century contributed to this desire for rural retirement. We might best characterize Cavalier poetry in this vein as a celebration of the love, friendship, and good life one might find in rural retirement. The product was a poetics that sought to transcend civil discord by gravitating to either stoic or epicurean content as intellectual justification for a situation that was often forced upon the writers politically.

² Tipping Sylvester, trans., *Piscatio, or, Angling. A Poem. Written Originally in Latin by S. Ford, D.D. and Inscribed to Arch-Bishop Seheldon* (London: 1733), 18. Ford's original was written in 1692.

³ J.S., *The Innocent Epicure: or, The Art of Angling. A Poem* (London: 1697).

⁴ John Whitney, *The Genteel Recreation: Or, the Pleasure of Angling, a Poem. With a Dialogue between Piscator and Corydon* (London: 1700), 1.

However, this narrative of retreat in the period does have its critics. James Loxley, for example, sees some problems with the model: “the location of the good life in retirement to a rural idyll is a rhetorical gesture so firmly enshrined in the verse practice of the mid-seventeenth century that its very ubiquity almost predetermines critical narratives.”⁵ Loxley thus conceives of the celebration of the happy life in rural retirement as “a hegemony” of sorts (202). He takes issue with the view that the prevalent use of the classical and Renaissance notions of retirement derives from the Latin *otium*, meaning “ease,” “leisure,” or even “free time.” *Otium* provides the imagined space for all Royalist retreat, which, in Loxley’s view, was “not as uniformly celebratory as has sometimes been assumed, or as some seventeenth-century invocations of the *topos* seem to claim” (202). This critique is supported by Brian Vickers’s survey of the history of the term *otium* from its Roman usage right through to the seventeenth century. Throughout the term’s long lineage, human worth was typically evaluated in terms of the nature and degree of one’s involvement in society, for the good of the public. The Roman citizen understood *otium* to be in opposition to the active life expected of him, and it therefore took on connotations of idleness and slothfulness. Vickers argues that there was a great deal of ambivalence toward the idea of *otium*, even in the Renaissance: “Any writer wishing to use *otium* in the seventeenth century in a positive sense, we may conclude, would have had to work to remove its pejorative meaning....”⁶ The Cavalier poets therefore faced a challenge in championing a happy retreat that lacked the negative associations that *otium* could arouse: associations of sloth and *accedie*, unproductive apathy or a lack of caring.

⁵ James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 202. Hereafter cited in text.

⁶ Brian Vickers, “Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*,” *Renaissance Studies* 4.2 (1990): 144.

Earl Miner, however, suggests how Cavalier poets obviated the criticism that a celebration of retirement might attract. He argues that a “social mode” of engagement allowed poets to constructively assert the positive elements of retreat to (and with) like-minded people. The social mode involves, according to Miner, “a mid-aesthetic distance, a position between the world of the poem and the world of the reader from which the poet can readily turn toward public poetry for certain needs, and toward private for others,”⁷ or, to put it another way, it features poetry that draws on a “kind of experience that is intimate and yet inclusive, or at times participating and yet exclusive” (42). For such compromises between the extremes of public and private or inclusiveness and exclusiveness, the poet requires first and foremost some assumed common ground between himself and his reader; otherwise, he would be dismissed for his idleness. As such, the poetry of address came to occupy a significant place in Cavalier poetry. As we will see in the poetry of Charles Cotton, it also served a useful purpose in articulating a sporting ethos. Miner notes that what allowed for the positive use of retirement poetry was a presumed social affinity between poet and addressee: “Their interests must coincide, or at least the nature of their social relation must have brought them together for social purposes. This is how friendship becomes so ready a subject” (265). As we observed in *The Compleat Angler*, the sport of angling became one such medium through which social engagements might flourish. Thus, the poetry in the period after Walton makes angling the vehicle to satisfy any residual ambivalence over perceptions of leisure and ease because of the positive social characteristics it embodies.

Furthermore, in connection with angling poetry, I would posit that the appeal of the Happy Man speaks more fundamentally to the psyche of the seventeenth and eighteenth-

⁷ Earl Miner, *The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 14. Hereafter cited in text.

century angler than a mere wish to return, as Røstvig suggests, to a more simple and stable time. This appeal rests primarily in the sport's enacting of play and pleasure, qualities alluring to all sport fishermen regardless of historical period or political climate. For the poets who followed Walton, descriptive poems employing the classical motifs of the *beatus ille* were a useful way of articulating their sporting ethos. Their attraction to the georgic in particular allowed the poets to adopt its distinctive classical ideals. From there the poets could use them to comment on social or political concerns, should they wish.

Epicureanism as such was not distasteful to the hedonistic-leaning court of Charles II, and the materialism inherent in the new science, which was itself influenced by Lucretian cosmology, often inclined many serious men to rationalize their way of life as Epicurean. Epicurean thinkers often adopted the skepticism of the new science and the empiricism characteristic of John Locke, believing that humans exercise free will and sole responsibility for their actions. In the process, external achievements and successes were increasingly privileged, and the *beatus vir* became one who cherished elegant pastimes. Røstvig terms this figure of the late-seventeenth century the "Innocent Epicure," a term borrowed from (it matches, at any rate) the title of J.S.'s fishing poem, which I will examine shortly. Such a man's purpose was not primarily sensual abandonment, as the term "epicure" sometimes popularly suggests, but rather to realize a tranquility of body and mind, valuing the pleasures of rest over those of motion.

In her study, Røstvig traces the neo-Stoicism of the early and mid century through to the Epicureanism of the later century. However, that transformation took place rather more slowly in the angling verse than in the larger literary trend toward Epicureanism that Røstvig details. I would suggest that the greatest reason for this lag in the fishing verse is the powerful influence *The Compleat Angler* had on the angling consciousness of the time. For

writers on the sport, the use of the motif of the Happy Man was reflected in a passion for solitary meditation, since a retired rural experience formed for them the best background for a contemplative and dignified life. Walton's work was a tour de force in this regard. And this lag also suggests that we should be cautious in too enthusiastically embracing Røstvig's sometimes overly schematic and ahistorical analysis.

The first serious Restoration poet to treat fishing in verse was, in fact, Izaak Walton's young protégé, Charles Cotton. To her credit, Røstvig gestures toward fishing literature's slow transformation, post-Walton. She observes, "The poetry of Charles Cotton, published posthumously in 1689, is somewhat less typical of the age.... His philosophy of life was more influenced by Stoic thought than was the general rule after 1660" (265). Cotton's continuation of *The Compleat Angler* in the expanded edition of 1676 shows how a love of country sports became an important part of this experience of rural retirement. A devout Tory and Anglican, Cotton was a country squire who continually professed his preference for residing at Beresford Hall (Staffordshire) and in particular at his fishing house built in 1674 on the banks of the River Dove (Derbyshire), rather than in London where he had obtained a commission in the King's forces. His addition to *The Compleat Angler* consists of twelve chapters on fishing in fresh water, principally fly fishing, titled *Being Instructions for how to Angle for a Trout or a Grayling in a Clear Stream*.⁸ The first few chapters of Cotton's section depict him and a companion traversing mountains and difficult terrain before finally

⁸ Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler. Being Instructions for how to Angle for a Trout or a Grayling in a Clear Stream* (London: 1676). This is part two of the volume, after Walton's *Angler*. The third part is by Robert Venables, titled *The Experienced Angler: or, Angling Improv'd. Being a General Discourse of Angling*. The title of the subsequent edition of the three-volume set was *The Universal Angler, made so, by three books of fishing. The first written by Mr. Izaak Walton, the second by Charles Cotton Esq., the third by Col. Robert Venables* (London: 1676).

arriving at an idyllic fishing retreat. It is here that he bestows his best advice, including his famous utterance that remains on the lips of fly-fisherman today, to “fish *fine, and far off*.”⁹

Interestingly, the 1676 edition also contains a piece of verse entitled “The Retirement,” a series of irregular stanzas by Cotton dedicated to Izaak Walton.¹⁰ Thematically, this poem serves to signal Cotton’s conception of how pleasure manifests for him in his angling adventures. His verses speak more to the sentiment of his experience than does the more instructional discussion of his angling methods. The verses unite a Stoic serenity in the mould of Walton with an Epicurean ease common in the verse of the last decades of the seventeenth century. “The Retirement” also serves as a platform for moral and political reflection. In contrast to the detailed lessons and narrative of the “Instructions,” which certainly establish Cotton as an experienced and generous technique-setting specialist in the sport, “The Retirement” is a simple ode, one that binds experience to location. The poem begins with the standard trope of the town-country divide. The address, “Farewell, thou busy world,” opens the poem, as Cotton proceeds swiftly in the opening stanza to censure the city for its “conspicuous theatres, / Where nought but vanity and vice appears” (107). The city is contrasted with the virtues of rural retreat: “innocent from lewd fashion / Is all our business, all our recreation!” (107). We can note here that recreation becomes the main purposeful activity, one bound in leisure: “Oh, how happy here’s our leisure! / Oh, how innocent our pleasure” (108). This counter to city-driven activity is still productive, albeit with entirely different aims. The actions an angler performs – both introspectively searching and outwardly sporting – assert a more positive ideal than the contestative performances of

⁹ Cotton, *The Compleat Angler*, 35.

¹⁰ Charles Cotton, “The Retirement,” in *The Compleat Angler. Being Instructions for how to Angle for a Trout or a Grayling in a Clear Stream* (London: 1676), 107-11. Hereafter cited in text.

city life, which are the product of the misguided objectives and behaviours found there. Alone in the country, one is able “To read, and meditate, and write, / By none offended, and offending none! ... And, pleasing a man’s self, none other to displease” (108). Here, the actions of reading and writing are commensurate with gentlemanly etiquette and self-improvement, which for Cotton serves as an important feature of the experience. First and foremost, the focal point is making the individual self happy and healthy. While the poem praises only solitude, I would infer that by first seeing to one’s spiritual and mental health, finding in “Dear Solitude, the soul’s best friend,” one can then reach out to interact productively with the larger community (108). From a sporting perspective, this can be expressed simply: an individual’s fishing career can take outward effect in the sharing of knowledge with the brotherhood once that individual has first internalized the skills.

Significantly, it is the speaker’s personal connection with the edenic, yet localized setting that allows for these productive possibilities. Cotton pays tribute to the locale, his “beloved nymph, fair Dove! / Princess of rivers!” (109). Here on the Dove, he can lie at rest and simply take in its beauty: “how I love / Upon thy flow’ry banks to lie, / And view thy silver stream, / When gilded by a summer’s beam! (109). He evokes a pastoral conception of the scene, echoing Walton’s image of the silver streams as the predominant metonymic image of nature that attracts men searching for peace and splendor. Here he can likewise see inwardly to focus on his soul, the strengthening of which is his primary business. The river is personified as a woman; it is she who keeps him company so that he is not utterly alone.

This introspection is a crucial element supplied by his outward gaze, as he looks at the landscape surrounding him. The caves adorning the scene offer “gloomy entrails” that provide him with “safety, privacy,” giving him vital solace and refuge (110). Sheltered in the

caves' darkness, away from any prying eyes or outward stimulus, he admits into his life the comforting landscape as a matter of necessity and rejuvenation:

How oft when grief has made me fly
 To hide me from society,
 Ev'n of my dearest friends, have I
 In your recesses friendly shade,
 All my sorrows open laid,
 And my most secret woes intrusted to your privacy! (110)

Clearly, for the speaker of "The Retirement," the setting serves as more than a mere backdrop to an experience away from the city. The landscape is personified ("intrusted") and made to take an active role in the experience by allowing for philosophical meditation, where he finds friendship in solitude.

But interestingly, Cotton's final word on the subject of retirement creates doubt about whether such an idyllic retreat can ultimately be achieved. The last stanza takes the form of the conditional: "Lord, would men let me alone" (110). The suggestion is that all his aspirations of privacy and retreat are subject to forces beyond his control. "Might I in this desert place," he continues, "Live but undisturbed and free! / Here in this despis'd recess" (110-111). In writing of these enclosures and recesses, Cotton hints that the idyll he has been praising cannot be sustained or perpetuated. He wishes he could attain that unchecked retreat – to "try to live out to sixty full years old" and "Contented live, and then contented die" – but his maturity and awareness of the larger social reality do not allow him in the end to envisage retreat in such absolute terms (111). Thus, the idea of retirement becomes for him an ironic suggestion of hope that he cannot fully realize even as it remains the ideal to which he aspires.

As we have seen with the political discourse surrounding *The Compleat Angler*, sport is a different form of contest from the competitively acrimonious political and business world of the city, court, and parliament, which prompted Walton, Cotton, and other Royalists to escape to the country. Two further fishing poems appeared in Cotton's *Poems on Several Occasions* of 1689, a collection assembled two years after his death in 1687. "The Angler's Ballad" is a largely amusing and lighthearted poem whose trochaic meter allows for a jocular tone, as opposed to the more solemn iamb. The poem's focus broadens in its scope as it proceeds from the basic material concerns of the angler to some larger political assertions. The poem's first half furnishes the reader with a list of the "tools when a man goes a fishing."¹¹ The rod, then the basket, then the pouch, then the boxes and books are each given tribute before any larger theme is presented. But once the materials are in place, the anticipation is that the day of fishing will be lucrative:

Or stream now, or still
 A large Panier will fill,
 Trout and Grailing to rise are so willing;
 I dare venture to say
 'Twill be a bloody day.
 And we all shall be weary of killing. (78)

The attitude expressed in this stanza is one of singular focus on besting the sport, as signified in the tonal shift in the last two lines of this passage. The stated ambition of being "weary" of the kill is an amplification of sporting desire, albeit expressed in violent terms. The bloody

¹¹ Charles Cotton, "The Angler's Ballad," in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: 1689), 76. Hereafter cited in text.

imagery is emblematic of a productive focus, of properly channeling human drives into sporting concerns.

Cotton even goes so far as to suggest that angling can be a patriotic activity. To this end, the setting is important, as the retirement from cares and concerns – “first leave our sorrows behind us” (79) – enabled by immersion in nature is what provides the platform for sporting success:

The Angler is free
 From the cares that degree
 Finds it self with so often tormented;
 And although we should slay
 Each a hundred to day,
 ’Tis a slaughter needs ne’er be repented. (79)

Even though the language of killing pervades the poem, Cotton takes great measures to insist that those who engage in angling activity are in fact “good subjects” (81). The killing is consequence-free in the sense that energies are directed into being a good neighbour and a good citizen through the expression of sporting prowess. In enacting this private performance, one can acquire a “greater good Conscience within,” which is coupled with “Devotion ... To our God and our King” (81). The poem concludes with a wish “For long life to our King *James* the Second,” signaling Cotton’s allegiances politically, which he believes can be manifested in his sport through a proper engagement and attitude (81).

Despite the emphasis on good citizenship, Cotton’s language also exposes his ruthless streak as a fisherman. In his ode “To my dear and most worthy Friend, Mr. Isaac Walton,” which was also published in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1689), Cotton pays tribute to his good friend by longing for the season when they can once again head out to the

country to engage in the sport they hold dear. In the poem they are at that moment suffering a chilly winter, in a “cold and blust’ring Clime,” where they are oppressed by the weather: “The chillest blasts our peace invade.”¹² But Cotton is praying for solace from the winter seasons, and he hopes to reach the month of May so that he can find time to perform his favourite recreational activity with his friend Walton. For Miner, this poem of address embodies the traits of the social mode that distinguish Cavalier poetry generally: “Cotton sounds the true mid-century note. Outside there is cold and suffering, but warm days will come again, God willing, when we shall create a happiness better than that of the tyrannic great. And the happiness will allow us to re-create society, for we shall be together as anglers. The poem is not simply a Royalist attack on the Commonwealth or Protectorate” (4).

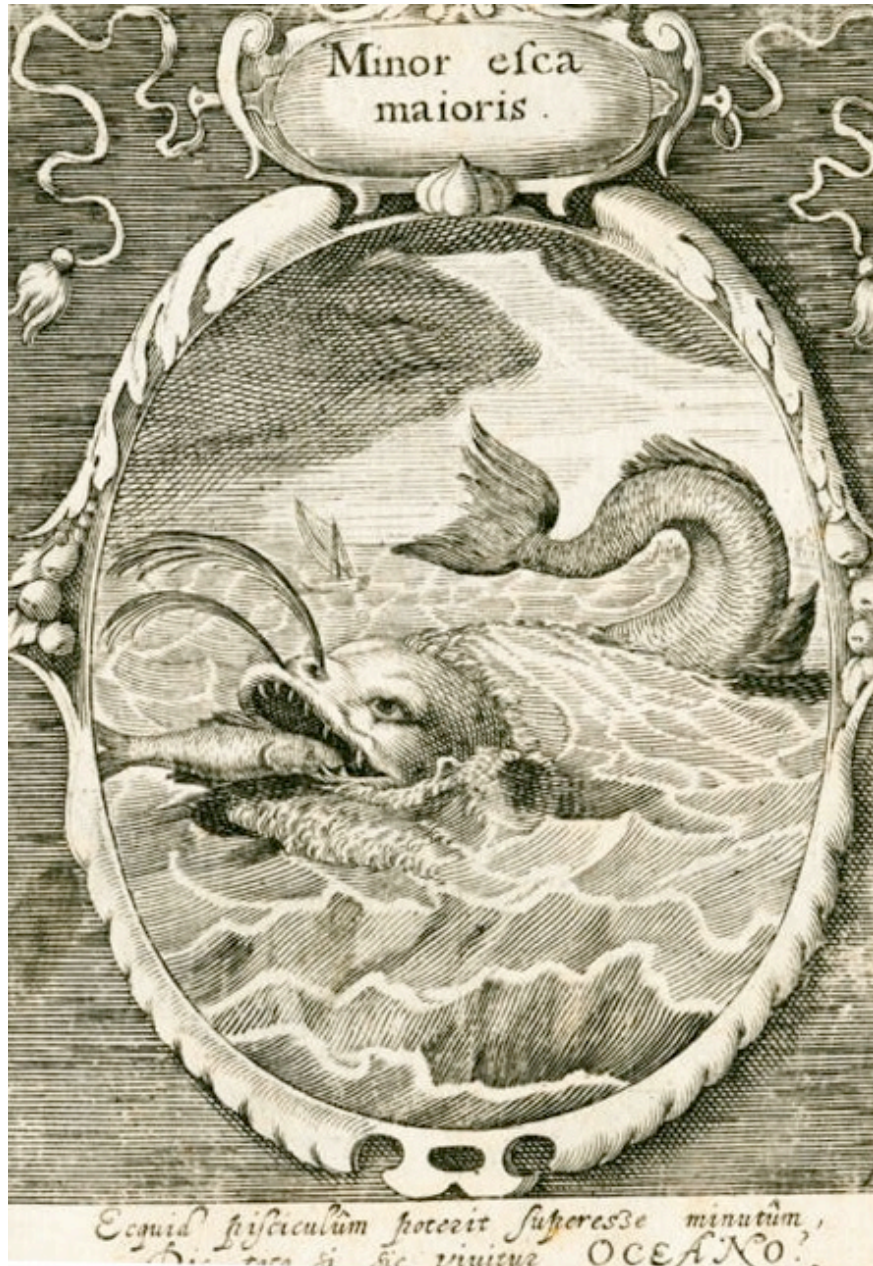
In this poem, Cotton once again expresses himself with the brutal vigour that characterizes “The Angler’s Ballad:” the men will have “Perhaps a week wherein to try / What the best Master’s hand can doe / With the most deadly killing Flie” (115). Here Cotton aligns himself with his master as a specialist whose skill is elevated to the point where, with the “treach’rous Bait,” they can devote themselves fully and with deadly effect, “The Scaly People to betray” (115). The men will thus ruthlessly take their prey from the stream. For Cotton, this is an act that is ethically justified because the fish constitute a worthy sporting foe. Unlike the actions of the posturing and antagonistic men of the city, the sport is honourable. When the action is taken to kill, it is done modestly, with the knowledge that, in nature, one creature invariably kills another, smaller in size: he claims they will “make the preying Trout our prey” (115). The trout are themselves in the course of their day seeking smaller victims, and it is natural they do so.

¹² Charles Cotton, “To my dear and most worthy Friend, Mr. Isaac Walton,” in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: 1689), 114. Hereafter cited in text.

This depiction in the poem calls to mind Peter Isselberg's famous emblem, "Minor esca maioris," from the book of emblems, *Emblemata Politica In Aula Magna Curiae Noribergensis Depicta* (1617).¹³ Isselberg's emblem can be translated into the proverbial saying, "The Big Eat the Small" (fig. 1). Isselberg's emblem is overtly political, as the subjoined verses make clear: "Tell me how any little fish will be able to survive if life in the big ocean is like this. If Harpies thus roam the realm and the entire city, where shall the poor citizen abide?"¹⁴ Cotton similarly politicizes his act of preying by contrasting it to the more damaging confrontations he has observed in human political and social behaviour: "And think our selves in such an hour / Happier than those, though not so high, / Who, like Leviathans, devour / Of meaner men the smaller Fry" (116). The truism that in nature the larger species prey on the smaller is tempered for anglers by the fact they will not act in the deplorable manner of those who are stationed "high" in society, those who devour the men of lesser means for profit or political advantage. These highly-positioned men are portrayed as Leviathans, after the large biblical sea creatures associated with the devil. This image was a commonplace in the literature of the time, after Thomas Hobbes' writing on the state of nature and social contract and John Milton's use of the name to describe the size and power of Satan. The powerful men are the greatest threat to any sense of social order, as they fight with socially and politically destructive abandon, bereft of the nobility Cotton and his friend wish to embody through their sport. For them sporting conduct means friendship, a brotherhood in which any bloodthirsty impulses are channeled productively into a sport that

¹³ Peter Isselberg, "Minor esca maioris," in *Emblemata Politica In Aula Magna Curiae Noribergensis Depicta* (Nuremberg, 1617), 36.

¹⁴ Translation courtesy Prof. Shane Hawkins.



(Fig.1 *Minor esca maioris* by Peter Isselberg, 1617)¹⁵

acts as a domain suitably constituted for man's competitive drives because it is framed with proper rules of conduct.

In equally political fashion, the next poem to make angling its focus, Thomas Heyrick's "A Pindarique Ode in Praise of Angling" (1691), also adopts the "Large fishes"

¹⁵ This image is in the public domain because its copyright has expired.

I an extensive Empire lay

O're all the watry Plain;

And numerous Subjects do our Scepters fear. (103)

Heyrick and his friend are generalists in the fisherman specialization continuum, having established the sport as a regular leisure activity in their lives to the point of using and mastering a variety of techniques. He angles for many different sorts of fish, be they “the bold, the fearful, or the cautious” (103). In fact, Heyrick conceives of his position as ruler of their underwater kingdom. He is set apart from them, standing above an “Empire” over which he asserts his superior position in the Great Chain of Being through his mastery of the proper techniques for each species of fish. He self-assuredly presents a catalogue of fish inhabiting this empire, in rank from the highest – the salmon, trout, and pike – through the middling species – the perch, barbell, chevin – and finally to the lower – the humber, greyling, carp, tench, and eel (103-104). In order to be a good fisherman, one needs to be a good philosopher and understand the hierarchy of creation and the order observable in the water.

With an understanding of the characteristics of each of the fish, Heyrick can modify his own practice to whatever elusive traits the fish might have. He takes pride in this adaptability, showcasing it by emphasizing the different strengths fish might have:

Some that in *Beauty* do exceed;

Some that in *Strength* and some in *Speed*:

And some by Nature arm'd for bloody *Fight*,

Some that in fertile *Mudd* do feed,

Some that in barren *Sands* delight (104)

But just as Walton's Piscator warns of fish that offer the angler "no sport," Heyrick points out the class of fish to be avoided: "The *Rabble* of the watry Clime, / Not worth a fisher's time, ... / Destin'd by Fate the Greater's Prey to be, / I'th' Water's curs'd *Democrasie*, / Are Subjects all of our Dominion" (104-105). We can note here the dual formulation Heyrick holds of the underwater world: it is his "Dominion" over which he can pick and choose which fish will succumb to his angling prowess. Yet, within his rule, the laws governing the interrelations of the rabble fish are of a "curs'd *Democrasie*," in which the lowest form of life is subject to being preyed upon by a stronger one, where even those fish that do not interest the angler as sport are still in peril and subject to predators.

Heyrick's conception of the universe is ordered but unsentimental and hard-edged. Much like Cotton's representation of preying on the prey, he maintains that each creature should respect his place within the established hierarchy. The angler may, thus, help the lesser fish by capturing the "Tyrant of the Flood," the pike, who routinely terrorizes smaller fry (106). The angler steps in to provide some order to the mob rule and violence, as an embodiment of the strongman leader described in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Administering the kingdom of the "watry clime" is an art not unakin to the political. Heyrick signals this formulation by praising an ancient ruler who achieved happiness through public-spirited political intervention: "Of Old – – – / The happy Man, that did a Tyrant slay, / And a slav'd People to their Freedom bring" (106). Virtuous leadership and the defence of liberty are sources of happiness and, by extension, constituents of the happy man (and the sportsman). Heyrick suggests that angling instills in gentlemen this sense of good citizenship and gives them opportunity to exercise it.

For him, angling is a "Bless'd Art! for Contemplation fit," as the undertaking elevates the angler's thought to the height of human understanding: "We to th' Celestial *Cataracts* do

rise, / And visit all the Scaly Race / That streams, above-the-Firmament, do grace” (108). But from this exalted level of speculative thought, the focus necessarily shifts back to the real world, as Heyrick is forced to endure “meaner Subjects” who threaten the pure contentment that he seeks (108). The thought occurs to Heyrick that our society is similar to the world occupied by fish. When he turns his attention back to the human world, he sees much foolishness and a lack of good sense. The fish emblematically reflect the social traits of humans, particularly damaging ones that prevent a peaceable culture:

See *Tyranny* i’ th’ Ravenous *Pyke* is shown,
 I’ th’ Armed *Pearch* *Oppression*,
 And in the Servile Crowd *Passive* Subjection;
 The Servile Crowd, that ne’r of Wrongs complain, ---
 Curs’d *Democratick* State; ---
 That doth no Law or Precepts own,
 But headlong Fury over all doth reign.
 And all the lesser Fry
 Without or Crime, or Cause, must dy,
 Onely because they’r Small and others Great. (108)

This layered and competitive social structure is a source of unease for Heyrick. The passage is an emblematic, rather than a descriptive, treatment of nature. The poem connects the political and sporting realms through emblematic conceptions of fish and their behaviour. Heyrick uses them to take to task the men of the “Deceitful Court” – those who are “*Sycophantick*,” those whom “Riches” or “Honours sway,” or those who take “Revenge” (108). He hopes that such reprehensible men steer clear of his sport. Or, if they do decide to take it up, Heyrick curses hyperbolically that they ought to be punished by catching only a

crocodile or hydra, as they do not merit the riches of mind and spirit that angling can provide. The same disapprobation applies to those who abuse the sport's codes: he who "any Poaching Ways doth use, / Or th' Honour of our Art abuse, / Or with devouring nets doth spoil our sport" (109). Poachers and net fishermen are not sporting in their methods and therefore do not deserve the respect of the sporting gentleman who is only looking for the pleasures of a calm and focused mind.

In contrast to dangerous types of social conflict, "The *Angler's* harmless sport" rises above the social and political disorder that plagues town and city (110). Following Cotton's example of a political characterization of sport, Heyrick offers a proper sporting conduct the angler can direct at the underwater world. Heyrick's ode uses its emblems to assert sporting codes that can stand as ideals of gentlemanly conduct for the social body at large.

In 1880, Thomas Westwood castigated Heyrick for his choice of the Pindaric form, arguing that the sport does not merit this lofty style: "How far the Pindaric Ode can be considered suitable to so simple and rustic a subject, is open to question. Certainly it has led the poet into very extravagant vagaries and much 'high falutin,' for all the gods of Olympus are dragged into his strophes ... [and] it is in figurative Elysian fields that our Pindarick Angler plies his sport."¹⁷ In adopting the Pindaric, Heyrick departs from the Horatian ode usually associated with the piscatorial subject. It is indeed a curious generic choice to attempt so boldly to reproduce the heroic lyric passion of the Pindaric form and adapt it to the angling experience. The effect is highly uncharacteristic of the piscatorial sub-genre this thesis is tracing. But its experiment in expressing a heroic ideal, while employing many of the modal traits so common to the angling tradition (particularly the wish for rural retirement

¹⁷ Thomas Westwood, "An Unknown Angling Poet," in *The Angler's Note-Book and Naturalist's Record* 7 (London: William Satchell, 1880), 101.

and the expression of personal angling codes as a means of articulating one's sporting and personal values), offers a distinctive counterpoint to the larger trajectory of the angling verse of the period. I should note also that Heyrick would not be the last poet to make angling a subject fit for the gods, as we will see in the translation work of Tipping Sylvester.

While still strongly influenced by Walton's neo-stoic sensibility, the poets who wrote on fishing toward the end of the seventeenth century tended toward an Epicurean conception of happiness. Even though Cotton and to some extent Heyrick infuse their writing with a Stoic bias, their interest in angling as a means to achieve a tranquility of mind shines through in their poetry. This became a widely accepted poetic theme as the century drew to a close. J.S.'s *The Innocent Epicure: or, The Art of Angling* (1697, 1713) contains many of the standard motifs present in the previous poems, beginning with the Horatian theme of retirement from the ills of the town: "Ah! Happy they, who free from Vice and Care, / With wise Content improve their Moments here; / Free from the Vices of the noisy Town, / Who study thus, and here to lose their own."¹⁸ But the attitude of the sportsman in J.S.'s poem sets it apart slightly from those that came before it. Thus, it serves as a transitional poem in the Happy Man tradition, and indeed in the angling tradition. A natural theology becomes the justification for retirement, as this poem represents a movement away from explicit or implicit political themes. As a concurrent movement, there is also an evolution away from an emblematic toward an empirical way of seeing the world and expressing it poetically. Røstvig singles out this poem as being among the first to exemplify the characteristics that would come to flourish after the turn to the eighteenth century, when an "appeal to reason came to outweigh any other, and the landscape of retirement was praised primarily because it

¹⁸ J.S., *The Innocent Epicure: or, The Art of Angling. A Poem*, Second Edition (London, 1713), 29. The first edition was 1697. All references are to the 1713 edition. Hereafter cited in text.

offered visible proof of the existence of God by virtue of the ordered beauty everywhere visible” (296).

The Innocent Epicure speaks to this harmony, particularly J.S.’s humble address to the “Celestial Bounty!” to which he owes all his happiness (16). He sees God’s work in all things because he is able to consider rationally his retired setting, unburdened by aspirations to do anything else:

Come here, and see with natural Reason’s Eyes:
Reason, your boast, tho’ an imperfect Guide,
The weighty Controversy shall decide
In beauteous Order see the Waters move
And shew like Motion in the Sphere’s above.
Tell me, could human Force such Skill attain?
And where that fails, sure Chance attempts in vain.
Chance mimicks Art, and Nature helps the Cheat;
But ’tis a different Glory to create. (16)

Reason is “an imperfect Guide” because we cannot understand revealed religious truth through unaided reason alone; we need the Bible and the Church as well. But at least as far as human capacity allows for it, reason is still best for allowing man to perceive that “consistent Beauty rules the whole” (17). Nature is God’s art. The creations made by human hands are certainly not comparable – they can only mimic divine creation – though one can come close to understanding that creation by an exercise of right reason and good sense. Because his Epicureanism is inflected with Christian values, J.S. signals that he is not a Lucretian epicure, someone who is atheistic in orientation. Instead, he is an “innocent epicure,” someone who appreciates the orderly cosmos God has created.

For J.S., reason and precision in the conduct of one's sporting practice is homage to this order. In the first section of the poem, he provides instruction on how best to make a rod, and he emphasizes how crucial it is that proper attention is paid to this enterprise, as sporting success is related directly to the quality of the tools one uses: "Here nice Proportion must be well observ'd, / And exact Beauty through the whole preserv'd; / For though rude Slaves with bungling Labour kill, / True Anglers ought to do't distinguishingly well" (5). Aesthetics need to be observed, and what elevates the angler into a talented practitioner of the sport, separating him from the lower orders who make a mess of the process, is his attention to detail. It is a different form of creation from the one performed by God, but it is still one that signals a division in power that pervades the created world.

For J.S., this hierarchical differentiation occurs throughout society. Part of his objective in the poem, then, is to define his place in society by establishing class distinctions amongst sportsmen, whether among different types of fishermen or in relation to practitioners of other sports. This preoccupation with class first becomes apparent when J.S. suggests that if manufacturing a rod for oneself is too burdensome, an angler should simply go and procure one from a London shop: "A little Change will purchase you your Ease, / And *London* furnish you with just Supplies / ... You buy your Pleasure, and they live by Art" (6). Here a key preparatory aspect of the sport is commodified, and pleasure now to some extent can be bought, in the sense that much of the toil of the activity is passed along to London's fishing shops. This is in fact preferable to making one's own equipment badly, as it is paramount that the angler use the proper gear to preserve the aesthetic harmony of the sport. Only the leisured gentleman (and those with sufficient means) can achieve this harmony.

Set against this ideal are “the Vulgar,” the “needy Lads at *Thames*’s fairest bridge” and “a poor Country Hind,” who serve for J.S. as negative examples in the poem. Their “coarse humble Labour,” consisting of multiple hooks per line, spoils for him the philosophical and aesthetic values of the sport (22-23). Unlike a gentleman who is motivated by leisure and ease, these men are motivated by survival, “Seeking with Life’s Distress, their Livelihood” (23). J.S. stresses the proper use of equipment as being part of a specific aesthetic, befitting a man of skill, refinement, and most certainly, ease: “he that justly plays the Angler’s Part, / In my Opinion, still should thrive by Art” (24). The art is in heightening the challenge so as to gain a measure of satisfaction in overcoming odds in the pursuit, a challenge the man of lesser means has no leisure to pursue in his need for survival. Thus, a class distinction is underscored in the sporting intentions of the practitioner, and the attitude J.S. expresses toward the lower forms is one of condescension, not unlike the agricultural writers of the period who sought to distinguish themselves from the “vulgar” peasant farmers.

In terms of solidifying these class distinctions, J.S. takes care to align gentlemanly performance with the great literature on the sport, which establishes a discourse of refinement for those who partake of it. First, he signals his understanding of the fishing literary tradition by acknowledging the great writers who came before him and serve as inspiration for all who participate in the sport and write on it:

Hail, great Triumvirate of Angling! Hail,
 Ye who best taught, and here did best excel!
 Play here the Gods, play here the Hero’s Part,
 Your selves the Proto-Prophets of the Art;
 My humble Breast with pow’rful Flames inspire,

To teach the World what justly we admire: (12)

A footnote informs us that the “great triumvirate” in this passage consists of Izaak Walton, Charles Cotton, and Robert Venables, the prose authors of the three parts of *The Universal Angler* (1676). Even though a fisherman handicaps himself sportingly according to the rules passed down by J.S.’s literary predecessors on the sport, such handicaps need not result in catching fewer fish. J.S. boasts that “if more fatal Methods you would try,” then you should “attend Experience, and I / Will Art and Nature interweave, disclose, / And teach thee Lessons never taught in Prose” (25). The prose he is referring to here is the proliferation of sporting manuals appearing at the time, above which J.S. elevates his own poetic interweaving of nature’s truths with sporting instruction. This is not to denigrate the great triumvirate who had also written largely in prose; he singles out their inspirational and instructive force above that on offer in the pale imitations that followed.

In this way, J.S. confidently privileges poetic form as an instructional means for sharing his knowledge and values. In taking this approach, he is elevating the sport as worthy of being treated by the muses as a topic for poetic consideration; his sport now runs in a sense as a parallel art to poetry. He goes so far as to claim boldly that he was fated to be a poet: “at my Birth, the waiting Nine ordain’d / These Truths should Lawrels to my Brows command” (25). The implication is that his poetic endeavour may even place him alongside the other great angling writers, if not surpassing them, because of his prowess in verse, the more elevated form than prose. “Less artful Ways, no Doubt, will much prevail,” J.S. concedes, but he is aspiring to a higher level of literary engagement, separating himself and his readership from the general level of discourse, which is transmitted through an oral fishing tradition or in basic prose manuals: “But these are common Ways, which all Men

teach, / And therefore far beneath the Muses Reach” (27). As a gentleman, he is exclusively qualified to engage both fields – to write in an elevated form on the art of angling.

For much of the poem, he remains preoccupied with his status as sporting poet. As he describes himself whiling away the hottest and most humid part of the day, an indolence that J.S. decries as the part of his sport least worthy of praise, he begins to question whether indeed angling measures up to the lofty standards he claims for it. To answer his own question he compares angling with other sports. First, he ponders whether hunting with horses and hounds measures up to the virtues of the angling experience. The benefits of fresh air in a rural landscape are certainly equaled by hunting, but what stands against it is that there is considerable risk of injury. Much the same pertains to the horse racer, as the same dangers of horsemanship apply. In addition, J.S. mocks the event as a burlesque, exemplified in the jockey’s outfit: “You, the *Jack-Pudding* of an Emp’rick’s Play / So have I seen your *Guinea* Monkeys drest / In ticking Trowsers, and in Body-Vest” (32). In its conventions and practices, the sport is “near to Buffoonry,” a far cry from the refined manner of the gentleman angler (32).

J.S. saves his strongest rebuke for the sport of bowling, depicting the practitioners of that sport as oafish and debased. He creates the caricature of “*Bobadill*, accouter’d for the Weather, / So plump, his Bowl and he might rowl together” (33). This man is just as concerned with dulling his senses as with the game itself, the very opposite of the sober angler. For men such as Bobadill, “the main Import, is Drink and Meat. / Vice, not Content’s, the Burden of their Thought, / And all their Rapture ends in Pissing out” (34). This burlesque portrait is an obvious converse of the angling ethos: “No Gluttony the Angler asks or knows; / ’Tis Use the sacred Rules for eating draws” (34). The angler sports only what he needs to eat and returns all that he does not; pleasure as the primary motivator does

not license gluttony or unbounded self-indulgence. Rather, neo-Epicureans such as J.S. believe that the greatest good is to seek modest pleasures in order to attain a state of tranquility and an absence of bodily pain. This is equipoise achieved through knowledge of the workings of the world and a curbing of desires. The combination of these two aims represents happiness in its highest form.

J.S. further believes we should be wary of a man whose fleeting interest in the sport is antithetical to the methodical and continual development of his skills. Described as “the busy Searcher,” this figure moves rapidly from activity to activity without devoting himself in a manner that would allow for the insight the innocent epicure derives from the sport. His “sole Motive is a Sate of Lust” – he is a person driven by passion rather than being in control (37). This motive is not authentic, and so such men will not reap the “sincere” rewards enjoyed by the angler: “Their Talk, their Actions, and their Wishes, shew / Their Search is not sincere, nor Pleasure true. / But the wise Angler quits all other Joys, / Because not solid, or so just as his” (37). We can interpret the word “solid” as meaning “lasting” and the word “just” as meaning “right” or “correct” in these lines. The angler is loyal to his sport because he applies this understanding to it. Principally, for J.S., the angler is loyal to nature, particularly as his reason allows him to perceive it best. The sport is rational – “nought arrives by Chance” – and by following reason in the mechanics of the sport itself, the dutiful angler can get closer to God: “Thus led by *Nature*’s Will, he finds her Lord’s, / His Reason finds, and he with that accords” (38). There is a design in things, and in performing the sport properly J.S. finds agreement with it.

Three years after J.S.’s *Innocent Epicure*, John Whitney published *The Genteel Recreation; Or, the Pleasure of Angling* (1700). While Whitney is likewise influenced by epicurean ideals, he also professes himself charmed by the thought of “minds sedate,”

gesturing toward a more stoic conception of retirement away from the city in the mould of Walton and Cotton.¹⁹ Here, as in *The Innocent Epicure*, the politics of sport intersect with class issues, as the poem opens by affirming that land ownership signals a sporting right that distinguishes men of property. The happy man is one who enjoys the inheritance of an estate: “Happy’s the Man blest with a moderate state, / His Grandsires Land devolv’d to him by fate” (1). Such a man is in a position to enjoy appropriately his self-contained garden, wherein “He gently can survey his Meads, and be / Spectator of his own felicity” (1). Unlike J.S. in *The Innocent Epicure*, who regards retirement as a means to observe the order of God in nature, Whitney takes a more self-regarding view, focusing on his own pleasures within the sporting realm, rather than on God’s ultimate design. He pursues his sporting travels through the countryside in accordance with an elevated code of values in line with a specialist orientation in the sport, and his attitude features a more expansive fishing brotherhood than J.S. allows.

The poem takes us on a tour through Whitney’s favourite fishing spots in Surrey and Kent, so the poem partly takes on the form of a travelogue, featuring his advice for each spot he visits. For example, he says of Shorham in Kent, “use your skill and choicest care, / Both with the worm and single hair, / And never doubt for pleasure most abounding there. / At twenty places where the River turns, / Is sport sufficient both for fly and worms” (16). In his travels, he moves progressively downstream toward the city, which is associated with subsistence methods of fishing (fishing as trade rather than as recreation). In particular, when he reaches the Thames estuary, he advises us to steer clear: at Dartford, in the northwest corner of Kent, “pack up your Tools and homeward high, / For sweet *Darent* by going

¹⁹ John Whitney, *The Genteel Recreation: Or, the Pleasure of Angling, a Poem. With a Dialogue between Piscator and Corydon* (London: 1700), 2. Hereafter cited in text.

thither, / Flows into *Thames* and runs the Lord knows whether” (16). In his progression toward the city, he hints at an opposition between the country and the commerce he observes nearer the town.

But the manner in which Whitney engages with less likely fishermen in his travels is more gracious, engaging, and considerate than the condescension we see from J.S. Upon seeing a “Rustick Clown” on the Medway, Whitney delights in observing him try his primitive methods of catching a fish (7). He is amazed to see him with nothing but “A bush pul’d from the hedg, his Angling rod” (7). Whitney is incredulous at the thought that someone might succeed with such equipment: “Heaven bless me when such tackling can prevail” (7). But sure enough, fortune shines on the rustic man, as he pulls two bleaks, a roach, and a perch in the brief time Whitney observes him. The rustic’s industry in his sport compels a spirit of generosity in Whitney, who promptly presents him the gift of “An Angle, Rod and Line the best I have, / And shew’d him where good baits to find / A Cow-turd, ten days old” (8). Irrespective of social rank, Whitney respects prowess and seeks to educate and instruct others in improving their sporting knowledge.

This respect extends likewise to an encounter with “A reverend Matron” he notices at a gentle stream (17). The woman goes about her sport in unassuming fashion, which earns her Whitney’s admiration, for she appears as proficient in her manner as any of her male counterparts: “Silent she goes and takes a shady stand, / Watchful her eye and steady was her hand, / For well she knew them both for to command” (17). In particular, Whitney admires her technique, which consists of employing a worm as bait, yet she chooses not to use tar to scour the worm, an old technique believed to make the worm more attractive. Her success speaks for itself, for when the sun begins to go down, “she packs up her Tools and homeward goes. / Well Laden with a Brace or more, / The just expence of but one only hour” (18). Here

it is Whitney who learns from observation, even though he is already an experienced angler himself, as he is forever a student of the sport willing to discover new methods, regardless of their origin. Watching her allows him to consider his own views toward scouring the worm, and he elects to stay away from tar. Simply contemplating this course of action inspires him, in fact: “Fraught with her luck some new designs, / Caus’d me next morn to rise betimes” (18). Watching others succeed excites Whitney, further compelling him to hone his own techniques by learning from others.

His fishing attitude is also one of humility when it comes to the prey itself. Whitney acknowledges that the real pleasure of the activity is in the pursuit – in the planning and preparation. No matter how accomplished one becomes as an angler, there will always be times when the fish eludes capture. At such times, there is a proper code of conduct; the angler should absorb such defeats with dignity:

Sometime an eager Fish,
Frustrates the long expected wish
By breaking of his Line,
Yet he’ll not Curse or Swear,
Like those in passion are... (3-4)

Once again, the culpable passions aroused by failure are absent in the experienced angler, who maintains calm and acknowledges that anglers will not be successful at every opportunity. Indeed, Whitney chooses to learn from his failures, thinking these “no disgrace,” and sets out to improve his techniques so that his success rate will improve in the future (3).

Whitney’s loss of his catch is a recurrent motif in *The Genteel Recreation*. He maintains his sporting identity independently of the final outcome. Upon seeing “Two *Carp*s

that were of mighty size,” he sets out to make one of them “his prize” (19). He describes in vivid detail how he dispatches his finest worm, conceals himself behind a shady oak, and holds himself in expectation and excitement as his prey approaches. Sure enough, one of the carps finds the bait alluring – “He seem’d to smile with expanding Jaws” – and hooks itself on his bait (19). But as soon as the fish realizes it has been ensnared, it jerks away and escapes with no fuss, breaking the line and taking the worm and hook with it. Whitney’s reaction is typically philosophical: “Vext, no we Anglers often loose our prize, / Compleat let all our Tackling be and most precise, / For Fishes prove sometimes more wise then we, / As by this late ensample all may see” (20). The angler can prepare himself in the sport as thoroughly as possible but still fall short of success. This happens to all anglers, even the most practiced, veteran sportsmen. What matters most, as Whitney’s behaviour shows, is maintaining the proper attitude and deportment when such setbacks occur. He is relaxed and sensible, and this is reflected in his style as a poet, which is more homely and less polished in diction. He is always learning his art, and in his poetry he is unafraid to place his failures alongside his successes as equal parts of the sport. This for Whitney becomes the ideal attitude for reaching the full heights of pleasure in angling. There is pleasure to be experienced even when the angler loses a catch, a pleasure that comes in the form of the lessons learned – in terms of techniques to be sharpened and in terms of fostering the understanding that nature can always confound man. Just as the angler will never fully succeed in his sport, he can never fully dominate the natural world and is always subject to its forces. The true sporting gentleman appreciates his successes but acknowledges the fleeting character of them as well.

Whitney seeks constantly to find the proper division between brutal efficiency in taking prey, in the manner of the rustics who poach large quantities, and a more sporting

conduct through which nature's balance can be maintained and preserved. Of course, this is a common feature of a more advanced fishing career. Whitney's search for balance is displayed in his own internal conflict over his principal irritant, the minnow that nibbles at his bait, ruining it before larger, more desirable fish can find it. He searches for ways to avoid the problem, even contemplating a purge of the pest. This tension between good sporting practice and success against inefficient means informs his writing on the sport: "Angler, bestow some pains, direct my Pen / How to avoid these Plagues which then / Requires our cheifest [sic] skill and all our care, / To make our *Recreation* supream fair" (53). In fashioning a fishing manual of sorts in *The Genteel Recreation*, Whitney looks for guidance from other fishermen on how best to establish a sporting practice that is fair for both sportsman and prey. This desire for fair play and a generous and pleasant attitude in recreation are the signs of a true technique-setting specialist. In the short timeframe of the 1690s, we see several distinctive examples represented poetically of advanced angling sportsmen, each articulating a distinct angling code. Combined, they form a rich picture of the values and principles that define the sport, and this era constitutes perhaps the high point in the long literary history of the sport.

Chapter 3. Eighteenth-Century Translations, Imitations, and Experiments

Throughout the seventeenth century the focus of the Happy Man's sporting practice was a search for ideals of contemplative escape, or for a vision of God exhibited in nature, or indeed for the self-centred bliss of the epicure. But in the new century, sporting verse came increasingly to mediate the tensions between the sportsman's reason and his passions. As we have seen, J.S. arrived at this view in some ways. The angling verse of the last decade of the seventeenth century reflects this shift in part through a more general transition from a poetry of emblemization to a poetry of description grounded in an empirical view of perception and understanding.

There were very few original verse compositions devoted exclusively to angling between 1700 and 1750.¹ Whereas the seventeenth century saw an upsurge in such poetry, eighteenth-century writers tended to avoid the sport of angling as a vehicle for addressing the preoccupations of the age. In terms of the fishing texts, Gingrich finds little creativity in the eighteenth century: "Qualitatively," he notes, "the eighteenth century was a let down from the seventeenth, both in terms of literary and instructional value. But for the poet John Gay and the two Bowlkers, father and son, it's hard to name eighteenth century angling figures of any real stature."² The Bowlkers he names are the father Richard and son Charles, who co-wrote the prose manual *The Art of Angling Improved in All Its Parts*; the first edition appeared in 1758, and it was reprinted at least ten more times in the hundred years following

¹ One small exception is the short lyric "Of the Seasons Proper for Angling," which appeared anonymously in *A Collection of Miscellany Poems, Never Before Publish'd* (London: 1737), 239-240. This brief poem celebrates the act of fishing during each of the seasons but has little to recommend it for either its angling content or its poetic value.

² Arnold Gingrich, *The Fishing in Print: A Guided Tour Through Five Centuries of Angling Literature* (New York: Winchester Press, 1974), 53.

that first edition. As for John Gay, I will examine his *Rural Sports* (1713, 1720) in the hunting section of this thesis, since that poem features sections on both angling and hunting, and some further contextualization of the latter sport is required in order to discuss the poem fully. In the hunting section of my thesis, I will also trace how the Happy Man tradition plays out in the eighteenth century. It is the hunting poetry of the new century that extends the thematic and formal trends of *beatus ille* poetry.

While Gingrich disparages the content of the fishing literature of the eighteenth century, there were still a small number of angling poems that should not be ignored in this study, as they are illustrative of some significant sporting and literary inclinations of the eighteenth century. This chapter will look at two examples that further illuminate the points of generic resemblance among angling poems and confirm how established the tradition had become.

The first instance is Simon Ford's Latin poem "Piscatio," which was translated no fewer than three times in the middle of the eighteenth century. "Piscatio" was composed for the 1692 edition of the *Musarum Anglicanarum Analecta*, an exercise in which students and professors of Oxford University collaborated on a collection of Latin verse, later called the *Musae Anglicanae* and edited by Joseph Addison. The three different ways "Piscatio" was translated (or imitated) point to the adaptability of the angling themes in addressing various social, political, and even religious issues the poets were considering well into the eighteenth century. These translations also amount to a tribute to what I call the golden age of fishing verse. The last half of the seventeenth century was this golden age, which culminated in a neo-Epicurean ethos of retirement that made angling one of its representative emblems. Eighteenth-century poets could look back to this era for a considerable tradition of fishing verse that celebrated the sport and promoted its virtues of gentlemanly behaviour.

The second occurrence I examine might be considered a case study in the piscatory sub-genre: Moses Browne's attempted intervention in the eighteenth-century critical debate about the pastoral with his *Piscatory Eclogues* (1729) and the response this occasioned from Thomas Scott in "The Art of Angling: Eight Dialogues in Verse" (1773). In the *Piscatory Eclogues*, Browne attempts a divergence of sorts from the established generic standard, forged in the second half of the seventeenth century, of employing a mixture of georgic instruction with pastoral play in angling verse. As a means of broadening out the subjects fit for pastoral, Browne endeavoured to write an avowedly pastoral angling poem. Browne's experiment is worth examining here in order to test the generic hypothesis I have drawn to this point in my discussion, that angling poetry as it was understood in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries required georgic modal traits in order to express the poet's practical knowledge and experience of the sport. Scott's subsequent satirical characterization of Browne's effort, a poem that itself pushes the boundaries of accepted piscatory generic standards, further tests that observation.

But to begin, I will examine the translations of "Piscatio" that hearken back to the golden age of angling verse. The first translation into English of Simon Ford's poem was by Henry Travers in his modest collection, *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (1731). Following in the meditative spirit of the angling poetry we have examined so far, "The Pleasure of Angling; Translated from the *Musae Anglicanae*" extols an escape from the concerns of the city and the trappings of modern life. In the country the angler can retire to a haven in which "His angling Sports suspend his Care, / He finds a grateful Silence there."³ In an enthusiastic early-morning departure for his favoured location, the speaker treads an

³ Henry Travers, "The Pleasure of Angling; Translated from the *Musae Anglicanae*," in *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* (London: 1731), 97. Hereafter cited in text.

idyllic landscape, described in very generalized terms, and revels in the splendor of the scene, which acts on all his senses:

Around the matin Birds he hears,
 And *Sylvan* Music glads his Ears.
 The genial Sweets, which Morning show'rs
 Draw from the fragrant Bloom of Flow'rs,
 Impearl'd in balmy Dews exhale,
 And round him breathe th'odorous Gale,
 While pleas'd he treads the furrow'd Plains,
 And meditates Iambic Strains. (98-99)

We can see in the final two lines of this passage an explicit gesture toward Virgil's association of the furrowed fields with the production of poetry. But the sensibility is one of leisure, not labour, as the business at hand is angling for sport, which modifies the nature of the endeavour being performed. Following the passages descriptive of the natural scene, we are thrust into the fishing action with a sequence in which the angler tries a series of flies and baits in attempting to catch his prey. In passing the hours in this manner, he achieves an introspective peace of mind, which then allows his attention to reach outward. He remarks that he would like to be joined by a "lov'd Companion," as this form of homosocial bonding would add joy to his sporting venture (101). The observable progression is that the individual's productive leisure allows him to internalize the nature with which he is engaging, before he can then share his happiness and experience with others.

The second of the translations followed closely after Travers's. In 1733, Tipping Sylvester paid tribute to Ford's poem with his own version called *Piscatio*. It is a much longer poem that does more than Travers's version to capture the hedonistic spirit of the

1690s, in which the drive to seek happiness in the present merges with the classical refrain of the *beatus vir*. The main focus is a praise of poetry itself, which runs concurrently with a consideration of angling. In fact, poetry steps in during the speaker's period of patiently hoping for his prey to bite: in the execution of the rituals and practices, the sportsman "Improve[s] by Sport, and moralize[s] in Song," even when he lacks success in the act of fishing itself.⁴ The Popean echo of this line is suggestive of Sylvester's purpose in writing poetry and engaging in sport. Pope had written, "That not in fancy's Maze he wander'd long, / But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song."⁵ As a youth, Pope had composed fanciful poems, but, believing the world needed correction, he later "stoop'd" to satire in his *Moral Essays*. Sylvester equates the lessons learned in sport with Pope's didactic purpose. But he prefers to engage in a type of artifice in his poetry and his sport; he eschews snares and nets, preferring instead "the artful, to the gainful Toil," where "'Tis not enough to catch the shining Prey, / But to deceive the Wantons as they stray" (4, 5).

A flight of imagination diverts Sylvester from the inevitable periods when he is not having much success in catching his prey. Even though the sport can be tedious at times, imagination is still productive, particularly when it is exercised in an idyllic setting. The god Phoebus comes to the rescue, arresting the poet's idle thoughts. As a means of exploring the relation between the parallel arts of fishing and poetry, he calls on the muses, the "sacred *Nine*," to guide him in mythologizing the origins of the fisher's art (4). Even in the action of mythmaking, the conception of progress through a fishing career is apparent, refigured historically and mythologically: "Like other Arts, This by degrees became / From plain and

⁴ Tipping Sylvester, *Piscatio, or, Angling. A Poem. Written Originally in Latin by S. Ford, D.D. and Inscribed to Arch-Bishop Sehdon* (London: 1733), 3. Hereafter cited in text.

⁵ Alexander Pope, "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 197-211, ll. 340-341.

simple to be great in Fame: / Yet plain and simple, as it first was known, / The Muse will trace the Seeds, from which 'tis grown" (5). The recounting of fishing's invention and development from the "plain and simple" recapitulates generically and mythologically the sportsman's growth from mere basics to advanced techniques and knowledge. But, as in Heyrick's "Pindarique Ode," the heroic presentation, as the gods enact the sporting skills, creates a different effect from what we have seen in the other poems.

Sylvester makes Calliope, the muse of epic, the initial focus of his tale and his source of fishing and poetic inspiration. She decides one day to seek out a "lighter Pastime," and as she puts down her lyre she observes some fish devouring smaller prey in the fountain of Aganippe at the base of Mount Helicon (5). She is fascinated by the engagement and is inspired to turn their credulity against them and tempt them for sport. For her purpose, she needs a rod, and using her own hair for a line, she meditates on its seductive powers: "To *Gods and Men* These Hairs have Slav'ry brought / 'These too, said She, shall give Me still to reign, / And stretch my Conquests o'er the *liquid Main*" (6). We can observe here a primal temptation scene, in which the hair triggers the downfall of yet another race of creatures. Attaching a "Reptile" as bait to her hook, she casts her line, and the effect is almost instantaneous: one fish in particular, "Loaded with Pain He bears the Prize away, / Tells His Success with many a wanton Wreath, / Revels in Rapine, and enjoys his Death" (7). Interestingly, the focus in these lines is on the plight of the fish, particularly on its complicity in its own capture. This is a departure from most other fishing poems, which typically name and classify the fish only to hierarchize them within a vast cosmology.

Though the fish that Calliope catches turns out to be small in size, she delights in its capture. In fact, she rejoices with the other muses at the spectacle. It is the challenge of the sport, rather than the prey itself, that elicits this approbation: "Th' *Aonian Sisters* mutual Joys

impart, / Admire the Prey, but more applaud the Art” (7). The aestheticization of the activity is most important here. As is commonly the case in the progression of the fishing career, the fisher seeks a more difficult prey once a taste for the catch has been established – the manner of the catch is the attractive and exciting part of the sport. This preoccupation is certainly the case with Calliope. She then proceeds to search for “a Nobler Fish of stately Size,” as the art and endeavour of catching a greater prey induces an even greater display of skill (7). But such is Calliope’s modest ability at this stage of her fishing career that the next fish she pursues unfortunately escapes her capture: the slippery prey “quits the straitned Pin” (8). As the prey becomes more challenging, the stakes rise, and the greater the achievement or disappointment when the skill encounters the trial.

From afar, the great Apollo witnesses the incident and quickly volunteers to help his sisters in the pursuit of greater prey, claiming the sisters do not possess the proper “Arms” for such a capture (8). In a slightly mock-heroic or burlesque characterization, Apollo is described in his undertaking as a “projecting *God*,” fitting the eighteenth-century conception of a projector, a person who pursues proposals for applying knowledge. The manner in which he assembles his instruments displays his understanding, and the description of his construction of the rod is a richly allusive and periphrastic passage, itself a conspicuous display of poetic art. Apollo makes use of several strands of hair from the great mythical winged-horse Pegasus, which “with skilful Hand the Artist roll’d, / And wove a curious Thong of various Fold. / In gradual Decrease the Links combine / By Knots, which never flip, to form the Line” (9). The fact that the god is willing to stoop to artisanship in building a rod is significant; manual labour is here represented as noble and heroic. Apollo makes himself into an artist, as in a maker of tools for a practical purpose. The sport, even in its

minutiae, is sanctioned by the gods and therefore should be interesting to all. The main purpose of the poem is therefore to legitimize the sport, indeed to apotheosize it.

After fixing a hook with care and applying another reptile as bait, Apollo creeps to his desired location and submerges the bait with a technique that gives it “vital motions,” a lifelike movement to fool his prey (10). His techniques of deception are soon rewarded. What follows is a match of wills, as the much larger and more cunning fish “tries a thousand Arts to quit his hold” (11). Tellingly, “*Fortune*” is unable to swing the decision one way or the other, as the “watchful *Phoebus* plays the skilful Part, / Opposing Fraud to Fraud, and Art to Art” (12). Clearly, it is a contest of arts between the two rivals, the fisherman Apollo and the fish who has found itself ensnared on his line, each with strengths and abilities pushed to the limits of talent and capacity: “Ten times the *Fish* attempts his Flight in vain, / Ten times the *God* recalls him back again” (12). Finally Apollo proves too much for his prey, as the fish is gradually pulled ashore. It turns out to be a “cunning” barbell (13). The great struggle provided by this species in its fight for survival takes on legendary proportions in the poem, reinforcing the famous sporting axiom that it takes a great opponent to bring out the best in a competitor: “No Captive ever greater Glory gave. / So strong he tugs, so subt’y plays his Part, / He quite exhausts the wary Fisher’s Art” (13). Indeed, all a sportsman can ask for is that he is provided with a challenge to both his abilities and his will.

Once this eminent challenge has been overcome, the great Apollo develops a taste for the sport. He therefore seeks other tests of his aptitude, and to do so he advances in his career by experimenting and travelling in search of tests: “Flush’d with Success, the fair *Latona*’s Son / Improves the Conquest, he before had won: / Presaging Sport, he visits other Shores, / Where swell’d *Enipeus* with his Torrent roars” (13). It is notable that he anticipates the great sporting contests he will encounter; this is the path to further greatness in the art. What

follows is a catalogue of the great rivers of classical Greece in which Apollo plies his talents. We are also given a catalogue of the types of fish he tests himself against, ranging from the more easily-defeated – the gudgeon, roach, and perch – through the mid-level prey – the bream, carp, and tench – and finally to the great conquests that bring him true glory in their capture – the trout, pike, and salmon. The overriding impression we are given of Apollo in his fishing exploits is that “He shews a Virtue, equal to each case, / And thrives by Patience, tho’ confin’d in Place” (17). Apollo is adaptable and patient: these are the greatest assets an angler can possess.

After the lengthy episode of Apollo the angler, the poem provides a brief coda voiced by the middling poet-fisherman as he ruminates on what he has learned from his flights of imagination. He characterizes himself as still “in sullen Mood,” though he finds himself “Content to take the fairer Sportsman’s Part” (17). This subtle shift in attitude is crucial to his conception of the sport: even though his lack of success has soured his mood, he nevertheless prefers to pursue the fish honourably. He will forever be “Railing at Nets, and the vile Poacher’s Art, / These blaming, that so rarely came the Prey” (17). He maintains a humourous self-perception, as his frustration in sport is part of his experience, but his poetry assists him in overcoming his disappointments. His standards remain elevated, and he reflects finally that, even if he does not succeed in the day’s fishing, he is able at least to put his thoughts in verse. This is a noble action worthy of the great sporting tradition of which he is now a part, one that originated with the gods Calliope and Apollo.

Appended to Sylvester’s translation is a brief poem simply titled “Ode.” It expresses his primary emotional and intellectual outlook, a fitting afterpiece to a poem that mythologizes the sport’s origins. It opens in recognizable Horatian fashion:

Happy, who rules with skilful Wile,

The Bait-suspending Wand,
 The wat'ry Natives to beguile.
 Which gaping shun his Hand.
 Untainted Joys his Heart dilate,
 No dismal Griefs invade;
 He's safe from Courtier's friendly Hate,
 Or Honour's doubtful Trade. (18)

The thematic indication in this introductory passage revisits the Happy Man tradition I have been exploring in this thesis. “The Sylvan Scenes, and Pastures green” (20) provide a pastoral backdrop for the fisherman to apply a list of reptile baits to his hook, from the grasshopper to the fly, snail, caterpillar, red worm, and even the wasp. He finds pleasure in devotion to these basics of the art, whether in solitary introspection, as “He muses o’er the Day,” or accompanied with a friend, where they take turns casting and praising their art (22). There is innocence and simplicity in his pleasure. When the day is done, they return home, share a feast, and enjoy an undisturbed sleep, content in how they have engaged in their pastime.

Even though Sylvester’s “Piscatio” is said to be a translation, the *Biblioteca Piscatoria*’s assessment of this work points to the license Sylvester took to expand on his sporting and poetic themes: “Sylvester’s is more an adaptation than a translation.”⁶ By comparison, the final of the three translations of Ford’s Latin original earns praise from the same publication as being “in some respects superior” to Sylvester’s effort (165). Published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1765, the poem is entitled “A translation of Ford’s

⁶ Thomas Westwood and Thomas Satchell, *Biblioteca Piscatoria: A Catalogue of Books on Angling, The Fisheries, and Fish Culture* (London: W. Satchell, 1883), 165. Hereafter cited in text.

‘Piscatio,’ an imitation of Horace’s *Beatus ille*, and applied to fishing. By a Young Gentleman at School.”⁷ While I can agree that the poem might serve as a more direct translation, it lacks Sylvester’s adroit linkage of an elaborate neo-classical poetic idiom with an account of the “progress” of an angler through the stages of facility outlined earlier in this thesis. The translation by this “Young Gentleman at School” is closer to Travers’s meditation on the sport. I should note also how fitting it is that Ford’s poem should have been thrice translated. Røstvig observes that “The neoclassical *beatus ille*-poem can be said to have served much the same purpose as the Renaissance pastoral: it provided suitable subject-matter for the young apprentice poet” (165). The young poet in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, like Travers and even Ford himself in the writing the original, found suitable and well-trodden subject matter in the form of “Piscatio.”

In the young gentleman’s version we see the main “points of resemblance,” to once again use Fowler’s term, that distinguish the fishing poetry of the time as a sub-genre. The first is the evocation of the classic refrain of the *beatus vir*, as the poem opens with its familiar refrains: “Happy the man whose skilful hand / Commands the trembling rod and fly, / Who well decoys the scaly band / The sweet deceitful bait to try.” The next point is the contrast between city and country: the poet shuns “the courtier’s envious hate,” turning instead to “*Thames, or Trent, on foot / ... Whilst chirping birds his ears salute / In an harmonious pleasing strain.*” As always, the escape to a natural setting is what allows for his enjoyment, but also for his moral and poetic reflection, expressed here in a salute to Virgil’s conceit of the poet-ploughman: “Whilst with uneven step he treads / The furrows, like *Iambic lay, / He sees the cattle in the meads / Employ their time in sportive play.*” In this

⁷ Anon., “A translation of Ford’s ‘Piscatio,’ an imitation of Horace’s *Beatus ille*, and applied to fishing. By a Young Gentleman at School,” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 35 (1765), 184.

passage, it is the cattle who have embraced “sportive play,” and their example propels the fisherman in his own understanding of how his play and his poetry run parallel to each other. The next point of similarity is that the sportsman finds equal measures of joy in solitude – “Himself supplies the place of friends / In solitude he finds delight” – and in company: “Or if companions there he finds, / By turns the tap’ring rod they throw.”

The major point of departure in this last version of “Piscatio,” however, comes in the gesture of praising God both for the delightful state of the natural setting and for the internal strength of the fishermen: “The fishers do not silent stand, / Like the dumb fish for whom they wait; / They praise the God by whose command / The world they view was form’d compleat.” Unlike the other two translations, which implicate the Greek gods in the setting and activity – particularly in Sylvester’s adaptation, which develops the conceit that the sport originated with the classical deities – this poem offers a tribute to the Christian God and the nation’s king; in the poet’s engagement of the sport, “No word prophane approaches near, / Which to their God or sov’reign wrongs.” This formulation infers the existence and strength of God from the natural beauty of nature. The poem serves as another example of the adaptability of the fishing poem through the period of the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, as the different religious, political, and social leanings of the various fishermen poets could be filtered through the piscatory sub-genre.

While the three translations of “Piscatio” highlight just how closely allied fishing poetry remained to a Horatian model, one writer in particular saw the tradition of piscatory literature as a useful means of taking part in a contemporary critical debate regarding the nature of pastoral. For Moses Browne, the definition of pastoral was at stake when he wrote *Piscatory Eclogues* in 1729, a collection of eclogues in which fishing is used as backdrop to the engagements of its characters, who range from singing country swains, to a spurned

lover, to commercial fishermen.⁸ Accompanying this poem is “an Essay in Defence of this Undertaking,” in which Browne vindicates his use of fishermen and fishing settings for the pastoral form.

The grounds for fishing’s importance in the pastoral debate of the eighteenth century descend from the experiment undertaken by the Italian Renaissance poet Jacopo Sannazaro in his *Eclogae Piscatoriae* (1526) to create an avowedly pastoral text in which the primary characters were fishermen at sea. Sannazaro’s endeavour eventually gave rise to a small tradition of pastoral poetry in English that was likewise set at sea with fishermen taking part. The notable examples in English are Phineas Fletcher’s *Piscatory Eclogues* (1633) and William Diaper’s *Nereides: or Sea-Eclogues* (1712). However, as Nicholas D. Smith has persuasively argued, because of the remarkable influence of Walton’s *Compleat Angler*, which ushered in a new strain of fishing literature, the course of the piscatorial pastoral tradition in England shifted away from a focus on fishing as livelihood at sea. According to Smith, *The Compleat Angler* was “central to the formulation of conflicting eighteenth-century definitions” of piscatorial eclogues and pastorals.⁹ Walton’s work, through its sheer popularity and applicability to the contemporary angling experience, supplanted the model supplied by Sannazaro. Thus, beyond the sporting dimensions the *Angler* offered, which I have examined above, it was also important as an instance of generic mixing. Subsequent to Walton, georgic and pastoral modal features conflate to some degree, usually leaning heavily toward the georgic in what Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor call the “georgicization” of

⁸ Moses Browne, *Piscatory Eclogues: An Essay to Introduce New Rules, and New Characters, Into Pastoral. To Which is Prefix’d, A discourse in Defence of this Undertaking* (London: 1729). The third edition was “corrected, and very much improved,” and published as *Angling Sports: in Nine Piscatory Eclogues. A New Attempt To Introduce a More Pleasing Variety and Mixture of Subjects and Characters into Pastoral* (London: 1773). Hereafter cited in text. All references are to the 1773 edition.

⁹ Nicholas D. Smith, “Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Eclogae Piscatoriae* (1526) and the ‘Pastoral Debate’ in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Studies in Philology* 99 (2002): 432.

pastoral, as the fishing poems surveyed so far have borne out.¹⁰ This, characteristically, is what defines the genre of angling literature, even though the debate on piscatory pastorals continued right through the eighteenth century.

In this debate, prominent writers argued about what constituted the proper bucolic style and the classical models that best represented the pastoral experience. The issues of literary decorum that were debated include whether contemporary poets should portray an idealized rural life or a more realistic one; whether the characters should speak with a refined simplicity or a more authentic, locally grounded accent; and whether pastorals should be set in a timeless pastoral setting like Arcadia or in the real British countryside. This debate sparked a public quarrel between Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips over the merits of their respective pastorals, for example. Both poets had published pastoral verses in Jacob Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies* of 1709. Pope's verse presented an idealized "Golden Age," with his characters emulating Virgil's shepherds in style and elegance, following from the principles Pope himself had articulated in his "Discourse on Pastoral," written in 1704. Conversely, Philips's pastorals emulated Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, and the characters adopted dialects commensurate with the English countryside. In the factious literary climate of the early-eighteenth century, a public war of words erupted. Richard Steele and Joseph Addison praised Philips and neglected Pope in respective *Tatler* and *Spectator* articles, and Thomas Tickell did likewise when he published five essays arguing for the revival of pastoral in *The Guardian* in 1713. Enraged by this treatment, Pope enlisted help from his friends from the Scriblerus Club, particularly John Gay, whose *The Shepherd's Week* (1714) satirically ridiculed the falseness of Philips's pastoral representations.

¹⁰ Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor, "Introduction," in *Culture and Cultivation in early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1992), 5.

Thus, in terms of what constituted the proper subject matter for pastoral, two camps emerged, subsequently labeled “neoclassical” and “rational” by J.E. Congleton in *Theories of Pastoral in England 1684-1789* (1968). Informed by René Rapin’s *Refléxions sur la Poétique d’Aristote* (1674), the neoclassical faction led by Pope insisted on generic criteria based on the example of the ancients, particularly Theocritus and Virgil. Because shepherds were the only subjects treated in these writers’ works, the neoclassicists believed shepherds to be the only true subjects worthy of imitation. Philips’s camp is termed the rationalists by Congleton. Informed by Bernard de Fontenelle’s essay “Discours sur la nature de l’églogue” (1688), they embrace a more eclectic approach in which pastoral might embody broader characteristics. Congleton describes this group’s focus as “psychological,” as the poets do not receive an “advantage from accumulated bodies of literature; they depend principally on vivacity of imagination, perfection in which may be attained without a long course of experiments or a multitude of rules.”¹¹ Browne belonged to this latter camp. In his “Defence,” he challenges Rapin directly by arguing for anglers as pastoral subjects; Rapin had argued for the illegitimacy of fishermen as pastoral characters on the basis that fishing itself was not a pastoral activity and the sea not a proper realm for pastoral. At stake in this debate was classical and critical authority, as well as the nature of literary and poetic decorum.

Even Samuel Johnson voiced his view of the piscatory pastoral in *Rambler* 36. While conceding that “the conviction of the necessity of some new source of pleasure induced

¹¹ J.E. Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England 1684-1798* (New York: Haskell House, 1968), 65.

Sannazarius to remove the scene from the fields to the sea,”¹² Johnson argues that such a modification does not enhance the pastoral mode:

I am afraid it will not be found easy to improve the pastorals of antiquity, by any great additions or diversifications. Our descriptions may indeed differ from those of Virgil, as an English from an Italian summer, and, in some respects, as modern from ancient life; but as nature is in both countries nearly the same, and as poetry has to do rather with the passions of men, which are uniform, than their customs, which are changeable, the varieties, which time or place can furnish, will be inconsiderable. (101-102)

Johnson found pastoral generally to be a trivial poetic form, based on false premises to begin with, and for him the piscatory pastorals of Sannazaro are no exception. He preferred instead truth, reality, and engagement with human passions, which he found wanting in the simple models of the pastoral form. Within the context of his overall dislike of pastoral poetry, however, Johnson’s disregard for the varying “customs” is telling in this passage, and it becomes a central principle for him generally. He has no intention of considering fishing experiences other than the sea fishing variety portrayed by Sannazaro, which is too remote from the normal experiences of British anglers, let alone from gentlemen such as Johnson who had little time for country amusements.

However, the greater implication of Johnson’s comment is that the historical development of angling in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulted in a fracturing of the discussion of piscatory verse. Nicholas D. Smith makes this point explicit: “It is clear ... from the polar arrangement of the associations that fishing inspires in the critics – ‘hard and

¹² Samuel Johnson, “Ramber 36,” in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 2003), 100. Hereafter cited in text.

toilsome' versus 'Leisure' and 'Contemplation' – that the argument is being constructed upon two different kinds of fishing (sea and river) and involved the use of two different discourses.”¹³ The result is two discussions entirely – on the sport of angling and on the sea-pastoral. For this reason, I have decided not to include the poems of Fletcher and Diaper in my study here, as their focus is not on the sport of angling but rather on commercial-subsistence fishing at sea. Conversely, Browne – even though he sets out primarily to engage in the pastoral debate – does represent the sporting variety of fishing in his attempt to include it in the pastoral debate. Hence, I have chosen to consider his work fully, to reflect on the consequences to the sport that angling is portrayed in such terms.

In his “Essay in Defense of Piscatory Eclogue,” Browne sets out to defend his choice of subject against those critics he labels “the Legislators of Pastoral,” who he believes are too restrictive in imposing rules on what constitutes proper grounds for this type of poetry (xxxiii). Though he includes hard-working sea swains in the poem itself, Browne is clearly more interested in the sporting angler: “Who can have greater leisure, or be led into more agreeable contemplation, than an angler, peacefully seated on the shady banks of a lonely river at his quiet recreation, attentively considering the gliding stream, mingled groves, hills, and open plains, the various landskip around him?” (xxii). Browne contends that all men who enjoy a country activity can be poetically “adapted to the simplicity and purity of the golden age” (xxvi). Angling’s softer elements – its lack of conflict, its quiet introspection, its relative safety – are the sources of its pastoral simplicity, and it is those upon which Browne fastens:

¹³ Nicholas D. Smith, “Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Eclogae Piscatoriae* (1526) and the ‘Pastoral Debate’ in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Studies in Philology* 99 (2002): 434.

It might be imagined that Angling, an exercise so gentle, and such a friend to contemplation, should need no argument to recommend it to the regard and favourable sentiment of a wise and thinking man; it seems so free from the hazard and fatigues of other recreations, and those ill habits and disorders, many of them breed in mind and body, that one would think it was the innocent diversion of the infant world, and the readiest, most naturally suggested subject for pastoral Poetry to be employed in. (xxix)

However, Browne's phrase "infant world" signals the level at which he is representing and appreciating the activity as a sport; pastoral remains for him an idealizing form. Just as there is nothing about sheep husbandry or shepherding (as an art) in regular pastoral, the poem *Angling Sports*, which follows Browne's argument for pastoral, lacks any discussion of the advanced techniques or thinking on the sport that typifies the body of angling poetry stemming from Walton, which sought characteristically to find a balance between the contemplation of a scene and a level of instructive material that would please an advanced sportsman. The technical discussion is that of a sportsman at the beginning, or infancy, of his career.

It is for this reason that I believe *Angling Sports* does not fall as naturally into the mode of angling poetry modelled by the vast majority of the fishing writers of the time. The poem's objectives are elaborately stated in its subtitle: "A new attempt to introduce a more pleasing variety and mixture of subjects and characters into pastoral. On the plan of its primitive rules and manners. Suited to the entertainment of retirement, and the lovers of nature in rural scenes." These goals are different from the central objectives of the other poems on angling, all of which in some way engage with the evolving career of an angler, an evolution indispensable to angling's definition as a sport.

A quick survey of the poem's content bears this out, as the closest it comes to relaying technical information occurs in the first eclogue when two "social youths," Lalet and Argel, engage in a brief discussion on weather and the best times to catch their prey (6). Argel's dialogue does trigger some familiar refrains from the angling tradition:

Happy the Fisher, when in sportive hours,
 No droughts prevent him, nor intemp'rate show'rs;
 When mildest zephyrs thro' the Ether fly,
 Or South winds spread their fleeces o'er the sky,
 While vary'd sun-shine and alternate rains,
 Temper the streams, and verdure all the plains;
 Then fish rise eager at the floating bait,
 Or sink the cork with their entangled weight. (10)

But this passage is not representative of the whole of *Angling Sports*, as the other eclogues in the work contain almost no instruction or technical discussion of the sport. For example, the second eclogue features the introduction of Renock, a depressed and troubled youth, who goes night-fishing with his friend Laco and complains of a lover who has rejected him. Renock reappears in the fifth eclogue in a nearly suicidal state lamenting his misfortune in a soliloquy; but even fishing cannot alleviate his despair. The third eclogue features a swain whose angling activities are interrupted by a young fisher seeking his aid when an otter steals the latter's trout and line. An adventure in hunting down the nuisance ensues, and the two young men bewail the creatures that interfere with their recreation. But the situation is not developed in a didactic or preceptive way. The fourth eclogue depicts a company of fishers entertaining themselves with songs at a local tavern because a storm has interrupted their work. The convention of the Happy Man is once again evoked here: "Happy the Fisher's life

and humble state, / Calm are his hours, and free from rude debate” (46). Browne’s version of piscatory pastoral employs the Happy Man motif for both the young men at play on the riverbanks and the labourers at sea. While both can surely be happy, there are fundamental differences between the activities, which Browne elides in his conflation of the two classes of men.

Curiously, in the third edition, now titled *Angling Sports* (1773), there are footnotes scattered throughout – many of them explaining angling principles taken directly from the eighth edition of *The Compleat Angler*, Browne himself having edited the 1750, 1759, and 1772 editions of Walton’s text. But even with such emendations, *Angling Sports* keeps the georgic modal qualities of the work subordinated to the bottom of the page. For example, in eclogues six and seven, the singing of songs by the characters displaces any real possibility of instruction, even though on occasion there are footnotes to explain what is passed over in the verse. This structure presents us with some questions: why did Browne feel adding footnotes was necessary? And what effect did this have on his pastoral attempt? Ironically, from a sporting perspective the footnotes offer very little that the angler might find insightful into the art, as they appeal only perhaps to the most basic of occasional fishermen. But they serve to “georgicize” the poem, if ever so slightly, signaling how fundamentally necessary even the most simple of instructions are to the literature on the sport. This provision of a modicum of instruction is done in contrast to the declared innocence he professes about his subject matter in his “Defence,” which had implied a narrower conception of pastoral, based not on detailed explanation of complicated technique but rather on “simplicity” as Pope uses

the term in his “Discourse on Pastoral Poetry.”¹⁴ Thus we might critique his verse as being caught between two possibilities, achieving neither. His verse is drawn in the direction of Pope’s neoclassical style of an idealized projection because it insists on the simplicity of the pastoral mode, and yet in later editions it edges, by means of the notes, toward the characteristic sociological and technical detail observable in J.S. and Whitney. As such, we might conclude that the georgicized pastoral represents the logical mode for the sport of angling because its characteristic elements of leisure specialization are necessary for any portrayal of the activity. Therefore, I would suggest that Browne fails to prove that fishermen (particularly as they came to be understood in the historically-specific setting of eighteenth-century England) are worthy pastoral subjects because they cannot be portrayed as even the rationalists would depict their pastoral subjects.

For this piscatory pastoral experiment, Browne is satirized in Thomas Scott’s “The Art of Angling; Eight Dialogues in Verse.”¹⁵ Pointedly casting his poem as a series of dialogues, Scott shows he is keenly aware of the debate into which he has plunged. Thus, in the poem’s first footnote, attached to the title of the first dialogue, called “A defence of Angling,” he playfully adopts the voice of Zoilus, a mediocre critic, in order to undercut potential denigration of his verse: “How artfully has this author skreened himself from our attacks, by giving to his compositions the title of dialogues! O that he had called them eclogues! I should then have been furnished with a fair occasion to display my reading and my critical skill, by showing that neither his characters, nor his sentiments, nor his

¹⁴ Pope states that in a pastoral, “The thoughts are plain, yet admit a little quickness and passion, but that short and flowing: The expression humble, yet as pure as the language will afford.... In short, the fable, manners, thoughts, and expressions, are full of the greatest simplicity in nature.” In *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 4.

¹⁵ Thomas Scott, “The Art of Angling; Eight Dialogues in Verse,” in *Collection of Scarce, Curious and Valuable Pieces* (London: 1773), 270-334. This poem was written as early 1758. Hereafter cited in text.

expression agree with the simplicity so essential to that species of poem” (275). Having deflected potential critical censure for the form his poem assumes, Scott can focus on the subject at hand, which is to articulate in verse the values and practices of the sport of angling while recasting the piscatory pastoral debate in ironic terms. Interestingly, he plays throughout the poem with scholarly conventions in the manner of Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum*, with its mock-scholarly apparatus. Scott assumes in his footnotes the voices of other critics, such as Aristarchus, the pedantic scholar Pope mocks in *The Dunciad* Book IV; Farnaby the Younger; and even Moses Browne himself, who is portrayed in the footnotes as highly knowledgeable about the sport.

The poem opens with a meditation on the nature of sport itself. For Scott, sport in general is associated with refreshing rest, though rest from labour should not be an end in itself:

Sports (like parentheses) may part the line
Of labour, without breaking the design.
But as, in verse, parentheses (if long
And crowded) mar the beauty of the song;
So pastimes which ingross too large a space
Disturb life’s system, and its work deface. (275-276)

Scott makes no judgment as to which sport in particular best serves this function of refreshment, as he professes to speak only for himself in extolling angling’s virtues: “Each, what his genius prompts and nerves attain, / Varies his joy, I no man’s joy arraign. / Me lonely vales and winding currents please, / And arts of fishing entertain my ease” (277). Scott’s defence of angling situates it as merely one sport among many; all genuine sports should be honoured for their virtues and taken on their own terms. Scott does this for angling

by respecting its sporting and literary precedents: “Let not my friend despise, with cynic mood, / Our pastime, honoured by the wise and good: / By blameless Nowell, Wotton’s cheerful age, / Cotton’s clear wit, and Walton’s rural page” (279). The footnote accompanying these lines, given under the name of Moses Browne, informs us that Alexander Nowell, the dean of St. Paul’s during Elizabeth I’s reign, and Sir Henry Wotton, the famous author and diplomat, “were great lovers of angling” (279). And the grounds for invoking Cotton and Walton are self-evident. Furthermore, in the seventh dialogue, Axylus asks Musaeus to explain the genesis and progress of angling verse. In response, Musaeus names the biblical Job as the first great fisherman, traces the tradition through Geoffrey of Monmouth, and finally arrives at the present by naming a familiar figure: “Yet, if the muse’s wreath bestows renown, / Is not our name immortalis’d by Browne?” (317). Clearly, Scott is paying homage to his immediate predecessor, particularly as Browne had taken up a verse form so similar to his own. But the ironic nature of the poem as a whole surfaces again here, as Zoilus once more comments on the interrogative form of the credit given to Browne: “surely, taste and candour would have taught our author to have celebrated [Browne] in the most round affirmative stile, as thus, ‘Our Name’s immortalis’d by tuneful Browne.’ Whereas, in pure envy, he expreseth himself in the form of interrogation” (317). The ambiguity surrounding Scott’s praise of Browne, and the awareness Scott shows throughout the poem of Browne’s place in the angling literary tradition, suggests a wish to distance himself from the debate in which Browne was a focal point and to return to a more mainstream tradition of angling discourse. This suggests that Scott regards Browne’s preoccupation with pastoral as a false move, a distraction from what angling verse ought to aspire to be.

In the second dialogue, Scott pursues his engagement with the angling literary tradition by including his own version of Piscator as one of the characters, who discusses with his friend Tyro how Izaak Walton's achievement in angling literature is a true inspiration for both poetic form and sporting endeavour: "Walton could teach, his meek enchanting vein / The shepherd's mingles with the fisher's strain: / Nature and genius animate his lines, / And our whole science in his precepts shines" (281). In Scott's view, Walton succeeded in achieving a union between the traditional pastoral and the angling pastoral, and he included as well his georgic instruction, a synthesis that Browne had undone in his effort to follow Sannazaro's lead.

In fact, in the next dialogue we see an overt condemnation of the way the British climate is often depicted in English poetry. Musaeus distinguishes Britain's climate as an exceptional case, in contrast to the vision Sannazaro would have had of the activity of fishing in his native country: "For spring oft shivers in the British isle, / But warms, in British song, with Baia's smile" (286). Attached to this line is a footnote from Farnaby the Younger informing us that Baia is a city near Naples and was Sannazaro's hometown. Farnaby quips, "I suppose our author's meaning is, that many English poets take their description of an English Spring from the circumstance of that prime of the year in the finest part of Italy" (286). English poets might do this if they are seeking to adopt Sannazaro's pastoral conception, but if they do not make factual and realistic changes to make it apply more distinctively to actual angling conditions by including the technical detail so necessary to the practice of the sport, such poets risk making their poetry irrelevant as sporting literature. Scott is breaking down the classical model, which he believes can stand in the way of the sporting theme if its conventions are applied too literally and if classical poetry is imitated too closely. Similarly, in their choices of modal qualities to employ, the vast majority of the

poets I have examined here have been drawn to the georgic priority of celebrating the pleasurable work that belongs to the countryside, even in the face of British weather. They have done so as a means of sharing their knowledge because that is what the sport entails in its basic practices.

More than anything, “The Art of Angling” embodies the values and experiences of angling in a manner that harks back to the late-seventeenth century, albeit with interjections of satiric humour on both the pastoral mode and the discourse of angling. But, even within this framework, there is room for pastoral sentiment because Scott continues to value it as part of the angling experience. The singing of songs is once again foregrounded in a gesture to the formal pastoral; Piscator sings “The Angler’s Song” as a culmination to his tribute to Izaak Walton, recalling Walton’s authorial technique of interspersing songs and poems within his narrative. In the fourth dialogue, Garrulus and Lapidus are depicted as having a day without luck in their pursuit of perch. However, their luck changes after Garrulus suggests they engage in singing to pass the time. The men happily sing “The Farmer’s Song,” which makes the point that farmers are victims in hunting expeditions, as their fences are destroyed by hunting beagles and they do not get to partake in the spoils of the chase. And if those farmers choose to disobey the laws, they are excessively punished and branded poachers. The song’s final stanza allies the fisherman with the poacher, in fact suggesting an affinity between the two groups based on class: “For his majesty’s service, we’ll press / The felon who steals but a hare; / For his brats, the parish assess: / All poachers and anglers, beware” (295). The entire song is scathing about the cruelties of hunting. It is ironic that the poet makes this statement, considering his opening sentiment, which praises all forms of sport without disparaging any. The sardonic critic Zoilus does not approve of this song, remarking, “I forebore to censure the Angler’s Song, because there is some gravity and

tolerable moral instruction in that: But this Farmer's Song is so vain and frothy, and satirical, that I cannot read it with any patience" (294). The poem's ironic layering is on display again in this note, as Zoilus has no patience for this type of suggestive song because he has no tolerance for satire. Regardless of Zoilus's objections, the effect of the song is that the anglers begin to catch the fish that had been eluding them; this reversal in fortune is largely attributable to the fact that they have employed that time-honoured virtue of the sport, patience, in stopping to sing.

The last dialogue provides a final meditation on the nature of the activity, as Icenus and Caurus engage in philosophical discussion while visiting Scott's favourite fishing places near Ipswich. Icenus evokes the new science in praising the scene's gorgeous sky, with its "Prismatic dies, that up the zenith flow'd: / The colour'd scene all Newton's optics show'd" (329). But Caurus tempers Icenus's enthusiasm by placing his appreciation for the natural beauty within a sporting context:

These are but shews, Icenus, in the scheme
Of angling action, which adorn our theme:
Some casual, some as subject parts obey
In the sweet drama of a fisher's day.
Our point is pastime, angling is the means,
Ponds, lakes, and rivers form the shifting scenes.
Captures of fish the fly intrigue employ,
And changing place diversifies the joy. (329)

There is a time and a place for the enjoyment of the natural setting, and this is subsequent to the "means" offered by the sport. Travelling amongst favoured locations "diversifies" the experience and adds to the delight, as the happiness of the angler comes finally from

discovering a balance between a skillful engagement with nature and an appreciation and contemplation of the larger scene that emerges from it. This sentiment, I believe, is fundamentally at the heart of the good verse on the sport.

That said, *The Bibliotheca Piscatoria* disagrees with my assessment of the merits of Scott's "The Art of Angling." It describes it as a poem "in which the technical and the humorous are dexterously enough interwoven; but such trifling in verse, as these and other poems of their kind display, is not to be confounded for an instant with the art and heart-work of John Dennys."¹⁶ This review confirms again that critics offer a generally narrow view of what constitutes good angling literature. While Scott's poem still fulfills many of the criteria for good angling verse, its experimentation in satire prevents it from reaching a far-greater appreciation amongst the anglers who assembled *The Bibliotheca Piscatoria*, because their expectations for angling works were narrowly conceived.

In the last half of the eighteenth century, no further poetry meets those standards, nor do they adhere to the expectations established in the golden age of the seventeenth century. The verse after Scott takes a marked turn, transitioning to a poetics that is more lyric in mode and that moves progressively away from the georgic conception of angling poetry. The focus becomes an exploration of the subjective states of mind of the authors writing the poems. Five poems in the last two decades of the eighteenth century make angling their subject matter and exhibit in some measure this new trend. The first short poem is by Ewan Clarke, titled "Angling – A Poem" (1779). This effort mostly centres on the poet's internal experience as he fishes on a pleasant day for the "supreme, sov'reign Trout."¹⁷ While doing

¹⁶ Thomas Westwood and William Satchell, *Bibliotheca Piscatoria: A Catalogue of Books on Angling, The Fisheries, and Fish Culture* (London: W. Satchell, 1883), 75.

¹⁷ Ewan Clarke, "Angling – A Poem," in *Miscellaneous Poems* (Whitehaven: 1779), 80. Hereafter cited in text.

so, he chides the trappings of the city and the superficial forms of amusement enjoyed therein, such as the Italian arias consumed by elite company at court. The inference Clarke makes is that in the Lake district in the Northwest of the country, it is nature that provides the entertainment, which cannot be matched by any human reproduction: “Let me, then, here in Cumbria’s pleasing plain, / Where rural sports, and nature’s prospects reign, / Resign’d and fearless meet th’approach of fate, / Unknown to fame, unenvy’d by the great” (82). The poem serves as a celebration of nature, and in particular of the poet’s angling success and his enjoyment of it. Only he is in position to take in nature’s advantages, because of his modesty and his sporting expression.

James Fordyce’s very short ode “On Angling Without Success” (1786) takes the subjective experience of the poet even further to make his fishing experience a metaphor for his life. Though he has gone off “In hope of sport: a golden dream!,” he returns home without a catch.¹⁸ Mourning his lack of fortune, he realizes his focus is “an ill so very light and vain!” (135). Rather than complaining about a lack of fortune, the proper attitude to adopt is to “seek intent a worthier prize, / The heart-approving smile of Heav’n!” (135). The moral is that in seeking a Christian standard, a man can find success both in his sport and in his life as a whole. Likewise, in Joseph Good’s “Angling for Trout” (1792), a similar lesson is experienced in the form of a realization of the angler’s place in the natural cosmology of the universe, even if no overt Christian attitude is expressed. The angler in the poem is a young man who cherishes his opportunity to take up his sport that day: “Not more the School-Boy hails the grateful Day, / Alloted all to Mind-Relaxing Play.”¹⁹ He finds a

¹⁸ James Fordyce, “On Angling Without Success,” in *Poems* (London: 1786), 134. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁹ Joseph Good, “Angling for Trout,” in *Poems on Several Occasions* (Sherborne: 1792), 43. Hereafter cited in text.

delightful brook, “not unworthy of a Poet’s Theme” (43), and proceeds to drag a trout out of it, inducing “joyous Pride” for his mastery over nature (44). But, just as quickly, his luck turns, though not because of something within his control. The weather changes, as lightening fills a blackened sky, forcing the boy to find cover. His change in mood signals an ironic reversal. Now the fisherman is small in the face of nature’s power: “What mighty Change his Aspect undergoes! / As Clouds succeed, and whistling Auster blows, / The beams of Pleasure from his Features fly, / Grown now as joyless as the low’ring Sky” (44).

Elizabeth Moody rejects fishing outright in “To a Gentleman Who Invited Me to Go A-Fishing” (1798), characterizing the sport as the “vacant hours of man’s destructive leisure.”²⁰ Having been invited on a fishing excursion by a male companion, she takes the opportunity to distance herself from the “barbarous” sport, which constitutes in her view a “cruel pleasure” (ll. 2, 3). The man she is addressing should know better: he “know’st the charms of lettered taste,” in a similar manner to Moody herself as one who likes to “cultivate the Muse’s lays” (ll. 5, 9). As a poet, she has no interest in applying herself to fishing, when she can be spending that time composing her lines of poetry: “Shall I to torpid angling give my days, / And change poetic wreaths for fishing-line?” (ll. 11-12). Her answer is in the negative, as she cares not to worry whether a fish will bite her line. By extension, she is rejecting her suitor in her outright dismissal of his recreational pleasure.

Finally, Samuel Low’s “On a Small Fish Caught by Angling” (1800) takes the notion of learning subjective personal lessons from angling experiences to its extreme point. In this lyric, the poet meditates on the significance of catching a small fish, having intended his bait

²⁰ Elizabeth Moody, “To a Gentleman Who Invited Me to Go A-Fishing,” in *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 404, ll. 1. Hereafter cited in text. References are to line numbers of this edition.

for much larger fish. Now he laments that he has to withdraw the hook from a bleeding and dying fry, but he comes to some realizations through this event. “Let pleasure’s votaries learn from hence,” he testifies.²¹ Empathizing with the fish, he acknowledges that “oft the most enticing garb / Pandora’s evils do conceal” (153). The lesson therefore is elaborately conceived:

Then, oh, be cautious, sanguine youth!

Beware of Pleasure’s Syren wiles;

From Error’s arts distinguish Truth,

And virtue from the harlot smiles:

If, like this captive fish, you grasp

At joy on Treach’ry’s hook that’s hung,

Or soon or late like him you’ll gasp,

And with remorse your soul be wrung! (154)

Though there is a bit of didacticism that harks back to the earlier part of the century, this lesson of discretion and prudence in all of life’s undertakings veers toward the subjective interest we can observe in the angling verse and of poetics in general at the end of the eighteenth century. The differences from the preferred methods of the late-seventeenth century – the georgic taste for mixing instruction with contemplation in a rural setting – are apparent, as the influence of the developing Romantic movement was moving the piscatory subgenre into a new state of sensibility associated with studies of sense perception as the means through which knowledge and understanding of the human experience can be gained.

²¹ Samuel Low, “On a Small Fish Caught by Angling,” in *Poems* (New York: 1800), 153. Hereafter cited in text.

PART 2. Hunting and Fowling

Chapter 4. Hunting Poetry in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century

In the first part of this thesis, I surveyed the fishing poetry of the period, using the categories of sport-sociologist Hobson Bryan to arrange representations of sport along a continuum of experience. From the beginning recreationist to the specialist, distinctive preferences and behaviours attend sportsmen at each level.¹ I then showed how different levels of sporting specialization inclined poets toward different choices of modal traits in the poetry on the sport. As the poetry inclined toward a more specialist orientation, its modal features tended toward the more georgic aspects of instruction, whereas the occasionalist might conceive of the sport principally in pastoral terms. This level of engagement was usually reflective of political, social, or literary preoccupations that evolved over the course of the last half of the seventeenth century and through the eighteenth.

In *Conflict in the Great Outdoors*, a follow-up to his study on recreational specialization in the sport of angling, Bryan considers how his specialization model might be applied to other sports, including hunting. Here, he states that, although fishing seems to offer a particularly wide range of specialization because of the remarkable variety of settings and experiences the angler can enjoy, “the sport of hunting may attract the most avid specialists of any sport.”² Many of the same elements that mark the recreational experience of anglers also apply to hunters, who pursue their sporting careers in a similar manner. As levels of specialization increase, there appears to be a tendency toward progression in

¹ Hobson Bryan, “Leisure Value Systems and Recreational Specialization: The Case of Trout Fishermen,” *Journal of Leisure Studies* 9 (1977): 176.

² Hobson Bryan, *Conflict in the Great Outdoors: Toward Understanding and Managing for Diverse Sportsmen Preferences* (Birmingham, Alabama: Bureau of Public Administration, The University of Alabama, 1979), 84. Hereafter cited in text.

methods, with the most experienced stage showing many of the same characteristics as technique-setting specialist anglers. Bryan once again defines this process on the basis of his observations of how American hunters graduate progressively through different hunting techniques and methods. “From shotgun to rifle to bow and arrow would be the logical sequence,” he writes (81). “There is also the tendency at more specialized levels toward emphasis on the nonconsumptive aspects of the sport. The essence of the sport becomes less the kills and more the pursuit, the challenge of knowing and tracking the animal” (81). This paradigm complements Norbert Elias’s conception of “tension-equilibrium” that I outlined in the introduction.³ This is the state of high conflict and pressure that experienced sportsmen usually try to achieve and prolong, the state where the outcome in the mock battle balances precariously and is most in doubt. This is the point that features the greatest test of skills.

As we saw in the last chapter, Bryan’s paradigm for fishing can be usefully transposed onto the historical period beginning in the seventeenth century, as the way that sport was conceived in England underwent a fundamental transformation, coming to embody many of the traits of a leisure culture we still experience today. Angling became, in essence, a modern sport at that time. But does hunting make that same historical transition at about the same time? Can the same model be applied to the various modes of the sport performed in England, given the symbolic and political weight the sport carried in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? The first major objection to the possibility of using Bryan’s model is that the hunting performed in present-day America is vastly different in most cases from that performed in England in the eighteenth century, whereas that difference is not so great in fishing. Angling in streams or lakes remains relatively the same now as then, both in Britain

³ Norbert Elias, “An Essay on Sport and Violence,” in *Quest for Excitement*, ed. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 159. Hereafter cited in text.

and America, and this similarity underwrites the historical utility in reading the angling poetry of the period through the lens of modern sociological studies.

I would argue, however, that salient cultural characteristics of hunting have bridged the historical and geographical difference, in particular the progression a hunter undergoes in the course of his or her sporting career. Norbert Elias sees this occurring at the time of my study: “Particularly in the way fox hunting developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we can see how it was a form of hunting in which the hunters imposed on themselves and their hounds a number of highly specific restraints” (161). As we will see, fox hunting came to be governed by an elaborate code, as that mode of hunting separated itself from the royal stag hunt in the period. This transition occurred markedly later than the high point of fishing poetry in the late-seventeenth century. Historical reasons, I believe, are the major factors in this temporal discrepancy.

In England, hunting’s origins as a sport can be traced back to the medieval period, when wealthy barons hunted deer on horseback using bred hounds. Pre-Norman monarchs, in particular King Canute of England (1016-1035) and Malcolm II of Scotland (1005-1034), established the first laws to protect deer as royal privilege. The Norman Conquest brought to England a formal structure of legislation called the forest laws, which ensured that hunting would become an exclusively royal and aristocratic pastime from the time of William I’s reign onwards. The law of the forests was separate from the common law, giving the monarch sole authority over every tract in the kingdom designated as “forest,” together with all the animals therein. The term “forest,” here, does not mean an area of densely wooded land, as the word is usually understood today. Royal forests could include expanses of heath, wetland, and grassland that supported deer and other game. We might consider forests at that time as wildlife preserves for the royal hunt. Local nobles could obtain a royal license to take

a restricted amount of game, and the common inhabitants of the forest might obtain licenses for gathering firewood or harvesting other forest products. This creation of specialized deer forests required the lords of the manors to employ warreners to protect the animals from any illicit hunting, and they mandated severe punishments for anyone found guilty of poaching or trespassing.

Alongside the predilection of the Norman kings to hunt deer as their primary sport, hares were also deemed to be major quarry. By the end of the fifteenth century, hare hunting was no longer limited to the nobility but had become the principal sport of the vast majority of country squires who needed to own only a few hounds to make a worthwhile chase. At the same time, another important shift occurred: the indiscriminate pursuit of any and all prey was gradually replaced by the hunting of individual species of prey, each with its own customs. The country squires did not go out hunting for whatever quarry they could find; rather, they set out specifically to pursue hare, fox, pheasant, or other specific species that were designated as the hunting target. This restrictive focus of the hunters is the first sign of an inclination toward sporting specialization within hunting.

But the stag hunt principally remained the domain of the monarch and continued to carry overtly symbolic functions. Throughout the Tudor era, hunting was an integral part of the life of the court, in conjunction with associated aristocratic households, and the hunt served many purposes, from recreation and exercise to ceremonial ritual. Because of its legal basis in the forest laws, the hunt was truly entwined in notions of royal privilege. The king's taking of the deer's life served as a visible demonstration of noble prowess, and because of its powerful symbolism it extended to all forms of royal insignia, as monarchs over the centuries adorned their shields, paintings, plate, statuary, and tapestries with hunting images.

With the accession of the Stuarts in the seventeenth century, hunting increasingly became a source of social strain, stemming from changing ideological and practical interests in hunting and land use. Roger B. Manning identifies as one of the major causes for this escalating tension the changing function of the Court of Star Chamber, the tribunal made up of Privy Councillors and common-law judges who supplemented the activities of the common-law and equity courts in both civil and criminal matters. Under the Tudor monarchy, the Court of Star Chamber (established by Henry VII) expanded its jurisdiction over poaching affrays and similar misdemeanours that represented infringements on public order. But with the reigns of James I and Charles I, who were both avid hunters, “the Court of Star Chamber saw a veritable flood of prosecutions shifted from the preservation of public order to the enhancement of the royal game prerogative and the preservation of aristocratic hunting privileges.”⁴ In other words, the new Stuart monarchs strove to extend their own hunting privileges and preserves, even at the risk of increasing turbulence among the citizenry. It was part of the Stuart aspiration toward absolute monarchy and divine right. England had long outlived the Norman system of raising revenue by imposing the licenses within forest laws, argues Michael Brander, who concurs with Manning about why the sport came under attack: “Theoretically [Charles I] extended the royal forest of Essex until it was presumed to include the entire county, but ultimately Parliament intervened and in 1640 annulled these enlargements. By that time Civil War was inevitable.”⁵ In the years leading up to the Civil War, the growing anger against aggrandizing royal policies manifested itself in organized poaching campaigns and the slaughter of the king’s deer. In poaching acts, the

⁴ Richard B. Manning, *Hunting and Poachers: A Social and Cultural History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1-2.

⁵ Michael Brander, *Hunting & Shooting: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971), 68.

ceremonial aspects of the hunt were flagrantly scorned and undercut, as riotous mobs of hunters stormed parks at night massacring deer and assaulting the keepers. This riotous hunting was a symbolic surrogate for war, a method by which socially rebellious gentry and their followers could give expression to their resentment.

In the first half of 1642, as England edged toward civil war, a number of attacks took place upon deer parks and forests across southern England. Alliances of local gentlemen and commoners slaughtered deer and felled timber, thereby achieving what Daniel C. Beaver calls a “radical disafforestation.”⁶ Disafforested lands were called “purlieus.” John Manwood, barrister and gamekeeper of Waltham Forest, defined a purlieu in 1598 as “a certain Territory of Ground adjoining to the forest [which] was once Forest-land and afterwards disafforested by the *Perambulations* made for dividing the *new* ... from the *old*.”⁷ Beaver argues that our understanding of the poaching crisis as a high political battle over prerogative and law overlooks the sometimes violent competition among local gentry families, which also led to occasional attacks on the king’s deer. There was always a degree of contestation that occurred over the use of the parks at the local level amongst those who presumed access to hunt those areas or even the right to enclose areas as purlieus. The forest laws had long regulated such competition for privilege among gentlemen by controlling participation in the hunt and restricting privileges. The local forest politics thus involved both a gentry “politics of honor,” to use Beaver’s term, between competing families and a popular politics focused on access to material resources (8). Both levels had been precariously balanced for many years; prior to the reign of Charles I, the forest laws had

⁶ Daniel C. Beaver, *Hunting and the Politics of Violence Before the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 3. Hereafter cited in text.

⁷ John Manwood, *Treatise of the Forest Laws* (London: 1741), 242. Fifth edition. The first edition was 1598.

acted as a framework that largely diffused conflicts and prevented them from erupting into violence. Charles I's policies, in effect, destabilized this delicate balance. The representations of hunting we will be examining in this part of the thesis, from the Civil War through the end of the eighteenth century, are set against this volatile and explosive social, legal, and political backdrop.

It is no wonder, then, that the episode of the stag hunt in John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1642, revised 1655) carried a powerful resonance in the consciousness of Restoration and eighteenth-century poets and sportsmen.⁸ Poets of the mid-seventeenth century, and Denham in particular, used the landscape to test various kinds of political order. In the fishing poetry of the last chapter, the landscape is often a setting for retirement as political statement; in the case of *Cooper's Hill*, the poem in part serves as an expression of the violence enacted against king and society. The stag hunt, argues James Turner, is "an image which disavows war, significant for not being what it closely resembles."⁹ It is the king (presumably Charles I) who is doing the hunting as the episode begins, "when great affairs / Give leave to slacken, and unbend his cares" (ll. 242). But paradoxically, the stag is also presented as a monarch, an effect Nigel Smith describes as "producing a proleptic image of divided kingship."¹⁰ Denham's stag is anthropomorphized as it eludes capture before finally succumbing. The symbolism of the stag as representing the king has a long literary tradition – previously depicted in Song 13 of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612) – which only adds to the significance of the series of similes used to represent the stag in *Cooper's Hill*. "Like a

⁸ John Denham, *Cooper's Hill* (London: 1655). Hereafter cited in text. All line references are to the first authorized edition of 1655 unless otherwise stated.

⁹ James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 68-69.

¹⁰ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 322. Hereafter cited in text.

declining Statesman,” “like a Knight Errant,” “as a Hero” – the stag seems to morph in identity throughout (ll. 273, 281, 313). But it is as king that the stag ends his flight and takes on the heroic stance of fighting his attackers, knowing that the outcome will be his own death:

Though prodigall of life, [he] disdaines to dy
 By common hands; but if he can descry
 Some nobler foes approach, to him he calls,
 And begs his Fate, and then contented falls.
 So when the King a mortall shaft lets fly
 From his unerring hand, then glad to dy,
 Proud of the wound, to it resigns his blood,
 And staines the Chrystall with a Purple flood. (ll. 315-322)

The stag will not succumb to the hounds who are chasing him down, nor to the first handlers who happen upon him. “Only a king should kill a king,” reasons Smith, and thus the encounter serves to denounce the recent regicide (322).

The same passage when viewed from a sporting perspective, however, departs from any real representation of a chase, underscoring the fictional and allegorical nature of the scene. This is where I differ with Earl E. Wasserman’s influential reading of the stag chase episode, for Wasserman argues against an allegorical interpretation of the 1655 version: “We can perfectly well read it as *primarily* an account of the hunt. The description, then, is not a vehicle for a system of political allusions but quite the reverse: the political references enter

by way of tightly integrated similarities to features of the hunt.”¹¹ Wasserman wants to insist on the primacy (and realism) of the representation over the allegory, but, if we look at the behaviour of the stag, we see that the tableau has become an entirely anthropomorphized conflict. Hunting by definition requires a hunter and a hunted, an agent and a subject. One endeavours to hunt, while the other struggles to elude the hunter. Once the stag chooses to fight and, even more strikingly, embrace a fate of suicide-cum-martyrdom, the dynamics of the chase have changed to such a degree as to make it no longer a hunt. We are forced therefore to view the chase scene in *Cooper’s Hill* in terms of its allegorical features, as traumatic and human.

The poem undermines the previously stable character of the hunt as a royal symbol. Because the stag has been anthropomorphized, conflicted human emotions are on display in the scene. Thus, Rothstein argues, “At least from the time of *Cooper’s Hill* (1642) to the later eighteenth century, poems tend to be at best ambivalent about hunting, and often inconsistent in their posture towards it.”¹² Both versions of *Cooper’s Hill* in this way represent a watershed for hunting literature. It is a poem so vivid and striking in its associations as to make it almost impossible for other writers to consider the hunt poetically in the years following without recalling the traumatic character of Denham’s violent scene. This ambivalent attitude toward the hunt, Rothstein believes, becomes a motif, a *topos*, that would come to inform later treatments of the sport poetically. Anne Elizabeth Carson likewise sees a change in the way hunting poetry was perceived, though she characterizes its effects a little differently. It was representative of a larger trend, she argues, “a move away from the

¹¹ Earl R. Wasserman, *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassical and Romantic Poems* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1959), 73.

¹² Eric Rothstein, “*Discordia Non Concors*: The Motif of Hunting in Eighteenth-Century Verse,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83 (1984): 330. Hereafter cited in text.

historical and clichéd poetry commonly associated with political elegy and formal lament toward the sentimental style that rises to popularity in the mid- and late-eighteenth century.”¹³

Even as early as the composition of *Cooper's Hill*, hunting already had its critics. Puritans opposed the sport on both religious and social grounds. They decried the misdirection of time and effort toward something other than devotion to God, and they also voiced pragmatic objections, pointing to the damage hunters inflicted on farmers' fields. Hunting also faced humanist and, later, sentimental opposition to the cruel treatment of animals, a view that remains strong to this day. Curiously, there are real differences between how hunting has been perceived historically compared to fishing, despite the fact that both are conquest sports of the first order, with participants seeking to find and kill live animals. But the conception of sportsmanship is slightly different in fishing, as the fish is considered, perhaps erroneously, to have a degree of choice in whether to take the bait laid out for it. The fish is being lured, as opposed to the hunting prey, which can suddenly find itself in a chase for survival without an overt action or “choice” of its own. Moreover, as we have seen in the descriptions of personal angling codes, the most experienced anglers undertake more difficult and challenging forms of angling, which enlarge the chances of escape on the part of the fish and make the activity more sporting. Even though some degree of fair play is also present in hunting, the sportsman's prowess is almost always measured by a successful kill, though displays of mercy are possible in some forms of chase. In shooting, however, if the sportsman has the animal in his sights and chooses not to pull the trigger, there is always the chance that he might miss, so there is never any measurable guarantee of success unless he

¹³ Anne Elizabeth Carson, “The Hunted Stag and the Beheaded King,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45 (2005): 538.

does in fact inflict a fatal or serious wound on the beast. By contrast, an angler has the option of catching his prey and allowing it to live by employing catch-and-release methods. Indeed, with the aid of current-day tracking technology, we know that it is frequently the case in heavily-fished recreational areas that a fish is caught and released repeatedly in its life.

Another important difference between the two sports is that most people do not anthropomorphize fish, in contrast with the way more visually pleasing game tends to be viewed. As Richard Hummel observes, “Few defenders of wildlife seem inclined to define the fish’s struggles as a source of torment and pain which so offend the defenders of land-based wildlife.”¹⁴ Perhaps a reason for this tendency is that fish remain, for the most part, hidden from view until capture, while deer, fox, and most fowl are part of the human experience of the countryside. People also exhibit what Matt Cartmill calls the “Bambi Syndrome,” a tendency to identify with more visually pleasing animals whose appearances more closely resemble the human race.¹⁵ We find it easier to project human emotions onto mammals than onto cold-blooded creatures that do not display the range of physical and behavioural characteristics of land animals. When fish were ascribed human qualities in seventeenth-century poetry, as we saw in the previous section of this thesis, it was to place them within a vast chain of being in which larger and higher creatures preyed on a smaller and lower ones. There was little sense of identification with the fish for their “human” qualities. In the seventeenth-century hunting poems, by contrast, prey came to be personified as an emblem of human torment or conflicted emotions. This identification is very much in evidence in such poems as *Cooper’s Hill*, which describe hunting prey in overtly humanized

¹⁴ Richard Hummel, *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, and Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 161.

¹⁵ Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1993), 161.

terms.

Another poet to consider in this light is Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. In her poems “The Hunting of the Hare” and “The Hunting of the Stag,” she likewise attributes to the hare and the stag many human qualities that force the reader into an uneasy relation with the sport of hunting and its forms of prey.¹⁶ “The Hunting of the Hare” opens by describing the physical features of a hare in a field, christened with anthropic effect by the name “Wat,” a humble name for a rural rustic. Describing Wat’s manner of squatting to keep unseen “Betwext two *Ridges of Plowd-land*,” Cavendish lists his physical characteristics, from his nose, to his eyes, head, tail, hairs, and coat (110). As Donna Landry notes of Cavendish’s two hunting poems, the author, in describing the prey, “offers close, scientifically observed details of what is species-specific,” almost taking up the position of a “field naturalist.”¹⁷ In the early morning hours while Wat is resting, hunters and their “*Cruell Dogs*” find the hare (110). The dogs break into a peace-shattering cry that rouses Wat and sets him running to escape. Into the woods he darts, where he sits to let his senses uncover where his pursuers might emerge. But here every movement and sound inspires nothing but fear, described in unerringly human terms: “At every *Leafe* that with the *wind* did shake, / Did bring such *terroure*, made his *Heart* to ake” (111). Moments of anthropomorphization such as this – sentimentalized projections – alternate in the poem with carefully-observed description of the hare’s physique and demeanour.

So after hinting at the hare’s suffering, Cavendish alternates back to describing in closely observed detail the evasive manoeuvres Wat undertakes:

¹⁶ The two poems appear one after the other in Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* (London: 1653), 110-116. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁷ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking, and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 151, 150. Hereafter cited in text.

That *Place* he left, to *Champion Plaines* he went,
 Winding about, for to deceive their *Sent*.
 And while they *Snuffling* were, to find his *Track*,
Poore Wat, being weary, his swift pace did slack.
 On his two *hinder legs* for ease did sit,
 His *Fore-feet* rub'd his *Face* from *Dust*, and *Sweat*.
 Licking his *Feet*, he wip'd his *Eares* so cleane,
 That none could tell that *Wat* had hunted been. (111)

The hare's winding course, his manner of sitting to rest, and his cleansing routine, which calms and rejuvenates him – these are all behavioural features associated with his methods of escape. Cavendish's awareness of these traits of behaviour signals her knowledgeability about the practical scientific expertise of the hunter, not dissimilar to the information transmitted through contemporary hunting treatises. Landry notes this feature of hunting technique: "As the treatises on hunting so popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasized, knowledge of animal physiology, habitats and behavior was inseparable from hunting practice" (151). By supplying such a meticulous portrayal of the hare's features and behaviours, Cavendish demonstrates her acquaintance with established hunting discourse practices.

Cavendish's hunting knowledge was gained accompanying her husband the Duke of Newcastle on his excursions. We know he was an avid hunter from Margaret's accounts in her biography of him, *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High Puissant Prince William*

Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess and Earl of Newcastle (1667).¹⁸ As a result, her poetic accounts of hunting have an authority deriving from their accuracy of detail, which is in evidence, for example, in her description of assorted breeds of dog working in concert:

For though the *Wind* had tied the *Sent* up close,
 A *Busie Dog* thrust his *Snuffling Nose*:
 And drew it out, with it did foremost run,
 Then *Hornes* blew loud, for th' *rest* to follow on.
 The *great slow-Hounds*, their throats did set a *Base*,
 The *Fleet swift Hounds* as *Tenours* next in place;
 The little *Beagles* they a *Treble* sing,
 And through the *Aire* their *Voice* a round did ring?
 Which made a *Consort*, as they ran along;
 If they but *words* could speak, they might sing a *Song* (111-112)

The elaborate pack of dogs is followed by horses and riders, also working together, all motivated by the thrill of the pursuit, culminating in the climactic moment of the kill. And so, each member of the hunting party contrives to be in place to witness that moment:

The *Hornes* kept time, the *Hunters* shout for *Joy*,
 And valiant seeme, *poore Wat* for to destroy:
 Spurring their *Horses* to a full *Careere*,
Swim Rivers deep, leap Ditches without feare;
 Indanger *Life*, and *Limbes*, so fast will ride,
 Onely to see how patiently *Wat* died. (112)

¹⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High Puissant Prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess and Earl of Newcastle* (London: 1667), 92.

The exhilaration of the pursuit is magnified the closer the hounds get to the hare. Here, we can see how the tension of the chase manifests itself at multiple levels. At one level, the hounds are chasing down their target, the primary point of contact; but at another, the hunters on horseback are furiously striving to stay close to the action, and this chase holds its own thrills and obstacles.

But Cavendish takes issue at both levels with the scene she describes, as the poem becomes an overt critique of the sport. Her sympathies are entirely with Wat: she anthropomorphizes him by naming him and by projecting human emotions onto him. Her sympathy is explicit at the final moment of his life, when the hounds finally do overtake him: “Then tumbling downe, [he] did fall with *weeping Eyes*, / Gives up his *Ghost*, and thus poore *Wat* he dies” (112). But even more striking is her condemnation of the hunting party. Her critique acquires weight through her close observation and her technical knowledge. She debunks the traditional arguments in favour of the sport – that it provides exercise, sustenance, good health, productive work, and even preparation for warfare. It is likewise at the moment of the kill that she rebukes most vigourously the men who take part in the slaying:

Men hooping loud, such *Acclamations* make,
 As if the *Devill* they did *Prisoner* take.
 When they do but a *shiftless Creature* kill;
 To hunt, there needs no *Valiant Souldiers* skill.
 But *Man* doth think that *Exercise*, and *Toile*,
 To keep their *Health*, is best, which makes most spoile.
 Thinking that *Food*, and *Nourishment* so good,
 And *Appetite*, that feeds on *Flesh*, and *Blood*. (112)

Moreover, she considers the activity from a moral and religious perspective, asking rhetorically if God made animals so that man could have meat, or worse, whether man should “for *Sport*, or *Recreations* sake, / Destroy those *Lifes* that *God* saw good to make” (112). The final lines of the poem answer her question. The creatures hunted and killed are left behind as “*Murther’d Bodies*,” and, although man thinks himself “gentle, mild,” his “cruell wild” actions belie his self-congratulatory view (112). Man mistakes his place in God’s created order, Cavendish asserts, in his belief “that all *Creatures* for his sake alone, / Was made for him, to *tyrannize* upon” (113). Hunting takes on the form, Cavendish suggests, of an egotistical expression of domination and cruelty. The poem is “unremittingly sad and painful,” observes Nigel Smith in claiming that Cavendish “rails against mankind’s tyranny, while still implying sentient pity” (259). Cavendish’s indictment of the hunting procession as tyrannical carries weight because of the experience and knowledge of the hunt she displays while condemning it. This is the foundation upon which she justifies her censure.

In “The Hunting of the Stag,” Cavendish extends her condemnation to the other type of hunt of which she had intimate knowledge. Describing the prey and its nocturnal habits, the poem’s opening lines present the stag with an air of scientific precision:

There was a *Stag* did in the *Forrest* lye,
 Whose *Neck* was long, and *Hornes* branch’d up high.
 His *Haunch* was broad, *Sides* large, and *Back* was long,
 His *Legs* were *Nervous*, and his *Joynts* were strong.
 His *Haire* lay sleek, and smooth upon his *Skin*,
 None in the *Forrest* might compare with him.
 In *Summers* heat he in coole *Brakes* him laies,
 Which grew so high, kept of the *Suns* hot *Raies*.

In *Evenings coole*, or dewy *Mornings new*,
 Would he rise up, and all the *Forrest* view. (113)

But from this starting point of detached description in introducing the stag, Cavendish proceeds to engage emotionally by anthropomorphizing the beast, though in a slightly different manner from that seen in “The Hunting of the Hare.” She forbears to name the animal, but she interprets his actions in human terms. As the beast proceeds to a nearby brook, he exhibits human traits, vanity in particular, by looking at his reflection: “Taking such *Pleasure* in his *Stately Crowne*, / His *Pride* forgets that *Dogs* might pull him downe” (113). The stag is considered emblematically in royal terms, his antlers signifying the crown, and it is the beast’s pride that puts him in danger, an accusation similarly levelled against Charles I.

However, this stag chase is not a royal one, as it is not processional in nature. It starts up spontaneously when the owner of a farm spots the stag in his field and calls upon his dogs and the local men to pursue the beast. Cavendish refrains from stating precisely who this “*Owner*” is, though he likely would have had the means to own land and raise hounds for the purpose of the hunt, suggesting he is a gentleman. That said, after Parliament had annulled most of the Stuart hunting preserves, it could have been any commoner. This fact could account for Cavendish’s antagonistic views of the men performing the chases she observes.

For Cavendish, the chase is a convergence of the passions of all creatures involved: “Thus their several *Passions* their waies did meet, / As *Dogs* desire to catch did make them *Fleet*. / The *Stag* with feare did run, his *life* to save, / Whilst *Men* for love of *Mischiefe* dig his *Grave*” (115). The men are portrayed in the darkest terms, as conquerors with no sympathy, taking joy in the fall of another creature. Only the stag is individualized, personified, and portrayed as a creature capable of higher virtues and emotions. Like the

hare, the stag feels grief in its heart at this moment of danger:

His *Heart* so heavie grew, with *Griefe*, and *Care*,
 That his small *Feet* his *Body* could not beare.
 Yet loth to dye, or yeild to *Foes* was he,
 But to the *last* would strive for *Victory*.
 Twas not for want of *Courage* he did run,
 But that an *Army* against *One* did come.
 Had he the *Valour* of bold *Caesar* stout,
 Must yeild himself to *them*, or dye no doubt. (116)

Even Caesar could not withstand such an assault. Once again, at this moment of high stress for the stag running for its life, Cavendish's poetic balance between anthropomorphic empathy and a field naturalist's observation resurfaces. The poem's final image is again one of sadness, as the stag is left "Shedding some *Teares* at his owne *Funerall*" (116). In Cavendish's oscillations between emblems – such as in the final image – and the many descriptive details throughout of the stag's physical and behavioural traits, we can note an early example of the transition taking place in the sporting poetry of the seventeenth century. We can account for Cavendish's move to realism through her expert or insider's knowledge of the chase and its thrills, even if she uses it to critique the human behaviour she detests.

This habit of considering the prey's perspective in an anthropomorphic manner extends also to the only other hunting poem of note in the last half of the seventeenth century, Thomas Heyrick's "The Chase of the Fox at Welby 1677," which appeared in his *Miscellany Poems* (1691), the collection that also included "A Pindarique Ode in Praise of

Angling” discussed in the last chapter.¹⁹ But, whereas that ode commends the sport of angling as a constructive means for stoic contemplation and presents the speaker as an expert participant, “The Chase of the Fox at Welby 1677” is viewed from the perspective of a witness or spectator who goes along to observe a hunting procession. This difference is telling, for participation in the hunt is highly class-based in nature, a circumstance that accounts partly for the rise in popularity of angling as a sport. For anglers, participation is much more individual and direct than the customs of the communal chase allow. Heyrick encounters the hunt not as a conductor or direct participant, but merely as part of its entourage, a privilege offered him as a member of the gentry, a clergyman who also taught boys Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.²⁰ As an observer, he is in a position to watch analytically the events taking place before him. He thus assumes a perspective similar to Cavendish; his peripheral participation in the hunt confers distance from it, allowing him to comment on the morality of the enterprise.

At the opening of the poem the hunters are described as a “Gallant Train ... For Vigorous Sport and Generous Actions fit” (79). The men conducting the chase are here portrayed as heroic and larger than life: “They all on winged Coursers mounted stay / And big with Expectation wait the *Prey*” (80). At the commencement of the chase, the dogs are sent off in advance, in military terms, as “curious Spies” whose characteristic powers of scent are employed to full effect (80). The speaker marvels at their ability and accordingly provides an account current with seventeenth-century scientific thought:

First they employ their curious *Nose* to find

¹⁹ Thomas Heyrick, “The Chase of the Fox at Welby 1677,” in *Miscellany Poems* (Cambridge: 1691), 79-84. Hereafter cited in text.

²⁰ W. H. Kelliher, “Heyrick, Thomas (*bap.* 1649, *d.* 1694),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

Those subtle *Atoms*, he had left behind:
 Those Exhalations in his Footsteps lie,
 That from his Breath, or from his Sweat do flie;
 So small, they to our Eyes do disappear,
 And undiscern'd mix with the Common Air.
 These, as i'th' wanton Wind they play about,
 Their Noses, *Chymist*-like, can draw them out; (80)

Thus, the conflict is conceived as the fox's "Deceit," "Treacheries," and "thousand Arts" (81) pitted against the dogs drawn to him "by a *Magnetick* Force" (80). It is this science of how they track by scent that Heyrick explains in his account.

In comparison to Cavendish's two poems representing hunting, which sympathetically keep the speaker's attention on the prey, Heyrick offers perspective on the whole scene, from the fox, to the hunters, and also to the onlookers. As the pursuit heats up, it is joined by a mob of townsfolk who demand retribution for the fox's depredations against their farms:

When lo! a mixed Crowd from th' neighbouring Town,
 Warn'd by the Noise, tumultuously came down;
 All, arm'd with Pitchfork, Spit, flail, Spade and Pole,
 To kill the *Fox*, that had their Poultry stole,
 Outnoise the Dogs, and with loud Curses fill
 The Air with sound of *Follow, follow, kill!*
 "Kill him, Cries *One*, he stole my Peckled Hen,
 "And got my fatted *Capons* out o'th' Pen.
 Another Woman lets her Tongue fly loose,
 And cries, "the thief did kill her Brooding *Goose*."

“My *Cock*, saith One, my *Turkey*, saith *Another*,
 “My pretty, Copled, *Pullet*, cries *the tother*, (82)

All levels of society are represented. We can contrast this procession with the royal stag hunt, which constitutes a kingly display of power in which the stag is a surrogate for an enemy. In vanquishing the stag, the king symbolically enacts his role as protector and provider for his people. Daniel Beaver describes the fundamental class division engendered in the royal hunt’s theatrical display of power: it “offered the clearest interrelationship of the chase and civic virtue, because the royal hunt offered a microcosm of the polity, a hierarchy of nobles and commoners defined by a clear division of labor and rank among courtiers, butlers, cooks, and huntsmen, yet held all strictly subordinate to the tastes and needs of the monarch” (22). By contrast, in “The Chase of the Fox at Welby 1677,” the inclusivity of the mob pursuing the fox suggests a very different social function is being served by fox hunting, bringing together the entire rural community at one level or another. Nonetheless, even though a “mixed Crowd” becomes involved in the activity, their inclusion remains indirect: their losses of poultry provide the social pretext or justification for the hunt. Beyond that, they are spectators rather than participants in the sport. The experienced handlers and their trained dogs remain the ones who take down the fox. The sporting display of the hunters differs from the angered and passionate motives of the townsfolk.

Curiously, at the crucial moment of the kill, Heyrick not only anthropomorphizes the fox but also equates the fox with its human pursuers. In fact, the fox is given the last word in the poem, crying “with faint and trembling voice” in the poem’s final line: “I liv’d by *Rapine* and by *Rapine* dy” (84). The implication of the chase as rapine puts the human pursuers at the same level as the thieving fox, and thus the end constitutes a subtle critique of the chase from the perspective of the onlooker. This critique takes on even greater power

when juxtaposed with the extent to which Heyrick celebrates and elevates the sister sport of angling in the very same collection of poems. Hunting does not hold the unwavering virtues that angling possesses for the rural sportsman. Instead, the levels of performance attached to hunting are questionable in the degree to which the best or worst of human behaviour and intention are displayed.

Chapter 5. The Hunt in Early-Eighteenth-Century Poetry

Thomas Heyrick's fox chase is a very early poetic representation of that mode of hunting. Most historical accounts of fox hunting claim the last half of the seventeenth century as a transitional moment for the sport. "Foxhunting is not an ancient sport," states David Itzkowitz, who dates its origins to around the time of Heyrick's poem: "Precisely when it began is a matter of some dispute among foxhunters, but there is no doubt that it was generally unknown until the end of the seventeenth century."¹ This timing has been challenged by Iris Middleton, who locates much earlier evidence of the sport in medieval books and art representations. Regardless, Middleton allows that "more and more people were able to go fox hunting during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because the English economy had improved considerably, which resulted in more people being able to afford leisure time."² Hence, Heyrick's poem gestures toward a change of sporting fashionability in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The deer was becoming less common as the object of the hunt. One important reason for this trend was its lack of availability as prey. In the Civil War, the king's deer parks were raided to the point that in some parks no deer remained at all. E.P. Thompson provides statistics on the deer count in Windsor Forest, noting that owing to the keepers' annual counts, "there are better statistics for the deer in Windsor Forest than for the human denizens."³ The early part of the seventeenth century saw James I and then Charles I defend the deer population so vigorously that their numbers swelled to the point that farmers and commoners complained of problems caused by overpopulation. But the Civil War period saw

¹ David Itzkowitz, *Peculiar Privilege: A Social History of English Foxhunting 1753-1885* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: The Harvester Press, 1977), 6.

² Iris Middleton, "Fox Hunting Traditions: Fact or Fantasy?" *Sport History Review* 28 (1997): 25.

³ E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 55.

the number of deer tumble dramatically, and, despite efforts to replenish the herds after the Restoration, it was not until the eighteenth century that the numbers of fallow deer began to rise steadily again, though to nowhere near the numbers observed in 1607, as Thompson's figures show:⁴

Year	Red Deer	Fallow Deer
1607	377	2,689
1697	258	203
1726	456	839

The culture of the hunt was also affected by other factors, in particular the wholesale destruction of several enclosures of forest land, which occasioned ongoing quarrels between gentry and the crown over the control of that land. The outcome of these changes, both social and political, was that hunting became increasingly a sport of the squirearchy in the second half of the seventeenth century. By and large, the squirearchy no longer pursued deer, engaging instead in shooting pheasants and chasing hare and fox. Some traditional sports, like hawking and netting, almost completely disappeared. In the last half of the seventeenth century, with the exception of Heyrick's narrative poem, poets shied away from the hunt as subject matter because of its vivid associations with the Civil War and its symbolic ties to the king's prerogative, regardless of what side a poet fell on the political divide. The mode of the fox hunt provided the distance necessary for Heyrick to avoid most of those associations.

The second half of the seventeenth century also saw a change in legal qualification that altered the way hunting would operate for the next 150 years. Even though the forests had been heavily regulated since the fourteenth century, a series of Game Laws, beginning

⁴ E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 56. I have reproduced much of Thompson's chart.

with legislation in 1671, radically altered the hunting regulations. These laws stipulated that only landowners with freehold land worth 100 pounds per annum or leasehold land worth 150 pounds per annum were permitted to shoot game, a qualification that remained unchanged until the game laws were repealed in 1831. In fact, between 1671 and 1831, Parliament passed twenty-four subsequent acts designed to regulate the hunting of game. On average, this amounts to a Game Act passed every six years, suggesting the high symbolic value attached to hunting and an intense interest in using the sport to demarcate privileges that defined the squirearchy socially.

Such a privilege bestowed many advantages on those who were qualified. In particular, the laws underscored the value of land-ownership, as opposed to other kinds of wealth, for the property qualification effectively excluded all others from participation in the hunting of game and even the ownership of weapons used for that purpose. From the perspective of sporting privilege, these laws had considerable effects. They heralded the transfer of the game prerogative from the monarch to the landed gentry. Up to that time, the king had claimed the rights to hunt where he pleased and to take whatever measures he thought necessary to preserve the game. After 1671, he still had those rights, but now the gentry also possessed them. Earlier qualification acts had allowed eligible sportsmen to hunt only on the land they owned, but the Game Act of 1671 did not include such a restraint. Under the new law, the qualified sportsman could hunt wherever he wished.

The Game Laws only referred to the hunting of hares, pheasants, partridges, and moor fowl, even though many more animals were pursued for sport after 1671. In particular, foxes were increasingly chased, even though they were not covered by the act because they were considered vermin rather than game (a category that also applied to otters and badgers). And with the deer population so depleted – combined with the practical consideration that if

one could not own dogs or guns one could not be expected to mount a decent deer chase – they were not covered under the act either. Deer remained the privilege of the king, and so poaching affrays persisted through the eighteenth century and continued to be considered as an affront to the monarch if his enclosures were breached.

The landed gentry also proceeded increasingly to enclose their game. As P.B. Munsche explains, “the concept of enclosure is central not only to the definition of game but also to the development of the game laws in the eighteenth century.”⁵ Hares, partridges, pheasants and moor fowl were considered wild animals in 1671, but over the course of the next century their habitats became enclosed for the purposes of hunting. “As they did,” Munsche continues, “the tendency to view game as property – and poachers as thieves – became increasingly apparent” (5). Thus, with the doctrine of possessive individualism becoming expressed through legal measures, poaching was perceived increasingly as a threat to private property. Hence, the Game Laws increasingly shifted the basis of hunting qualifications from purely social status to economic status.

While this may have been the outward effect of the Game Laws, the original justification for their enactment was to ensure the plentiful survival of game, an idea prompted by fears of further mass extinctions of prey, such as those witnessed in the king’s deer parks during the Civil War. In addition, the Game Laws were conceived as a measure that would reduce the possibility of armed insurrections by the lower classes, a response to the violence of the 1640s. If only country residents who were qualified to shoot game possessed firearms, the chances of armed rebellion would be reduced. Admittedly, this thinking ignores that it was precisely this class, not the lower orders, that had fuelled the

⁵ P.B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 5. Hereafter cited in text.

conflict of the Civil War; there were powerful noblemen and gentry families on both sides of the conflict. Another motivation for the Act was a desire to secure the numbers and social integrity of the rural population. It was thought that if the Laws allowed only the higher country gentlemen to hunt, this would help persuade them to continue residing in the countryside, a measure considered necessary to counter the allure of urban life. Keeping the better gentlemen in the country was a circumstance thought essential to the nation's welfare, and they were accordingly invested with significant power to enforce the laws and prosecute poachers.

But even though as much as ninety-nine percent of the population could not legally hunt, evidence from correspondence, diaries, and statute books from the period shows that many more people hunted than were legally allowed, and they often did so with the knowledge and blessing of the country gentlemen who oversaw the legal administration of the forests. The reasons for this development are many. Personal friendships account in large part for such unlawful hunting. Moreover, gentlemen were seen by their tenants and the community at large as generous if they allowed others to hunt. This reputation was easily lost if they enforced the laws and introduced strict game preservation on their estates. Yet, despite widespread laxity on the part of country gentlemen, the nature of a deferential society necessitated a gradation of privilege, and so there remained an official line between qualified and unqualified sportsmen according to law.

The social effects of this legal distinction were substantial, for it acted as a discriminatory measure. Munsche considers the practical consequences of the Game Act from the point of view of the now-entrenched divide between landowners and those sportsmen who did not claim such title: "Most merchants, for example, owned or could have easily purchased enough land to qualify under the Act. The same was probably true of the

despised bankers and of many lawyers as well. For the upper ranks of the urban bourgeoisie, then, the Game Act was not a formidable barrier to sporting privilege” (17). But the ability to purchase privilege was not the point; there was, in Munsche’s view, another principle at stake: “The Game Act’s property qualification forced them to concede the superiority of land over other forms of wealth – and for country gentlemen that was the important point” (17). Thus, there existed a point of contention that was more than merely economic. It was cultural and political as well. The country gentry wanted to tie political power to land ownership. The Game Laws became a driving force behind the new legal framework, serving as a tangible marker of the power struggle over which form of wealth and standing should prevail – the landed interest or moneyed interest. But the conflict between country gentlemen and the town elite over rights to such activities as hunting was perceived as taking on a much greater significance than perhaps was necessary. Munsche concludes, “As the eighteenth century would demonstrate, the two societies were not incompatible, but to country gentlemen in the decades following the Restoration this was far from obvious” (18). Amidst shifting political and cultural values, the sport of hunting found itself at the symbolic centre of the struggle. By the end of the seventeenth century, it was clear the sport had to be rehabilitated in the public consciousness. It was many years after the initial passage of this legislation that hunting became acceptable as a poetic subject in the instructive and imaginative mode of its rural counterpart, angling.

I argue that the man who enacted this poetic rehabilitation was Alexander Pope. The extended representation of rural sports in *Windsor Forest* serves to legitimate hunting as contributive to his overall project of celebrating the English countryside and the nation under the rule of Queen Anne. But, even though the rural sports are favourably represented in *Windsor Forest*, Pope’s own view of hunting was quite ambiguous. In a *Guardian* essay

discussing the ethics of a proper diet and the avoidance of gluttony, Pope quotes from the brief depiction of hunting in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Here, Pope denounces the royal stag hunt:

I must animadvert upon a certain custom yet in use with us, barbarous enough to be derived from the Goths, or even the Scythians; I mean that savage compliment our Huntsmen pass upon ladies of quality, who are present at the death of a Stag, when they put the knife in their hands to cut the throat of a helpless, trembling, and weeping creature.

—*Quesluque cruentus,*

Atque imploranti similis. (*The Guardian*, LXI, May 21, 1713)⁶

The Latin quotation is from *Aeneid* Book VII, and the translation of the lines shows the dynamic he saw between hunter and prey: “bleeding and suppliant-like / he filled all the house with his plaints.”⁷ Clearly, the sentiment expressed is driven by an aversion to the cruelty of the practice, based on identification with the prey. Pope would have had first-hand knowledge of the practices of the hunt, for in 1700 his family moved to Binfield, a village in the environs of Windsor Forest, and he spent his teenage years there.

While Pope's condemnation of the chase is uncompromising in the *Guardian* essay, his views on the hunting of smaller game are less rigid, if we take such poems as *Windsor Forest* as evidence.⁸ This poem offers a celebration of a forest economy characterized by harmony; the forest functions as an extended metaphor for the political life of the nation, “Where Order in Variety we see, / And where, tho' all things differ, all agree” (ll. 15-16).

Written principally in celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the poem extols the rule

⁶ Alexander Pope, “*The Guardian*, LXI, May 21, 1713,” in *The Guardian*, ed. John Calhoun Stephens (Lexington, Kentucky: The UP of Kentucky, 1982), 234.

⁷ This is from the Loeb translation provided in Stephens's edition.

⁸ Alexander Pope, “*Windsor Forest*,” in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 65-77. Hereafter cited in text. All line references are to this edition.

of Queen Anne who stands responsible for the state of the forest: “Rich Industry sits smiling on the Plains, / And Peace and Plenty tell, a STUART reigns” (ll. 41-42). The use of the word “industry” is apt here, for the harmony depicted is one that has taken a long time to establish, as the history of the forest preceding 1713 confirms. The economic reason for the serenity depicted in the poem is the proper proportioning of forest resources, as E.P. Thomson argues: “This harmony is expressed not only in the variegated forms of natural beauty but in the adjustments of interests between hunters and farmers” (288). In the poem, Pope takes great pains to contrast the current climate with the forms of hunting enacted in England’s long past, though, as we have seen, England’s recent past was fraught with similar discord: “Not thus the Land appear'd in Ages past, / A dreary Desart and a gloomy Waste, / To Savage Beasts and Savage Laws a Prey, / And Kings more furious and severe than they” (ll. 43-47). It is easier for Pope to place the violence in the distant past than to refer to the mid-seventeenth century violence, especially as the Stuart kings of the period are Anne’s direct ancestors. Instead, the “Savage Laws” refer to the forest laws of the Norman kings, particularly of William I, who created the forests as hunting preserves and severely punished any trespassing or unlawful hunting. Pope relates how this imposition brought unparalleled levels of injustice and suffering to the inhabitants of areas designated as forests, who were treated even worse than the beasts hunted by the king:

The Swain with Tears his frustrate Labour yields,
 And famish'd dies amidst his ripen'd Fields.
 What wonder then, a Beast or Subject slain
 Were equal Crimes in a Despotick Reign?
 Both doom'd alike, for sportive Tyrants bled,
 But that the Subject starv'd, the Beast was fed.

Proud *Nimrod* first the bloody Chace began,
 A mighty Hunter, and his Prey was Man:
 Our haughty *Norman* boasts that barb'rous Name,
 And makes his trembling Slaves the Royal Game. (ll. 55- 64)

The rural inhabitants are depicted in this passage as themselves little more than prey.

William is christened as a successor to Nimrod, the builder of nations, despot, and hunter mentioned in Genesis 10. Nimrod is credited also as the founder of the chase, a disreputable beginning for an activity that would have to be redeemed, according to Pope, by “Succeeding Monarchs,” who allowed their subjects greater “*Liberty*,” resulting in the current state of the forest, which he now views as in its “golden Years” (ll. 85, 91, 92). Pope’s historical understanding of hunting is that a civilizing movement has taken place, one that has taken hunting away from its roots in tyranny and barbarity.

As a result, hunting has become productive for most of the forest population, and the poem proceeds to list the activities of the various seasons in which the “vig’rous Swains” exercise their sport within “the gameful Woods” (ll. 93, 95). In autumn, the sport of choice is the partridge, detected in the field by a spaniel and swept up in a net or shot as it takes to the air in an attempt to escape. In winter, the preoccupation with shooting continues, as doves, woodcocks, glades, lapwings, and larks fall from the sky. In spring, the activity of choice is fishing. Finally, in the summer the grandest of the activities takes place, the chase of the hart with coursers speeding after it. The queen herself has previously graced the shades of Windsor, and the youth of the forest turn out to join in the pursuit. The deaths of all these animals are thus set in contrast to the royal tyrant’s savagery of earlier times, with England’s current prosperity and peace serving as validation for the current practices. The connection

between the field sports and warfare is made overt. Warfare in *Windsor Forest* has been displaced, its energies transferred into empire building:

Thus (if small Things we may with great compare)
 When *Albion* sends her eager Sons to War,
 Some thoughtless Town, with Ease and Plenty blest,
 Near, and more near, the closing Lines invest;
 Sudden they seize th'amazed, defenceless Prize,
 And high in Air *Britannia's* Standard flies. (ll. 105-110)

Britain is able increasingly to find peace on its own shores by relocating violence onto foreign theatres. It is able to exploit the oaks of the forest to build ships for commerce and the navy, because, within its own forests, the bloodshed of years past has been replaced by a harmony of competing interests, including the now rehabilitated hunt, which serves to unify rather than divide the forest's inhabitants. As in Denham's poem, *Windsor Forest* is blood-soaked again, but the violence and killing have been reframed:

Safe on my Shore each unmolested Swain
 Shall tend the Flocks, or reap the bearded Grain;
 The shady Empire shall retain no Trace
 Of War or Blood, but in the Sylvan Chace,
 The trumpets sleep, while chearful Horns are blown,
 And Arms employ'd on Birds and Beasts alone. (ll. 369-374)

Pope never fully resolves the tensions of hunting's beginnings with its current practice, because it remains cruel. But, at least in the pursuit of game, the forest inhabitants can channel the violence productively for the nation in a period of peace. In this way the forest denizens are active contributors to the harmony Pope is celebrating.

John Gay's *Rural Sports, A Georgic* (1720, first published 1713 under the title *Rural Sports, A Poem*) is more overtly about field sports than *Windsor Forest*, though Gay's focus is likewise on literary decorum and a celebration of the forest economy. Here, we find a greater demonstration of specialized sporting knowledge, the source of which appears to be in some part his reading of John Dennys and Izaak Walton. However, Gay's modern editors, Vinton A. Dearing and Charles E. Beckwith, conjecture that he gained experience of rural sports during his upbringing in Devonshire: "it is quite possible that he got his information from experience and conversation rather than from his reading," and "he was certainly a fowler and fisherman, though Swift [in his letters] cast aspersion on his ability in the latter capacity."⁹ Gay's true level of expertise is unclear, and the style and approach to his subject in the poem seems to indicate his knowledge is gained from books rather than first hand. *Rural Sports*, observes Dwight L. Durling, "is mainly descriptive; the didactic content is negligible, a convention merely."¹⁰ And John Chalker sees the poem as an experiment in verse, more concerned with testing generic limits than instructing or imitating directly. In *Rural Sports*, he states, "the Virgilian influence is, at least in the first instance, more purely literary, perhaps more complex in its intermingling with other elements, certainly more elusive, but of great interest in showing how flexible the concept of 'kinds' was."¹¹ Gay's epigraph in the 1713 version is an amalgam of two different lines from Virgil's *Eclogues*, but the revised 1720 version opens with an epigraph from Nemesianus, whose *Cynegetica* of A.D. 283 further expanded the reach of hunting verse in the georgic mode. The epigraph

⁹ Vinton A. Dearing and Charles E. Beckwith, ed., *John Gay: Poetry and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 492.

¹⁰ Dwight L. Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1964), 37. Hereafter cited in text.

¹¹ John Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 141. Hereafter cited in text.

reads, “We sing the carefree battles of the country,” which establishes Gay’s preoccupation with, as Chalker argues, “the post-classical tradition of hunting poetry that had already freely adapted the Virgilian model to its own purposes” (162). Thus, the poem is best understood, I would argue, as a drawing-room georgic, more interested in a certain ethos of the genre than in giving hard advice.

Despite classical precedent for Gay’s sporting georgic, Tom Woodman castigates the poem for its attempt to use field sports as subject matter in a georgic poem. “The true georgic,” Woodman argues, “succeeds in generalizing the significance of its central activity so that it becomes symbolic of an art of living as a whole. Gay’s version of this in *Rural Sports* has to be a series of trite moralizations on fishing or hunting because of the peripheral nature of such activities in the modern world.”¹² This critique assumes that field sports were not economically and socially central to eighteenth-century life, as husbandry was. One can certainly concede that agriculture is an indispensable activity, but it does not necessarily follow that Gay’s altered focus trivializes his poem. There is more to the poem than just a preoccupation with sports: “’Tis not that rural sports alone invite, / But all the grateful country breaths delight,” Gay tells us (ll. 31-32).¹³ The poem is more about the poet’s engagement with the country than a purely prescriptive exercise in instruction on sporting techniques. The changes from the 1713 to the 1720 version of *Rural Sports* illustrate this broader focus.

Jean Ellis D’Alessandro and John M. Aden have each provided extended analyses of the differences between the two versions. What we learn principally from examining these

¹² Tom Woodman, “‘Vulgar Circumstance’ and ‘Due Civilities’: Gay’s Art of Polite Living in Town,” in *John Gay and the Scriblerians*. Ed. Peter Lewis and Nigel Wood (London: Vision Press, 1988), 84.

¹³ John Gay, “Rural Sports: A Georgic,” in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: 1720), 5. Hereafter cited in text. All line references are to the 1720 edition unless otherwise stated.

changes is how Gay himself was evolving as a writer. In the later 1720 version, the speaker becomes interested primarily in a contemplative engagement with the rural scene, as indicated in the Prooemium to his friend Pope and the short summary of Virgil's *Georgics* in an early section: "Here I peruse the *Mantuan's* Georgic strains, / And learn the labours of *Italian* swains; / In ev'ry page I see new landscapes rise, / and all *Hesperia* opens to my eyes" (ll. 67-70). He describes his reading of the four books of the *Georgics*, studying the rural labourers toiling in Book 1; noting the fruits blooming in the trees in Book 2; seeing the nurturing of farm animals in Book 3; and learning about the hives of bees that populate Book 4 (ll. 71-90). Gay's ordering of his own poem becomes more sophisticated in the 1720 version. According to D'Alessandro, "He follows an internal order in the poem through the dichotomies of town versus country, peace versus war, and past versus present, while the framework of the poem, or the external order, is of classical precedent and concerns a rest in the country in an Horatian mood of retirement."¹⁴ In both the internal thematic structure and the external structural framework of the 1720 version, Gay displays his greater experience as a poet.

Aden likewise sees growth in the maturity of the poet, particularly in the structural congruity visible in the 1720 version. The first effort at *Rural Sports*, he notes, "is really a combination of four types, georgic as well as halieutic, ixeutic, and cynegetic ... all carelessly combined with a general stress on field sports."¹⁵ Gay made his improvements by sharpening the georgic focus through a rearrangement of the parts of the poem, making some additions to and subtractions from sections of the original, and notably dividing the poem

¹⁴ Jean Ellis D'Alessandro, "John Gay: Poetic Techniques in *Rural Sports* 1713-1720," *Lingue del Mondo* 50.3 (1985): 230. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁵ John M. Aden, "The 1720 Version of *Rural Sports* and the Georgic Tradition," *Modern Language Quarterly* 20 (1959): 229. Hereafter cited in text.

into two cantos: spring/fishing and fall/hunting. In the 1713 version, as Aden notes, “the purely georgic part of the poem occupied an arbitrary and incidental position in the middle,” but in the 1720 version “it was brought forward to a first position preceding the field sports sections” (229). This georgic part comprises the speaker’s reading of the *Georgics* mentioned above. In addition, the poem concludes with another georgic section at the end of Canto II, thereby bookending the sporting sections with extensive passages inspired by Virgil.

With this structure in place, I believe the sporting sections are more fully realized. The first sporting scene constitutes a very early description of a fishing technique still used today, the dry fly, so named because the fly is designed to be buoyant, floating on the surface of the water rather than sinking:

Far up the stream the twisted hair he throws,
Which down the murm’ring current gently flows;
When if or chance or hunger’s pow’rful sway
Directs the roving trout this fatal way,
He greedily sucks in the twining bait,
And tugs and nibbles the fallacious meat:
Now, happy fisherman, now twitch the line! (ll. 149-155)

This “early reference to the dry fly,” as Mortimer J. Donovan calls it, portrays the cast of a fly fisherman.¹⁶ The dry fly emerges as Gay’s preferred mode of fishing. Clearly, the vivid detail of the description confirms Gay’s experience with this technique; the specificity of detail, rather than the poem’s instruction, establishes his credibility. After his depiction of a successful catch, Gay does provide some directions on the making of flies, in keeping with

¹⁶ Mortimer J. Donovan, “Early Reference to the Dry Fly,” *Notes and Queries* 195 (1950): 247.

the modal paradigm of sporting verse, though Durling is quite right in pointing out the lack of specificity of the instruction. The tutoring on the proper bait to use and on the colours to employ in fly-tying are fairly generalized and do not descend to particularities. In his description of the sportsman assembling his fly, Gay advises that flies should be made to mimic the available insect bait:

Then round his hook the chosen fur he winds,
 And on the back a speckled feather binds,
 So just the colours shine through ev'ry part,
 That nature seems to live again in art. (ll. 205-208)

The passage is reminiscent of the description of Belinda's comb in Canto I of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, suggesting the artificiality on display in both poems.¹⁷ The first canto of *Rural Sports* ends with a gesture toward the conservation of fish that echoes advice given in earlier piscatorial poems: "Would you preserve a num'rous finny race? / Let your fierce dogs the rav'nous otter chase" (ll. 253-254). This counsel is accompanied by a brief reflection on the sporting codes Gay espouses as important for angling. He denounces "The thievish nightly net" and the "barbed spear" as inappropriate methods of capture (l. 262). Rather, he affirms, "Let me less cruel cast the feather'd hook" (l. 267). Using a less cruel method, however, requires greater art. Hence, it is sporting and worthy as a gentlemanly pursuit.

The second canto features a move to the ixeutic and cynegetic field sports. Gay signals a transition to them from the fishing portion in a characteristically Virgilian fashion, declaring that he will eschew the topic of sea fishing because "It would extend the growing

¹⁷ From "The Rape of the Lock": "The tortoise here and Elephant unite, / Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white" (ll. 135-136). In *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 83.

theme too long, / And tire the reader with the watry song” (ll. 279-280). Given the debate over the merits and purposes of sea fishing versus river fishing as poetic subjects, discussed in the fishing part of this study, we can see where Gay’s sporting and poetic allegiances reside: fishing as performed in England requires a georgic orientation to the subject matter. This has consequences for his poetics. I therefore note, with D’Alessandro, that Gay “has no intention of poetising a theme which would mark him as a poetaster, as one who was uncertain what to retain and what to eliminate in a poem, a poet lacking in *decorum*” (234). Sea pastorals remained unpopular in the early eighteenth century as subject matter, despite Moses Browne’s later efforts to revive the tradition. Hence, in this transition between cantos, Gay is illustrating what subject matter is and is not poetically appropriate for georgic.

For this reason, Gay is keen to move his attention to the chase, though he begins by offering a subtle criticism of hunting with his suggestion that there are occasions where the hunter should “from the chase refrain,” so that he does not “render all the Plowman’s labour vain” (ll. 281-282). Hunting must not be undertaken at the expense of the farmer’s crops. It is not until the farmers have reaped the harvest in the autumn that the chase should commence. Once this is established, Gay proceeds through short descriptions of the various forms of the chase commonly practiced. He begins with a passage on coursing, the chasing of the hare with the “fleet greyhound” (ll. 290). Gay implies that, of the many types of hunt, only coursing can be enjoyed before the harvest because greyhounds do not follow the hare by scent; they must see their prey and chase it down with their remarkable speed. The hare’s method of escape is usually to circle back to avoid the onrushing dogs. This takes place over a relatively small area of land, and if the hare manages to enter a grain field, the greyhounds lose sight of it and cease pursuing, thus sparing the grain for harvest.

Next comes the ixeutic section, featuring a fowler and a spaniel in search of “th’unwary partridge” (ll. 305). The spaniel is prized for his sense of smell – “The subtle dog scowrs with sagacious nose” (ll. 309) – and, sneaking up on the partridge, the hound flushes out the bird, over which his master then attempts to throw his net. Unfortunately for the fowler in *Rural Sports*, the partridge escapes to the relative safety of the woods. As with all sport, success is never total. After this disappointment, however, the poem’s focus shifts to a higher level of specialization, declaring shooting as a subject worthy of poetic consideration: “Nor must the sporting verse the gun forbear, / But what’s the fowler’s be the muse’s care” (ll. 335-336). In this type of pursuit – called “perching pheasants” or “shooting-flying” – the dog’s bark springs the woodcocks, and “death in thunder overtakes their flight” (ll. 342).

Perhaps the most disappointing section of the poem is the cynegetic, and Gay appears to acknowledge this shortcoming, as he addresses the muse in his perfunctory attempt to summon up a scene of chase:

But stay, advent’rous muse, hast thou the force
 To wind the twisted horn, to guide the horse?
 To keep thy seat unmov’d hast thou the skill
 O’er the high gate, and down the headlong hill?
 Canst thou the stag’s laborious chace direct
 Or the strong fox through all his arts detect?
 The theme demands a more experience’d lay:
 Ye mighty hunters, spare this weak essay. (ll. 388-395)

Gay here confirms that there is a hierarchy of sport, and he admits he lacks sporting experience in the “highest” of them – the chase of the stag. It is notable, though, that he acknowledges the fox hunt here as part of the hierarchy. There is a changing social reality

reflected in Gay's retreat from the stag hunt to the smaller game in his poetic representations. From a sporting perspective, the choice of prey actually being pursued by the majority of sportsmen had changed by his time of writing, so there is a component of realism reflected in Gay's attitude, hinting at his own experiences directly.

Gay's 1720 version is likely to have been influenced in part by Thomas Tickell's "A Fragment of a Poem on Hunting," which was published with some of Gay's verse in Jacob Tonson's *Miscellanies* of 1714. Even though Tickell's abortive cynegetic boasts of lofty intentions to be the first to employ the hunt to imitate Virgil in English – "I first in British verse presume to raise, / A vent'rous rival of the Roman praise"¹⁸ – he abandons the promise of a lengthier work, and we are left with only some admirable verse on the breeding of hounds: what Durling calls "a piece of unrelieved classical adaptation" (37). In a lecture on didactic verse presented at Oxford in 1711, Tickell lauded the georgic as "second to epic alone," an oft-repeated sentiment in the period.¹⁹ This fragment on hunting has many stock features of georgic verse, and it signals, alongside Pope's and Gay's incorporation of hunting motifs into their verse, how in the early part of the eighteenth century hunting was increasingly perceived as legitimate subject matter for georgic poetry. The links between the two become tied unequivocally to nationalism, as Tickell makes his poetic function explicit: "The task be mine to teach Britannia's swains, / My much lov'd country and my native plains" (181).

¹⁸ Thomas Tickell, "A Fragment of a Poem on Hunting," in *Poetical Miscellanies* (London: 1714), 177. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁹ Richard Eustache Tickell, ed. *Thomas Tickell and the Eighteenth Century Poets (1685-1740)* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 199.

After an epigraph from the opening lines of Grattius²⁰ and an invocation to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, as muse, Tickell introduces his subject matter with a conspicuous display of circumlocution, stating he will be offering insight into the proper breeding of “the latrant race” (or, the barking race) (178). The breeds of dogs are presented as having different qualities that distinguish their utility: “In pow’rs distinct the diff’rent clans excel, / In sight, or swiftness, or sagacious smell. / By wiles ungen’rous some surprise the prey, / And some by courage win the doubtful day” (178). Among those “clans,” Tickell notes the gazehound, the greyhound, and wolfdogs, but “O’er all the bloodhound boasts superiour skill” (179). Aware of the many breeds from all around the world, Tickell describes the perfect dog for the English hunt, the ideal to which all breeders should aspire:

Such be the dog I charge thou meanst to train;
 His back is crooked and his belly plain,
 Of fillet stretch’d, and huge of haunch behind,
 A tap’ring tail that nimbly cuts the wind,
 Truss thigh’d, straight hamm’d, and foxlike form’d his paw,
 Large legg’d, dry sol’d, and of protended claw;
 His flat wide nostrils snuff the sav’ry steam,
 And from his eyes he shoots pernicious gleam (181)

The ideal type of dog in this case is robust, low-slung, and strong of scent, capable of leaping and barking in the manner requisite for chasing the game indigenous to England’s forests, a dog that is built for the sporting challenges of the English countryside. To breed such a creature, we are told that its stock should be “Deriv’d from noble but from foreign seed, / For

²⁰ This translates to “Under thine auspices, Diana, do I chant the gifts of the Gods.” Like Xenophon before him, Grattius claims a divine origin for hunting. Tickell follows this example.

various nature loathes incest'ous breed" (182). While the nationalistic notion of an English breed is uppermost, the need for foreign stock to enter into the bloodstream is also recognized, as the fear of inbreeding is a concern. The foreign stock must be the strongest attainable and conform to the traits necessary for good hunting.

After providing such learned advice, Tickell adds some reflections on hunting's origins and man's developing capacity to hunt. His story begins with a description of Eden, where there was plenty for all and no need to hunt. All animals co-existed peacefully: "the lamb and lion friendly walk'd their round," and "hares undaunted lick'd the fondling hound" (183). But, with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, the need to prey on other animals for survival came to the fore. Initially, hunting was rough and rudimentary, but with the passing time, the art of the occupation took hold: "Rude arts at first, but witty Want refin'd / The Huntsman's wiles" (184). Nimrod is credited as the great teacher in this regard, yet there are still some harsh features to the hunt. It still demands a propensity toward humanity's baser instincts and drives. Here, the praise Tickell confers upon the sport is hesitant at best, but he gestures toward the civilizing process the sport has undergone over time.

One other poem in the early part of the century that perceives hunting unambiguously as a worthwhile activity is William Churchill's *October; a Poem Inscrib'd to the Fox Hunters of Great Britain* (1717).²¹ While the poem is inscribed "to the Fox Hunters," it is not, in fact, a work of sports poetry as we have been examining here, but rather about the art of brewing beer and about the virtues of country and private life. It is addressed to fox hunters simply because they enjoy consuming the product very enthusiastically. In an echo

²¹ William Churchill, *October: a poem inscrib'd to the fox hunters of Great Britain* (London: 1717). Hereafter cited in text.

of Virgil, the poem's speaker wishes for nothing more than "a small estate, where limpid currents glide," where he can "manure [his] Soil, / Blending soft Ease, with Exercise, and Toil" (53). The poem's conclusion juxtaposes hunting with the other wholesome rural activities he imagines himself performing:

In golden Autumn Partridges [I] would set,
 And sweep whole Covies with my Spreading Net.
 Hunt circling Hares, or wily Foxes chase,
 Their mazy Rings, and fly *Meanders* trace.
 My nimble Hounds should tainted Tracks pursue,
 Fatal and sure, as *Ariadne's* Clue.
 In brumal Frost rove after feather'd Flocks,
 Or springing *Pheasants* shoot, and flushing Cocks.
 My vivid shot their glossy *Plumes* should tear,
 And dropping *Snipes* lose fleeting Lives in Air.
 When storms arise, and ratling Tempests roar;
 Cull from learn'd Authors all their choicest Oar.
 Thus void of Care, my golden Days would spend,
 Esteeming *Beveridge* and egregious friend.
Virgil I'd read, and *Tully's* fluent Prose,
 In pristine Innocence, and sweet Repose.
 While Terrors seize, and anxious Cares invade
 The conscious *Statesman*, shining in *Brocade*. (54-55)

The hunting allusions here are to the ixeutic section of Pope's *Windsor Forest*, in which the pheasant is described in terms of his "glossie, varying Dyes" and "his shining Plumes"

(*Windsor Forest* ll. 115, 117). And, just as overtly, the birds are described falling to their deaths in the same manner as the birds in the conclusion of Pope's fowling passage: "They fall, and leave their little Lives in Air" (*Windsor Forest* ll. 134). Because of Churchill's allusions to Pope and to John Philips's *Cyder* – and in turn those authors' imitation of Virgil's third Georgic, in which the subject is pestilence, where the ground is strewn with the dead bodies of many different animals – Eric Rothstein surmises that the poem might demonstrate an ambivalence on Churchill's part toward hunting.²² While Pope surely was ambivalent toward the hunt, the context in which hunting is placed within *October* does not suggest any mixed emotions aroused by it. The penchant of hunters to enjoy their ales is the reasoning for the poem's subtitle, and the passage quoted above describes the author's ideal ways to spend his "golden Days" – drinking, hunting, reading, and taking pleasure in the joys of the rural life.

While poetic representations of hunting became respectable in the early part of the century, new arguments against the hunt emerged. The hunter's proclivity to drink is among the complaints James Thomson levelled against the sport in *The Seasons*. Reflecting a nascent humanitarianism and sensibility, Thomson decried the slaughter of animals and was an early proponent of vegetarianism. As we have seen, ambivalence about the sport of hunting was not new; it was very much in evidence in the poetry of the early part of the eighteenth century. But Rothstein sees in Thomson an intensification of this viewpoint toward the negative, calling Thomson "the first significant poet of the period to abandon the

²² Eric Rothstein, "Discordia Non Concors: The Motif of Hunting in Eighteenth-Century Verse," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83 (1984): 339-340. Hereafter cited in text.

topos of ambivalence” (352). Thomson’s assessment of hunting is undeniably harsh: in *The Seasons*, particularly in “Autumn” (1730), he condemns the hunt outright.²³

The basis of his antipathy is expressed in terms of the reversion he observes in the hunter toward baser human instincts, toward savagery, a degeneration often expressed poetically in burlesque terms. *The Seasons* celebrates the magnificence and harmony of nature as a manifestation of the Supreme Being. But in the hunting passage in “Autumn,” Thomson sets out a description in which this state is compromised, as he provides an account, according to Ralph Cohen, “of what the squire, not nature, destroys; it is destruction for private pleasure, a transformation wholly to be deplored.”²⁴ “Autumn” begins by drawing the history of human development from man’s primitive beginnings to the polite society of the eighteenth century. The primary product of that evolution is “industry,” or labour, which for Thomson is “the kind source of every gentle art, / And all the soft civility of life,” a purposeful activity directed toward material and intellectual improvement (ll. 40-41). Industry has raised the human race from savagery to politeness. The conviction expressed in this section of the poem is that the human obligation to balance enjoyment of the earth’s riches with virtuous action is paramount. Industry has lifted humanity out of primitive barbarism and has produced civilization. But the poet spurns the hunter’s triumph over helpless animals as unworthy to be deemed industrious activity and unfit for poetic contemplation. Thomson is critical of what he sees as inappropriate subject matter for georgic description: “These are not subjects for the peaceful muse” (ll. 377). In the poem, there are questions of literary decorum, as well as social and political dimensions, for the

²³ James Thomson, “Autumn,” in *The Seasons, a poem* (London: 1730), 163-248. Hereafter cited in text. All references are to the line numbers of this edition.

²⁴ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of “The Seasons”* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), 188.

poet to consider. For the muse, the performance of the hunt is counterproductive because it is inauthentic, in the sense that it is not contributing to the larger trajectory of human social evolution: “’Tis not joy to her, / This falsely cheerful, barbarious game of death; / This rage of pleasure” performed by “the restless youth” and “the stedly tyrant man” (ll. 381-383, 388). With civilization has come justice, the polity, commerce, and art. But each of these is undermined by the hunt, where appropriate engagement in purposeful leisure is undercut by the despicable conduct of the men who engage in the activity. Thomson shows a group of hunters who, when they come together, are reduced to savagery, a sunken state in consequence of their hunting activities. The hunt reverses the trajectory of progress that Thomson celebrates in “Autumn.”

This is particularly true of fox hunters, who gather together in drunken revelry to brag about their exploits in fits of self-congratulation. But, in an ironic tension, it is only the chase of the fox that carries for Thomson any redeeming character, even if he holds its practitioners in disrepute. He condemns the hare hunt – “Poor is the triumph o’er the timid hare!” (ll. 399) – and the stag hunt because of their violence and because they offend his belief in the sanctity of all life. In his commentary on the stag hunt, Thomson consciously follows in the tradition of the famous hunting depictions from Denham’s and Cavendish’s 1650s poems, in which the stag is anthropomorphized. Thomson’s stag weeps: “The big round tears run down his dappled face; / He groans in anguish; while the growling pack / Blood-happy, hang at his fair, jutting chest, / And mark his beauteous chequer’d sides with gore” (ll. 452-455). While the killing of the fox does have a social utility because of the destruction the creature wreaks upon the farmer’s livelihood, it is the enjoyment of the pursuit that Thomson disparages, and he regards the kill as brutal, notwithstanding its defensibility. It is in this context that Thomson offers a “ludicrous account of fox-hunting”:

For happy he! Who tops the wheeling chace;
 Has every maze evolv'd, and every guile
 Disclos'd; who knows the merits of the pack;
 Who saw the villain seiz'd, and dying hard,
 Without complaint, tho' by an hundred mouths
 At once tore, merciless. ... (ll. 485-490)

We can detect a note of ironic bitterness in the representation of happiness in the killing. The man is not truly happy in this inversion of the classical Horatian and Virgilian *beatus ille* models. Most importantly, this hunt is in opposition to the natural and religious order because, as Cohen notes, the hunter is violating “the authority of nature or God in joyfully destroying living creatures” (188). Thus, in contrast to the harvest of the fields or the making of wine, which Thomson lauds immediately after the hunting passage in “Autumn,” hunting is at worst a “mad tumult” and at best a “discordant joy,” a pursuit any gentleman, and certainly all ladies, should avoid (ll. 423).

Clearly, Thomson holds some ambivalence toward the fox hunt. But his mixed depiction of that one form of hunt is not atypical: even the most virulent anti-hunters saw some degree of utility in the fox hunt. This goes some way to explaining why representations of fox hunting, in particular, were in the ascendancy at Thomson’s time of writing. Despite Thomson’s admonishment, when we look over the early part of the century, we can see that the representations of hunting served to reclaim hunting as legitimate poetic subject matter, particularly through the sport’s inclusion in celebrations of the English countryside in political works such as *Windsor Forest* and *Rural Sports*. For Pope and Gay, hunting stood as a vital and natural element of English nationhood, harmoniously conceived. After the publication of their works, the field sports were increasingly incorporated into the poetry of

the period. Because of this reconstitution, it was challenged as well by writers such as Thomson. These poems tend to possess a greater focus on the “lesser” kinds of game over the “higher” pursuit of the stag. In social terms, this shift in focus can be linked to the rise in the number of people who could legally and realistically participate in those pursuits.

Chapter 6. The Hunting Gentleman: William Somerville's *The Chace*

In the early part of the eighteenth century, one of the most notorious pieces of legislation in England's long history was enacted. With the passage of the Black Act in 1723, a variety of poaching activities became felonies, and offenders were often hanged if convicted. The Game Laws had been in place since 1671, but the Black Act was an amplification of that existing legislation to draconian severity. In the early part of the century, Queen Anne had been a frequent presence in Windsor Forest. During that time, the number of poaching offenses brought to trial were few. Anne's reign, according to E.P. Thompson, "saw a genial laxity in forest government."¹ Pope had praised her mild hand as responsible for the forest's harmony, as we saw in the last chapter. But circumstances changed after George I made his first forest hunt and visit to Windsor in 1717. He had longstanding sporting tastes, developed on the continent in his native Hannover. The celebrated royal forest of England, however, fell short of his expectations, given its scarcity of game at the time. He sought to build up the deer reserves, by cracking down on poachers and by leaning on foresters to enforce the law. In response to this attempted reactivation of a relaxed forest authority, the practice of "blackening" arose, that is, of blackening or otherwise disguising one's face before entering parks to poach or vandalize. This was an action inspired by the Waltham Blacks, a group of men who poached and terrorized in the Waltham Forest northeast of London.

¹ E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 41. Hereafter cited in text.

A series of poaching incidents in Windsor and several smaller forests, as well as the murder of a gamekeeper, led to the passage of the Black Act in 1723. Thompson argues that the act sought on the one hand to quell the prolonged symbolic affront presented by the poaching affrays, and on the other to fortify the position of the new political regime by recasting poaching confrontations as battles against treasonous insurgents. The act thus served the interests of the government's own supporters within the country gentry: "The Black Act put unprecedented legal power in the hands of men who had not a generalized, delegated interest, such as the maintenance of order, or even the maintenance of the privileges of their own class, but a direct and personal interest in the conviction of men who were a nuisance to them" (Thompson 188-189). Armed with the power of law, they could obtain sworn information, declare outlawry, and punish offenders by summary execution. The Act also covered arson, vandalism, entering parks or warrens with weapons, cutting down trees, and establishing gardens on private land. It was amended many times in the following years, eventually covering, for example, the act of disguising one's face while committing a crime. An offender committing any crime in disguise became subject to the Act's full force. As a result of its sprawling coverage, the Act's purview swelled from cracking down on poachers to repressing and subduing the lower ranks in much broader ways. As Thompson points out, this "was a power only too easily open to direct abuse in a society in which every office-holder was subject to immediate political influence," and he concludes that the Act's sanguinary provisions served as "a step upwards in the ascendancy of the hard Hanoverian Whigs" (189, 206). As a result of this political struggle, hunting poetry at the time was necessarily inflected with distinct political resonances because of how poaching was prosecuted.

It follows that this situation affected the gentleman hunter, whose sport was now part of shifting social and political associations. It is during this period that William Somervile, at the age of sixty, took it upon himself to write *The Chace* (1735), the first great English hunting poem. The hunt at this time still carried some traditional connection to royal privilege, but it was increasingly being regulated by Whig devotees who sought office, perquisites, and even enclosure of Crown or public land. Moreover, the popular fox hunt was gradually supplanting the more traditional hunts of the stag and the hare in the national sporting consciousness. And finally, hunting generally was being attacked for its savagery by writers such as James Thomson. Insofar as these circumstances affected hunting gentlemen, they contributed to a larger redefinition over time of the role of the nobility and gentry, one Anthony Low describes as a shift in “views about what constitutes virtuous and public-spirited behaviour ... from the martial ideal that is proper to feudalism to the georgic ideal that is proper to a newly centralized and peaceful nation-state.”² The gentleman’s role was conceived more as overseer of a well-run estate than as warrior. More than any other hunting verse of the eighteenth century, Somervile’s lengthy poem elevates hunting as a lofty and justifiable pursuit for country squires, a means to contribute productively in their leisure activities to their communities and by extension their nation. Donna Landry characterizes Somervile’s contribution as a rallying cry for traditional hunters: “Writing on behalf of the old sporting culture, in 1735 Somervile countered Thomson’s urbane metropolitan views by representing hunting as an activity both requiring technical knowledge and possessed of moments of sublimity worthy of an imperial nation.”³

² Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 123.

³ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 179.

Somerville was certainly aware of the existing tradition of hunting poetry and the representations of the hunt in Pope and Gay (and likely Tickell), and he acknowledges Denham directly in his poem. But he does not count their works per se as hunting poems. They are either not complete or do not make hunting their primary subject matter. Thus, in his preface he wonders why, even though writers as far back as Oppian consistently acknowledge Britain as producing the greatest hounds and horses for the purposes of the chase,

none of our Poets have yet thought it worth their while to treat of this Subject; which is without doubt very noble in itself, and very well adapted to receive the most beautiful Turns of Poetry. Perhaps our Poets have no great Genius for Hunting. Yet I hope my Brethren of the Couples, by encouraging this first, but imperfect, Essay, will shew the World they have at least some Taste for Poetry.⁴

Somerville himself appears to have possessed such a genius for the hunt. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* informs us that “Somerville's hunting exploits were well known in the locality [of Edstone, Warwickshire]. He disapproved of coursing, but he took an active part in hunting, his favourite horse Old Ball being used three days a week during the season. His kennels included twelve couples of beagles, six couples of fox-hounds, and five couples of otter-hounds.”⁵ In fact, he incurred such expenses in keeping his extensive hunting apparatus that he was frequently in financial difficulties. But he was devoted to the sport, and in his old age he reflected often on his memories of great chases.

⁴ William Somerville, *The Chace. A poem* (London: 1735), vii-viii. Hereafter cited in text.

⁵ F. D. A. Burns, “Somerville, William (1675–1742),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Significantly, the preface to *The Chace* opens with an invocation of memory, as Somerville meditates on how “the Amusements of our Youth are the Boast and Comfort of our declining Years” (i). This nostalgia is certainly common to sportsmen of all types, though admittedly not distinctive to sport, as one can be nostalgic about a great many experiences. Within the context of sport, however, Somerville hits on a critical point about the way the sport is shared. As he explains it, elder sportsmen such as himself carry the “Privilege” of being able to “recall to their Minds those Scenes of Joy in which they once delighted ... with a Satisfaction almost equal to the first Enjoyment” (i). Such memories contribute to forming the identities of specialists in the sport. Recalling great hunts of the past is a vital component in perpetuating the genius of a sport, as only he who has felt the thrilling joy of a successful chase can pass it on to his successors. Hence, Somerville ushers in an era of “poet-participants” in the eighteenth-century tradition of hunting poetry.

Somerville’s preface also confronts the issue of genre. John Chalker notes that for Somerville hunting “is related to the deepest emotions” he has experienced, and so “the value of the *Georgics* is that it enables Somerville to realize and to express this relationship [between experience and emotion].”⁶ This poetic expression is achieved through the literary structure the *Georgics* sets out: Somerville claims he has “intermix’d the preceptive Parts with so many Descriptions and Digressions in the Georgick manner” (iii). The georgic modal features he employs allow him to be “entertaining” and “diverting” to his readers through an evocation of pleasure, more so than the ubiquitous prose manuals of Gervase Markham and Richard Blome to which he compares his poem. He also justifies his generic choice by tracing back hunting’s poetic origins. Noting that Virgil had indeed mentioned hunting in his

⁶ John Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 184.

Georgics and *Aeneid*, and that the tradition passes from Xenophon to Oppian, Grattius, and Nemesianus, he acknowledges that hunting has changed much since his classical predecessors wrote on it. The sport's development as an art has "very much alter'd and improv'd in these latter Ages," particularly in the breeding and disciplining of hounds so that they can pursue prey by scent only, not sight (v). In fact, in comparing the ancients to the moderns, Somervile judges his contemporaries to be superior and their methods so improved that the ancients "must have pass'd for Poachers amongst our modern Sportsmen" (vi). The issue of sportsmanship here enters the debate between ancients and moderns. Yet even though the writers of antiquity fell short of the technical knowledge possessed in the eighteenth century, they still gave highly applicable and detailed representations of the activity. Consequently, Somervile borrows their passion for the activity, though not their details of its execution.

Somervile also considers the appropriate poetic decorum and diction for his subject matter. He opts for blank verse and avoids rhyme, noting that he is not "asham'd to follow the Example of Milton, Philips, Thomson, and all our best tragick Writers" (ix). His subject matter is Virgilian, but his poetic treatment of it is filtered through the English tradition; hence, his marriage of subject matter and form mutually elevates hunting and Britain. His love of the sport and his patriotism are the driving forces behind his venture to raise hunting practice into a gentlemanly discourse. His wish, he explains, is "to be well understood by any Gentleman, who would enjoy this noble Sport in full Perfection" (iii). The author's preoccupation with gentlemanly sensibility is significant to his modal choice. A gentleman himself, Somervile must not be seen as too specialized and his language too technical. As such, he positions himself as a wider surveyor of society. In poetic terms, such an individual was identified with the prospect views and topographical surveys characteristic of

eighteenth-century georgic-descriptive poems. His choice of genre preserves propriety; it allows him to express his technical knowledge and skill in a form that is respectable and universally intelligible.

Samuel Johnson provides confirmation of Somerville's success in this aspiration, remarking, "Somerville has tried many modes of poetry; and though perhaps he has not in any reached such excellence as to raise much envy, it may commonly be said at least, that 'he writes very well for a gentleman.'" ⁷ While this might seem a backhanded compliment, it underscores the culture of gentlemanly writing in the period, as Chalker remarks: "many 'gentlemen' could write, if not always with what Pope or Johnson would have recognized as professional competence, at least 'very well' for amateurs" (180). Johnson's criticism of the work highlights a divide between those readers who bring to it their love of the sport and the normative tastes of the "common" reader that Johnson might be considered to embody:

To this poem [*The Chace*] praise cannot be totally denied. He is allowed by sportsmen to write with great intelligence of his subject, which is the first requisite to excellence; and though it is impossible to interest the common readers of verse in the dangers or pleasures of the chase, he has done all that transition and variety could easily effect.... (92)

The fact that Johnson praises the poem for its variety and transitions, key features of georgic, suggests that Somerville has chosen well in his appropriation of the georgic frame and that he has successfully executed his aim to avoid tedium in the preceptive parts of the subject matter. *The Chace* embodies a well-judged balance of literary decorum, which was for Somerville an integral part of his vision for the poem.

⁷ Samuel Johnson, "Somerville," in *Lives of the English Poets*, Ed. Arthur Waugh (London: Oxford UP, 1952), 91. Hereafter cited in text.

The Chace is structured in four books. Much of the technical and instructional material on the proper breeding of hounds for the purpose of the chase is to be found in the first and fourth books, serving as bookends to the descriptive and digressive passages, themselves also important features of the georgic mode. But the first book opens with an address to Prince Frederick of Wales, who was at the time the leader of a group in disagreement with the policies of Sir Robert Walpole, a faction Christine Gerrard has termed the “Patriot Opposition,” the dissident country Whigs and opposition Tories who were Walpole’s persistent detractors.⁸ Somerville pledges his support to the Prince, stating that if Frederick’s station should ever come under threat,

Thy hunter train, in cheerful green array’d ...
 Shall compass thee around, die at thy feet,
 Or hew thy passage through th’embattled foe,
 And clear thy Way to fame. (Book I, lines 25-29)

The allegiance declared in this passage, with its pledge of potential violence, recalls the longstanding associations between the hunt and warfare, to the extent that Chalker argues it “provides a touch of romantic mediaevalism which colours Somerville’s whole treatment of the chase, and which recurs strongly ... in the description of the stag hunt” (182). (The stag hunt, however, as we shall see, is set off from the other forms of chase that Somerville addresses in his extensive descriptive scenes in the poem’s second and third books.) In the address to the Prince that opens the poem, the suggestion of the hunt’s ties to warfare are softened by a georgic commitment to productive peace. He invites the Prince “to the Chace, the Sport of Kings; / Image of War, without its Guilt” (I, 14-15). Gerrard thus sees the poem

⁸ Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Hereafter cited in text.

as “a highly political work,” in which “the prophetic hopes centred on the future glories of Frederick’s reign, rather than the current blessings of George’s, make this an opposition Whig poem written in a Tory-Stuart idiom” (217, 218). The poem invests in Frederick the personality and majesty attributed by Denham to Charles I and by Pope to Queen Anne.

In fact, Somerville’s literary acquaintance Richard Powney followed Somerville’s lead in 1739, using the stag chase motif as a means of championing Prince Frederick Lewis. Powney’s *The Stag Chace in Windsor Forest* provides a more extensively allegorical reworking of the stag chase to show Frederick and his followers hunting and killing a stag.⁹ More allusive to real-world politicians than illustrative of hunting practice, the poem takes the political dimensions of Somerville’s *The Chace* to an extreme: in Powney’s poem the hunt is a mere vehicle or pretext for political commentary.¹⁰ Politically we can see Somerville, a Whig himself, as representing an old order of established hunters, grounded in gentlemanly sensibilities. The encroaching policies of Walpole’s Whigs were perceived as a threat to this order.

The Chace outlines the historical development of hunting as a sport in a genealogy that traces the activity from its humble and crude beginnings. This evolution is presented with a nationalistic fervor and traced back to the Norman kings. The greatest value the sport has had in contributing to the building of the nation is that it has brought its people together, albeit paradoxically, “In bloody social Leagues” (I, 81). The shared aims of rearing and disciplining a pack of hounds function as a bond that promotes community, first at the local level, but also at the level of the nation state. While the tension between the “bloody” nature

⁹ Richard Powney, *The stag chace in Windsor Forest: a poem*. London: 1739.

¹⁰ Christine Gerrard lists a number of political allegories employing the stag hunt motif that surfaced during this time. I have chosen not to include them here because their focus is not on hunting as a sport. *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 220.

of the hunt and its positive social aspects is evident in his characterization of the activity, Somervile sees violence as only a minor concern. The social value of the “leagues” justifies, for him, the bloody sacrifice of animals in the cause of bringing citizens together as community. The sport’s uniting effect is heralded in the poem’s passage imitative of Virgil’s tribute to the nation. “Hail happy *Britain!* highly favour’d Isle,” Somervile exclaims (I, 84). It is in Britain that one finds the best huntsmen, “ever gay, robust, and bold” (I, 99).

The character of the social group formed by these sportsmen is undeniably circumscribed and elitist, but, in the course of the various chases, that group expands to include others, depending on the nature and type of chase. The poem is addressed to young huntsmen who are striving to learn and experience the joys of the exercise, and to become ideal huntsmen. These youths are privileged scions of the landed gentry who comprise the hunting fraternity, legally endowed with the right and privilege to hunt. Somervile makes a distinction between those who boast such a pedigree and those who come from the lower social orders:

Ye vig’rous Youths, by smiling Fortune blest
 With large Demesnes, hereditary Wealth,
 Heap’d copius by your wise Fore-Fathers Care,
 Hear and attend! While I the Means reveal
 T’ enjoy those Pleasures, for the Weak too strong,
 Too costly for the Poor ... (I, 103-108)

The weak and the poor do not have the strength and means to exercise the sport, and so Somervile addresses those from his own class who can benefit from his insight and knowledge. It is for them that he proceeds to explain the particulars of managing a proper kennel with an aim to breeding the best dogs for the various forms of chase. Importantly, he

notes the need for “A diff’rent Hound for ev’ry diff’rent Chace,” as each form of prey demands particular and exacting traits, peculiar to different breeds of dogs (I, 226). The huntsman must have the means to rear and maintain multiple breeds for multiple purposes.

Moreover, the huntsman must also have the resources and leisure time to master the sport. To that end, Somerville encourages aspiring huntsmen to read expansively from the classics, including those works that contain no direct hunting instruction. For Somerville, the “Rich and the wise Remarks of Heroes of old,” and the “great Examples of old *Greece* or *Rome*,” enlarge a huntsman’s understanding beyond a merely technical grasp of the sport (I, 387, 389). Reading is connected to liberty. It is what separates the true gentleman hunter from lesser men. It is these latter he draws as a negative example in the concluding passage to the first book:

See! How mean, how low,
 The bookless sauntering Youth, proud of the Skut
 That dignifies his Cap, his flourish’d Belt,
 And rusty Couples gingling by his Side.
 Be thou of other Mold; and know that such
 Transporting Pleasures, were by Heav’n ordain’d
 Wisdom’s Relief, and Virtue’s great Reward. (I, 394-400)

Extensive reading is what distinguishes polite men. Here, the huntsman’s discourse is aligned with the reading necessary for a liberal education. The gentleman must not be too technical. He must have an enlarged perspective, attained by expanding his knowledge, so that he can better contribute to his sport and to the nation.

The second and third books depict the various kinds of hunt, descriptions interspersed with historical and exotic geographical digressions. Along the way, Somerville offers his

opinions of assorted forms of chase most commonly practiced in England, notably of the hare, fox, stag, and otter. In the first book he had already expressed his distaste for coursing – a sport in which hares are released in a field to be chased by specially bred greyhounds or lurchers – asserting that the sportsman should “Select with Judgment; nor the tim’rous Hare / O’er-match’d destroy, but leave that vile Offence / To the mean, murd’rous, coursing Crew; intent; On Blood and Spoil” (I, 227-230). Somerville’s contempt for coursing is rooted in its unsporting ease, as the hare is overrun too easily by speedy hounds and conquered without the proper sporting challenge. A fair challenge for him consists in directing a disciplined and cohesive pack of hounds who hunt by scent rather than sight. This allows him better to enjoy the contest against the hare as a sport with specific challenges to overcome.

Much as in Margaret Cavendish’s “The Hunting of the Hare,” the poet-hunter provides realistic details about the species he is pursuing. But Somerville’s engagement with the hare is very different from Cavendish’s sentimentalized account. Even though there is some anthropomorphizing of the prey, it is not expressive of anti-hunting feeling, as Somerville’s sentiment is one of respect for an adversary, born from the hare’s ingenious and tricky survival strategies:

Ah! there she lies; how close! She pants, she doubts
 If now she lives; she trembles as she sits,
 With Horror seiz’d. The wither’d Grass that clings
 Around her Head, of the same russet Hue
 Almost deceiv’d my Sight, had not her Eyes
 With Life full-beaming her vain Wiles betray’d. (II, 137-142)

Somerville shows a small measure of ambivalence here, as he appreciates the beauty of the animal before him, but he is ultimately a committed and experienced practitioner of the hunt

with specific strategies to implement. At this optimal moment to release the hounds, when the hare is unaware her hiding spot has been discovered, Somerville shifts away from his near-reverence for the animal to a more calculated stance, coolly ordering the hounds after the hare: “Here, huntsmen, bring / (But without hurry) all thy jolly hounds, / And calmly lay them in” (II, 148-150). As the hounds chase their prey, Somerville continues to admire the hare’s survival tactics, appreciating her ingenuity: “Huntsman! her Gate [gait] observe, if in wide Rings / She wheel her mazy Way, in the same Round / Persisting still, she’ll foil the beaten Track” (II, 172-174). If the pack loses the scent, the huntsman typically redirects the hounds’ attention and sends them out after the hare again. This is a crucial test of the hunter’s skill, a moment Somerville relishes. In this series of highly realistic descriptions of a chase, we can observe some insightful tensions within the modern hunter: he expresses his admiration for the prey he comes to know in precise detail, yet this is surpassed by the indomitable will to catch her, to defeat her as sport.

The hunter’s individual resolution propels the chase forward. But this moment in the poem is also shared with an expanding community of onlookers who join in on the excitement, people from all levels of society:

Afflictive Birch

No more the School-boy dreads, his Prison broke,
 Scamp’ring he flies, nor heeds his Master’s Call;
 The weary Traveller forgets his Road,
 And climbs th’adjacent Hill; the Ploughman leaves
 Th’unfinish’d Furrow; nor his bleating Flocks
 Are now the Shepherd’s Joy; Men, Boys, and Girls
 Desert th’unpeopled Village; and Wild Crowds

Spread o'er the Plain, by the sweet Frenzy seiz'd. (II, 191-199)

The hare hunt, which was protected under the game laws, is undoubtedly elitist, and Somerville is unapologetic in addressing his poem to those youths who have the means to partake in the activity. But clearly the hunt still has a considerable effect on the community, as it invites the local populace to join in on the merriment and excitement. The class distinctions remain, as these villagers are only indirect participants, but within that social framework there is plenty of joy – “the sweet Frenzy” – to be shared by all involved.

Somerville clearly loves the hare hunt, perhaps more than any other kind of hunt, and it is telling that he invokes the classical motifs of the *beatus ille* in the course of his description of this form of hunt:

Happy the Man, who with unrival'd Speed
 Can pass his Fellows, and with Pleasure view
 The struggling Pack; how in the rapid Course
 Alternate they preside, and jostling push
 To guide the dubious Scent; how giddy Youth
 Oft babbling errs, by wiser Age reprov'd; (II, 233-238)

The height of elation and pleasure occurs for him on the back of his steed in pursuit of the pack. A hare weighs eight pounds on average and is nominally faster than most hounds over short distances. But, in a typical hunt, the hounds' superior stamina eventually outstrips her. Before this happens, however, chases lasting as long as two-and-a-half hours can be expected. Because of the speed of the pack, the dogs may lose the huntsman and followers, even disappearing from view for a considerable portion of the chase. Hence, Somerville expresses his joy in his ability to keep with the pack, using all his experience as a rider to stay close. The modal trait of the Happy Man has here been adopted to the particular

conditions encountered in this form of chase. At this moment of pleasure, competition between riders is uppermost, as Somervile strives to surpass and outshine his colleagues. The thrill of the activity occurs at multiple levels, not just with the hounds' pursuit of the hare. He enjoys his perspective on the event, and the challenge for him is to maintain that perspective, both on the hounds' situation and his own in relation to his hunting party.

While Somervile derives great pleasure from the hare hunt, most of the hunting fraternity by the middle of the eighteenth century was moving toward fox hunting. The third book begins by considering from a historical perspective how the fox, considered a verminous pest, came to be a popular quarry for eighteenth-century sportsmen. This evolution was gradual. Fox hunting is a substitute for the more challenging and dangerous pursuit of the wolf, which stretched back to the Saxon King Edgar, when, we are told, a lengthy and organized campaign of genocide brought the wolf to extinction in England. But the wolf's distant cousin, the fox, continues to disturb the country. Described as a thief, who by cover of night steals "the poor defenceless Lamb," the fox provokes great antipathy from the community (III, 24). Thus, it is the hunters' duty to find the "sharpest Vengeance," in which they "right th'oppres'd, and bring the Felon vile / To just Disgrace!" (III, 36, 37-38). In contrast to the blameless hare, the fox evokes such antipathy that the emotional chords struck in this section of the poem are more clearly related to feelings of revenge and punishment, of a moral ground established in the social and economic utility of the kill. The interests of the huntsman mesh with those of the wider community, an ideal we saw represented also in Thomas Heyrick's "The Chase of the Fox at Welby, 1677."

The fox covers more ground than the hare, and so, in Somervile's descriptive passages of the fox chase, the path of the pursuing hunting party is even more challenging and covers ever more rigorous terrain. As such, it elicits bravery in the chase's best

practitioners, defined as those who hold their nerve in the face of all oncoming obstacles:

“Far o’er the rocky Hill we range, / And dangerous our Course; but in the Brave / True

Courage never fails” (III, 87-89). Somerville’s description of the chase inverts Thomson’s

representation of the sport, where the bravery is burlesqued. In *The Chace*, the valour of the

huntsmen is depicted without irony or burlesque; rather, the poetic tone is heroic. However,

though the chase is exciting, the fox hunting section is shorter than its hare hunting

equivalent, reflecting Somerville’s own tastes. He dislikes that the chase can get filthy. In

trying to elude the pack, the fox takes all forms of evasive action, which makes the pursuit of

the fox far less dignified than that of the hare:

Hark! Thro’ yon Village now

The rattling Clamour rings. The Barns, the Cots

And leafless Elms return the joyous sounds.

Thro’ ev’ry Homestall, and thro’ ev’ry Yard,

His midnight Walks, panting, forlorn, he flies;

Thro’ ev’ry Hole he sneaks, thro’ ev’ry Jakes

Plunging he wades besmear’d, and fondly hopes

In a superior Stench to lose his own. (III, 151-158)

The hunter literally has to wade through muck, filth, and excrement to catch the quarry.

Despite its best efforts, the fox is overrun, to the delight particularly of the local farmer, who

rewards the hunting party with celebratory meat and ale, locally produced and thus

emblematic of the proper balance being restored in the forest. The fox hunt is not about

eating the prey itself, but it is indirectly tied to the better production of harvests and

provisions, and it is portrayed as promoting community.

While anyone could legally hunt the fox (though only landowners usually had the means to raise hounds for that purpose), the stag hunt retains an aura of royal privilege in *The Chace*. Somervile's stag hunting party comprises the royalty and the highest nobility in the land, creating "A scene so gay: heroick, noble Youths, / In Arts, and Arms renown'd, and lovely Nymphs / The fairest of this Isle" (III, 354-356). The inclusion of princesses in the procession counters Thomson's assertion that hunting debases women and that they should steer clear of it entirely. For Somervile, the activity heightens their allure, as the country air brings out "all the Flush of Beauty in their Cheeks" (III, 449). Echoes of *Cooper's Hill* are deliberately invoked, with Somervile acknowledging that he should "Tread with respectful Awe / *Windsor's* green Glades; where *Denham*, tuneful Bard, / Charm'd once the list'ning Dryads, with his Song / Sublimely sweet" (III, 346-349). He knows he follows in Denham's long shadow with this literary endeavour, so he acknowledges his debt to his predecessor for establishing motifs in the royal chase that continue to resonate in the current political and sporting climate.

Somervile takes his first cue from Denham by elevating his stag hunt passage to the level of royal panegyric. Here it is Frederick, Prince of Wales, who exercises his royal privilege to hunt, and Somervile ascribes to him the greatest of kingly virtues:

But who is he

Fresh as a Rose-bud newly blown, and fair

As op'ning Lillies; on whom ev'ry Eye

With Joy, and Admiration dwells? See, see,

He reigns his docile Barb with manly Grace.

Is it *Adonis* for the Chace array'd?

Or *Britain's* second Hope? Hail blooming Youth!

May all your Virtues with your Years improve,
 'Till in consummate Worth, you shine the Pride
 Of these our Days, and to succeeding Times
 A bright Example. (III, 383-393)

On the surface, one might suspect this passage of irony, of veering toward the mock panegyric that was common for writers disparaging Hanoverian royalty. But Chalker's reading of the passage ascribes to the lines a "stylistic manipulation" in which Somerville's tribute is genuine (187). His idealization of Frederick is nonetheless hyperbolic to the point of burlesque, reminiscent of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. In Chalker's view, the poet "transcends one critical attitude by including it in his poem" (187). This affords the poem a complexity one might not expect from Somerville. Without this conscious exaggeration, one might read fulsomeness into a passage where sincerity is intended.

Because of the way it is used as a recreational tool, the hunt offers considerable insight into the psychology of the sport, on the kind of pleasure it affords:

the statesman grave

Forgets his weighty Cares; each Age, each Sex
 In the wild Transport joins; luxuriant Joy,
 And Pleasure in Excess, sparkling exult
 On ev'ry Brow, and revel unrestrain'd.
 How happy art thou Man, when thou'rt no more
 Thyself! when all the Pangs that grind thy Soul,
 In Rapture and in sweet Oblivion lost,
 Yield a short Interval, and Ease from Pain! (III, 418-425)

The stimulation and ritual bonds of the sport take the statesman altogether out of himself. Somervile elevates the activity into an all-consuming pleasure. It involves a spiritual and emotional release as well, representative of a psychological understanding of the attractions of the hunt that goes beyond kingly duty and symbolism. The pleasure is universalized, so that the statesman's experience is closer to that of any other sportsman enjoying his hunt.

Somervile's stag hunt provokes further comparison to Denham's in the manner of the stag's tearful submission to the inevitable. The stag remains, in Somervile's account, the focus of a human projection; he is anthropomorphized and labeled the monarch of his kind. But, unlike Denham's allegory, Somervile's description is realistically conveyed, though with a different symbolism attached to it. At the crucial moment of the kill, the reader is invited to consider both the stag's plight and the larger implications of the king's intervention at the moment of the kill:

Beneath a Weight of Woe, he groans distress'd:
 The Tears run trickling down his hairy Cheeks;
 He weeps, nor weeps in vain. The King beholds
 His wretched Plight, and Tenderness innate
 Moves his great Soul. Soon at his high Command
 Rebuk'd, the disappointed, hungry Pack
 Retire submiss, and grumbling quit their Prey. (III, 593-599)

The king has decided to spare the stag, moved by "tenderness" to exercise the royal prerogative of mercy, much to the chagrin of the hounds, who have stressed their limbs and hearts in the chase, only to be deprived of their reward (they were typically given the entrails of the slain beast). But the purpose of the chase is not to satisfy the dogs – they are mere tools in the process. It is for all who are watching. The symbolic suggestion is that the king is

now capable of sentimental action, of showing mercy and thereby displaying a kindness and compassion not often associated with the hunt. It is in this display that we see the hope and expectation Somerville holds for his monarch, as the poet concludes the third book with an address to his majesty and a eulogy on mercy in which he makes the connection between beneficence and power explicit. Here, in historical terms, sport is serving a changing symbolic function. What is important is that the king and the stag are not symbolically equated, as they had been in Denham's poem. The stag is now an object of royal mercy, representing a fundamental shift to a different kind of kingship, away from the absolute power exercised by the arbitrary Stuarts toward a Whig conception of the crown, wherein the king shares power with Parliament.

The fourth and final book opens with a defense of hunting, and at this point Somerville directly refutes Thomson's denunciation of the hunt as irreligious and immoral. Thomson had decried the fact that men were killing living creatures for their own pleasure, insisting that this action constituted an affront to the natural order God had ordained, in which man is part of an interdependent and harmonious hierarchy. This, to Somerville, is patently false. He understands the first book of Genesis¹¹ as having assigned to humans superiority and suzerainty over the animal kingdom:

Hence great the Distance 'twixt the Beasts that perish,
 And God's bright Image, Man's immortal Race.
 The Brute Creation are his Property,
 Subservient to his Will, and for him made.

¹¹ Genesis 1:26: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl in the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

As hurtful these he kills, as useful those
Preserves; their sole and arbitrary King. (IV, 7-11)

Somerville's thinking might be considered mainstream for the eighteenth century. His reasoning for making a distinct hierarchical differentiation between man and animals is that, if this were not so, the animal population might grow out of control, destroying crops and relegating men to a less refined existence: "Man might once more on Roots, and Acorns feed" (IV, 19). Thus, controlling numbers serves as a justification for hunting. We can couple this with his statement in Book I that hunting is necessary for reasons of survival, and that hunters should therefore feel no guilt in their occupation:

For the green Herb alone
Unequal to sustain Man's lab'ring Race,
Now ev'ry moving Thing that liv'd on Earth
Was granted him for Food. So just is Heav'n,
To give us in Proportion to our Wants. (I, 64-68)

Somerville's invoking of the first book of Genesis performs two functions simultaneously: it defends his art, and it serves as a gentle mocking of Thomson's vegetarianism and of the latter's interpretation of scripture. Somerville's doctrine maintains that man is superior to animals, who were placed on earth for him, though man is charged with conserving that order, taking what he needs "in Proportion," to maintain natural harmony.

The fourth book of *The Chace* briefly describes the otter hunt as the final type of chase in the hunting calendar. It takes place in the summer, after the fall hare hunt, the winter fox hunt, and the spring-summer stag hunt. As we have seen in the fishing poetry, anglers view the otter with as much antipathy as hunters regard the fox, if not more so, as a spoiler of resources. Somerville describes the otter unequivocally as a "Spoiler" and a "Felon," the

same language we have seen him use in reference to the fox (IV, 379, 385). The otter hunt is, however, at the bottom of the game hierarchy; as a result, that creature is given only the dishonour of being speared to death, presenting a less dignified ritual death than those undergone by other types of prey: “On pointed Spears they lift him high in Air; / Wriggling he hangs, and grins, and bites in vain,” until finally he dies (IV, 459-460). The fourth book is the least heroic in *The Chace*, as the lowly otter’s hunt is juxtaposed with georgic instruction on how to quarantine a diseased dog in order to preserve the health of the rest of the pack. Perhaps offering a contemporary turn on Virgil’s passage on pestilence in Book III of *The Georgics*, Somervile offers cautions and warnings, but also instructions for survival and success. He offers, further, instruction on raising, maintaining, and training hounds.

The poem concludes with an extensive and close imitation of Virgil’s meditation on happiness from Book II of *The Georgics*, “O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas!”¹² Without any hint of burlesque to the passage, Somervile shows his belief that learning and performing his art allows him best “to know wise Nature’s hidden Depths” and to contemplate his place within God’s creation (IV, 512). He maintains a humble stance in this regard, here, acknowledging that “*Newton* leads the Way” (IV, 519). The genius of the scientist eclipses his own and stands as a model in terms of understanding what God has set into motion. Ultimately, the art of the hunt stands for Somervile as the proper sphere for him to engage in his pursuit of knowledge, exercise, community, and finally pleasure.

Somervile’s *Field Sports* (1742) is a follow-up to *The Chace*, this time dedicated in its title to Prince Frederick. Gerrard speculates that Frederick’s approval of *The Chace* must have been sufficiently encouraging for the aging poet to dedicate his final poem to the

¹² “Oh, too lucky for words, if only he know his luck, / Is the countryman....” Virgil, *The Eclogues & The Georgics*, translated by C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 84.

Prince. In fact, *Field Sports* was presented posthumously to Frederick after Somerville's death earlier in 1742.¹³ In his advertisement preceding the poem, Somerville calls *Field Sports* a "short supplement to the *Chace*," which gives "some Account of all the more polite Entertainments of the Field."¹⁴ These entertainments are the more antiquated modes of hunting, particularly falconry and hawking, which he acknowledges the current generation of sportsmen are less and less likely to pursue. But his use of the word "polite" to characterize the sports suggests they had once occupied an elevated place in the sporting hierarchy. However, his representations of the sportsmen performing the sports call into question this characterization of these forms of hunt. In the advertisement, he takes pains to assure the reader that "though the Description of flying at the Stag, and other wild Beasts with Eagles, may be thought a little incredible, yet permit me to assure the Reader that it is no Fiction, but a real Fact" (v-vi). Hence, the poem takes on a descriptive quality, realistically conceived, moving away from the instructive passages that gave *The Chace* its georgic tenor. This descriptive facet of the poem allows Somerville to critique or praise the various forms of sport as he desires.

The passage depicting a stag hunt in *Field Sports* moves in a different direction from that in *The Chace*. In the earlier poem, he had associated the stag hunt with a celebration of Prince Frederick's virtues, but there is no hint of royalty or benevolent grace in the later poem. The portrayal of two eagles diving in on the stag with their talons is spectacularly rendered, with a clear sense of excitement conveyed by the poet at their splendor; yet, once the greyhounds and men descend upon the wounded beast, a familiar sympathy for the stag returns, as the stag falls "with eyes that swim in tears" (13). A harsh characterization of the

¹³ Gerrard, *Patriot Opposition*, 220.

¹⁴ William Somerville, *Field Sports. A poem* (Dublin: 1742), vii. Hereafter cited in text.

bloodthirsty hunters follows, as they plunge their sabres into their prey to make their kill.

Somerville's editorial stance is overt:

Unseemly joy! 'Tis barb'rous to insult
 A fallen foe. The Dogs, and Birds of Prey
 Insatiate, on his reeking bowels feast,
 But the stern Falc'ner claims the lion's share. (13)

In comparing the stag hunt of *The Chace* with that in *Field Sports*, we arrive at a better understanding of Somerville's ideas about proper sporting conduct. This representation is hardly "polite." The gentleman-sportsman can derive just as much pleasure and excitement in pursuing lesser game, though this by no means guarantees better behaviour by practicing hunters. For Somerville, the sport of the activity lies in the chase, not in the kill, and certainly not in disrespecting a fallen stag. Moreover, the poet creates an overtly hierarchical relation among the various types of prey, elevating the stag almost on a par with man. This sentiment was not new, as we have seen with previous poets who displayed their admiration for the stag in keenly anthropomorphic characterizations of the beast. But Somerville employs this elevation of the stag in order to critique man's conduct as the ultimate predator, even as a predator of his fellow man:

Such are the Sports of Kings, and better far
 Than royal robb'ry, and the bloody jaws
 Of all-devouring war. Each Animal,
 By nat'ral instinct taught, spares his own kind:
 But Man, the Tyrant Man, revels at large,
 Free-booter unrestrain'd, destroys at will
 The whole creation, Men and Beasts his prey,

These for his Pleasure, for his Glory Those. (14)

Somerville deplures the notion that man revels in destroying his fellow man, and that he even finds glory in it. So, even though he can feel some sympathy for fallen creatures, at least hunting them is morally superior to many of the actions his fellow men undertake in their pursuits of power or riches. The passage is reminiscent of the sentiment John Gay voices in *The Beggar's Opera*: "Lions, Wolves, and Vulturs don't live together in Herds, Drovers, or Flocks.—Of all Animals of Prey, Man is the only sociable one. Everyone of us preys upon his Neighbour, and yet we herd together."¹⁵ For mankind, unlike other animals, predator and prey are indistinguishable because they are the same species. At least in the hunt the distinction between species, between hunter and prey, is clear. In fact, this is the justification asserted in Book I of Genesis that man has dominion over animals. With this belief of man's relation to animals, hunting can be understood more clearly as a productive organization of violence. Hunting is a substitute for man's drive to power, or at least a sublimation of it, even if the sport is not always as "polite" in practice as ideally it could be.

The poem also includes spectacular accounts of other less commonly practiced field sporting modes, with passages of social or political commentary. In particular, the heron-hawking passage conveys some sense of the exhilaration of that activity, though Somerville again complicates the issue in how he represents the heron's plight. The heron is observed in his habitat, as well as within the natural hierarchy of the field, for, as he waits motionless to catch his prey, he is, unawares, the object of another predator: "Observant [he] stands to take his scaly prize, / Himself another's Game" (14). Nature stipulates that each creature preys on a smaller one, though the heron is better able to defend himself from attack than most. Thus,

¹⁵ John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, III.ii.4ff. In *John Gay: Dramatic Works*, ed. John Fuller, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), vol. II, 46.

the falconer sends up not two, but three falcons in pursuit, knowing the challenge the heron presents will be demanding.

But the event becomes for Somervile a covert reference to a specific political situation. As part of the country opposition to Walpole, he takes this opportunity to critique the Prime Minister's leadership, in this case by painting Walpole as soft in his foreign policy. The heron hunt is metaphorically compared to the context of the British war with Spain, particularly to recent Spanish attempts to block the passage of southbound British ships. Walpole had been perceived as weak on this issue because he did not aggressively fight such blockades. In an epic simile, the released falcons are likened to a Spanish ambush: "As in some winding creek, / On proud *Iberia*'s shore ... / [they] Lurk waiting to surprize a *British* sail" (15). The heron is understood in this comparison to be the British ship: "So flies the Hern pursued, but fighting flies" (15).¹⁶ Within the context of the simile, we might interpret Somervile as showing sympathy for the heron by aligning it with the British position in international conflict. Such is not the case, however. The realism of the rest of the description supersedes such sentimentality, and the simile is merely employed to illustrate the heron's plight.

The community revels in the excitement of the encounter between falcons and heron – "hope / Glows in each Breast" – as a crowd forms consisting of individuals from all social levels to witness the clash, uniting them in shared communal spirit: "The Vulgar and the Great, / Equally happy now, with freedom share / The common joy" (16). However, the joy of the experience collapses. As the three predators descend on the heron, he mounts his

¹⁶ "Hern" is an eighteenth-century variant to "heron."

defences, sticking his beak into the breast of an oncoming assailant in his fight for survival. Falling dead from the sky, that falcon's demise elicits great pain in her master:

See alas!

The falc'ner in despair, his fav'rite Bird
 Dead at his feet, as of his dearest friend
 He weeps her fate; he meditates revenge,
 He storms, he foams, he gives a loose to rage (17)

While the other hawks are successful in bringing the heron to ground and feasting upon him, the occasion has turned sour for the falconer. It is a risk he knows he always takes in pitting his birds in a contest where life is at stake. The level of sport is extremely high. There is considerable risk undertaken in trying to bring down the heron, which in this case is ultimately accomplished with significant loss. The fact Somerville that paints the hunters in a negative light – he exhibits “rage” and seeks “revenge” – suggests he does not value their activities as much as his own sporting preferences, which were celebrated at length in *The Chace*.

The poem also features a thrilling description of a mallard duck escaping underwater from a falcon, accounts of pursuits of the partridge and the lark, and short statements on the joys of shooting-flying and angling. Somerville paints these activities in a positive light, their practitioners exemplifying noble traits. He also concludes by reflecting on the setting of the activities as a necessary component of the experience, and he adopts a celebratory tone in doing so. Autumn is the season when he can best enjoy the country, allowing him, as he says, in “my obscure sojourn to sing at ease” (22). In *The Chace*, Somerville had foregrounded his particular expertise in rearing and developing a strong pack of hounds, establishing himself as a technique-setting specialist in his sport. Thus, the georgic model was appropriate for his

concerns there. But, in *Field Sports* he takes a step back, minimizing the technical information he relates in order to present himself more as a generalist in these particular field sports. In so doing, he focuses more on the descriptive delights. It also allows him to condemn those aspects of the sports he believes do not conform to the “polite” vision he has of rural activity.

Chapter 7. Fowling: Advances in Shooting Technology

Prior to the seventeenth century, the meaning of the word “hunting” included many different forms of activity: falconry, hunting with guns or bows, hunting with hounds and horses, and the various types of trapping. And today, in most of the English-speaking world, the term has the same broad meaning. It is only in a select number of countries that the terms “hunting” and “shooting” differ in meaning. Great Britain is exceptional in distinguishing the two. According to the *Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports*, shooting is “the collective term used to denote the use of guns, usually shotguns, in the pursuit and killing of a variety of birds and mammals. Those who use guns are not denoted as ‘hunters,’ but as ‘shooters.’”¹ By contrast, “hunting” is the general term used to denote the pursuit of a variety of wild animals, usually with dogs. By the end of the eighteenth century, the term “hunting” was circumscribed even further to include only fox-hunting and, to a lesser degree, hare-hunting. It is appropriate, therefore, to distinguish between hunting and shooting poems in this study, since such a distinction recognizes underlying cultural differences that are reflected in the ways these two activities are represented.

In the eighteenth century, shooting as a category of traditional rural sports was the latest form in the long evolution of fowling, or the pursuit of wildfowl. In *The Gentleman’s Recreation*, an oft-reprinted prose sporting manual first published in 1674, Nicholas Cox describes its methods: “Fowling is used two manner of ways: either by Enchantment, or Enticement by winning or wooing the Fowl unto you by Pipe, Whistle, or Call; or else by Engine, which unawares surprizeth them.”² Many fowling techniques can be traced back to

¹ Tony Collins et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 245.

² Nicholas Cox, *The gentleman's recreation: in four parts. Viz. Hunting, hawking, fowling, fishing* (Fifth Edition. London, 1706), 242.

classical times and beyond. Oppian notes several techniques in his *Cynegetica*, where he views the sport as a lighter pastime than hunting: “to the fowler his toil is sweet; for to the hunt the fowlers carry not sword nor bill nor brazen spear, but the Hawk is their attendant when they travel to the woods, and the long cords and the clammy yellow birdlime and the reeds that tread an airy path.”³ Hawking was, of course, a prominent fowling technique, as was the use of nets. Birdlime is a viscid, adhesive substance used to catch birds by spreading it upon a surface, to which the bird adheres when it lands, effectively trapping it.

Shooting as a category of fowling came into vogue in eighteenth-century Britain. But whether the shooting of birds was practised in classical times is not clearly known. In his study on sport in classic times, A.J. Butler argues that “the evidence is not very conclusive” on this question.⁴ A distinct linguistic term denoting the activity of bringing a bird down from the air existed in Greek, as in English, Butler continues, “but whereas in English it would mean pulling down a tall pheasant, for example, with the gun, in Greek it may mean literally pulling down a bird from a tree-top with the limed fowling-rod” (196). Guns not having been invented, slings or bows might have been used, though if an arrow shot from a powerful bow misses its quarry, it is lost for good in the wooded forest. Archery is not the most efficient fowling technique. The apparent absence of shooting techniques in ancient times helps to explain why there are no direct classical sources for the shooting poems that appeared in the eighteenth century, apart from the ornithological details provided in ixeutic texts.

³ Oppian, “Cynegetica, or The Chase,” in *Oppian, Colluthus, Thyphiodorus*, trans. A.W. Mair (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1928), 9.

⁴ A.J. Butler, *Sport in Classic Times* (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, 1975), 196. Hereafter cited in text.

The curious English term that emerged in the eighteenth century to denote the act of shooting at escaping birds was “shooting flying,” which the *OED* traces back to George Markland’s poem *Pteryplegia: Or, the Art of Shooting-Flying* (1727).⁵ But the term predates Markland’s use. For instance, Jacob Giles employs it as part of his extensive fowling instruction in *The Compleat Sportsman* (1718), which indicates it had likely been used much earlier.⁶ So popular was the activity that editions of *The Sportsman’s Dictionary* from the mid-eighteenth century onward claim that shooting-flying “is by experience found to be the best and most diverting way of shooting.”⁷ It was the most challenging and sporting method of fowling because it involved trying to hit the bird while it was in flight. As shooting historian Tony Jackson describes it, “A typical day’s shooting would see perhaps two or three friends and their servants, with as many brace of pointers, leisurely working the stubbles or roots for partridges or the odd pheasant.”⁸

Shooting was an exhilarating activity made feasible by recent advances in the evolution of firearms. Gunpowder was invented in China, but it was Europeans from the fourteenth century onward who perfected the guns used in warfare and sport. The matchlock firing mechanism was a fifteenth-century invention that held a slow-burning fuse in a clamp, which, upon pulling a lever (or, in later models, a trigger), was lowered slowly into a flash pan igniting the powder, sending a flash through a touch hole igniting the main charge in the barrel. This technology was superseded in the early sixteenth century by the wheel-lock mechanism, which was comprised of a wheel-lock legend, a device made of iron with indented edges that passed through a flash pan. The friction from some pieces of pyrite and

⁵ “shooting flying, n.,” *OED Online*.

⁶ The term may have been translated from Italian Vita Bonfidini’s *Caccia Dell’ Arcobugio* (1640).

⁷ *The sportsman's dictionary; or, the gentleman's companion: for town and country* (London, 1800), 434.

⁸ Tony Jackson, *Legitimate Pursuit: The Case for the Sporting Gun* (Southampton: Ashford Press, 1988), 27. Hereafter cited in text.

the iron teeth of the legend produced sparks that ignited the powder in the flash pan. This offered better resistance to rain than the slow-burning matchlock, the match or light itself being a hazard around gunpowder.

But the next mechanism to be developed proved to be much easier to operate and much less costly to produce, creating a simplicity of design and accessibility that accounts for the rise of shooting in the eighteenth century. The flintlock mechanism, which was invented in the mid-seventeenth century and used in sportsmen's rifles for over a century to follow, was the dominant firearm technology through the eighteenth century, until it was replaced by the percussion or detonator system, which came into use in the early-nineteenth century. The flintlock created a spark by striking flint against steel. This spark ignited the priming powder, which in turn ignited the main charge. The flintlock was easier to use and more effective, particularly for infantry-men but also for sportsmen because, as Kenneth Chase points out, it "permitted a higher rate of fire."⁹ This by no means allowed a quick turnaround between shots by current standards, but it did mean greater opportunity for repeated shooting than before. Jackson describes the business of reloading: "There was pause between each shot for reloading as powder, wads and shot were rammed home, the pan fresh primed and the flint checked" (27). The rising participation in shooting in the period also propelled the firearm industry in England to meet standards set on the continent. The earliest version of the flintlock had been invented in France by Marin le Bourgeois in the court of Louis XIII (1610), but very few were manufactured in England until much later. According to shooting and hunting historian Michael Brander, "at the start of the eighteenth century

⁹ Kenneth Chase, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 201.

English gunmaking was still in its infancy.”¹⁰ But, as the century progressed, better guns were being fashioned, guns that were safer, more reliable, and increasingly deadly. They became such a source of national pride that, as George Edie wrote in *The Art of English Shooting* (1777), “Our English fowling-piece has, of late years, met with so much improvement, that we may, without partiality, esteem it equal, if not superior, to any other in Europe.”¹¹ The fowling-piece was the term of art for the rifle used in shooting-flying.

It is not surprising, then, that the technical advances taking place in the eighteenth century had an impact on the way the shooters conceived of their sporting activity, both in terms of its objectives and how its skills were shared and taught to others. We can observe this in shooting poetry, where the tendency to make use of georgic poetic models persists. Markland’s *Pteryplegia: Or, the Art of Shooting-Flying* (1727) is the first complete shooting poem in the manner of the georgic-instructional angling verses we noted in the 1690s, preceding even Somerville’s hunting poem, *The Chace*. The poem stresses a technical approach to the sport and makes use of the language of empiricism and the new science, which were taking hold more generally in the intellectual activity of the period. This emphasis begins in the dedication, which draws attention to the language of science, putting an accent on “a Sett of *Speculations*” with an eye toward establishing a “*Regular System*.”¹² Markland’s endeavour is to be systematic and to demonstrate that the sport of shooting is indeed an art – an activity reducible to a set of rules. His speculations, he states, “contain many demonstrable Truths, which never before made any Figure abroad in *Terms of Art*, or were reduced to any *Shape or Expression*” (i). Markland claims to be the first to undertake

¹⁰ Michael Brander, *Hunting & Shooting: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971), 77.

¹¹ George Edie, *The Art of English Shooting* (London, 1777), 5.

¹² George Markland, *Pteryplegia, or the art of shooting-flying: a poem* (London: 1717), i. Hereafter cited in text.

this project, as he has no predecessors to turn to who have written poetically on shooting-flying, though prose manuals, such as the many editions of Cox's *Gentleman's Recreation*, had offered some systematized advice before Markland. But, with the latest advances in technology, shooting was a relatively new sport as yet, so he had very little but his own experience upon which to draw. His challenge was to turn into an art what had been, according to him, a "hitherto Unexplain'd, and Difficult Mystery" (i-ii).

Markland's use of the word "mystery" is significant for understanding how he conceives the body of knowledge outlined in his poem. The word, as he uses it, denotes a trade or guild. The *OED* offers as one of its historical definitions, a "practice about which there is or is reputed to be some secrecy; *esp.*, a highly skillful or technical operation in a trade or art."¹³ With his use of the word "mystery," Markland suggests that one must learn and cultivate one's abilities in the art. This is a conception that we can link to the process of increasing specialization and socialization into the sports that we have been examining. In the poem, Markland is offering his trade secrets, so to speak, which he purports to be the science of his sport. That science has been forged from the wealth of experience he has accumulated, refined into a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of his sport.

It is significant that he foregrounds his experience as the way toward establishing a science or a theoretically coherent body of knowledge. But one must gain experience in the art before scientific understanding can be achieved. He explains that the process itself is necessary in order to gain that expertise: "*Practice alone can make you Masters*" (ii). Trial, error, success, and failure are the constant sequence of experience in the improvement of the art: "You must sweat and be Cold, must Sweat again, and be Cold again, before you can

¹³ "mystery, n.," *OED Online*.

arrive at any Degree of Perfection in this Art. I have furnish'd you with all Necessary Tools of the Trade, but 'tis Time and Experience must Finish and Accomplish the Workmen; and even after Seven Years Industry, you will find but too many Occasions to prove you still deficient and imperfect" (ii). Perhaps this is the attraction of the sport for its practitioners, that perfection is never quite attainable and that challenges will always remain to be overcome.

These challenges, Markland goes on to show, are often mental in nature, once one's physical skills have improved. So, at this point in the dedication, Markland proceeds to sketch out one such mental obstruction, and in the process he furnishes an insight into the psychological experience of the sportsman: "In some Hands, the ill Fortune of the first shoot determines and influences the Success of all the rest" (ii). This psychological effect is well known to sportsmen of all kinds, though it applies particularly to shooters. The pressure of the first attempt is such that a miss can shatter confidence, potentially beyond recovery. However, the reverse usually accompanies a successful first attempt: "on the contrary, a prosperous Hit shall have the very opposite Effect, and induce such an easy Serenity and steady Assurance, as carry inevitable Death with 'em for many Hours after" (iii). Only experience, achieved through a regimented practice, can improve one's performance and psychological make-up. Thus, the art is oriented toward a mastery of the psychological dimension of physical accuracy and dexterity. The poem constitutes an attempt at a complete and systematic understanding of how physical and mental strengthening takes place.

To this end, the poem proceeds step by step, beginning with the basic principles of the sport. Charging the gun is the first topic of technical instruction Markland discusses. The shooter must not charge the gun the night before, lest "in the Morn the Prime will hiss" (3). Nor should he want to fill the prime too full; rather, the proper procedure is "To ram the

Powder well, but not the Ball” (4). The basics of the sport need first to be established before any complex technique can be introduced. Once these fundamentals have been addressed, the shooting of the gun itself becomes the focus. Markland broaches, for example, the question of proper timing and range for a shot. He dismisses attempts to shoot a partridge from twenty yards because it is too short a distance:

Full forty Yards permit the Bird to go,
 The spreading Gun will surer Mischief sow;
 But, when too near the flying Object is,
 You certainly will mangle it, or miss;
 And if too far, you may so slightly wound,
 To kill the Bird, and yet not bring to Ground. (9-10)

Once the proper distance has been explained, Markland presents even more advanced techniques on aiming. This section is one of the most technical discussions to be encountered in an eighteenth-century georgic. The physics of the discussion are indebted clearly to Newton, with its orientation toward an advanced awareness of space and motion. Markland lists five classes of aiming that a shooter needs to master: “The *Lineals* two, *Traverse* and *Circular*; / The Fifth *Oblique*” (13). The lineals are the linear planes directly before and behind the shooter. Markland’s advice for making such shots is that, if a bird is coming directly toward the shooter, he should give “a little space above her Head” and then fire. And, if “the Bird flies from you in Line,” the proper technique is to “neatly raise / Your piece, till there’s no *Open Under-space* / Betwixt the Object and the *Silver Sight*,” at which point that the trigger is depressed and the kill is made (14). The next category is the traverse, or “Th’unlucky *Cross Mark*,” about which he acknowledges there is some dispute as to the best way to take the shot (14). The “most common Practice is, to Fire / Before the Bird,”

though the distance in front of the crossing bird is difficult to ascertain – too much, and the ball will fly harmlessly in front of the bird; too little, and a swift bird will speed unscathed past the bullet (15). One of the easier shots is the oblique, because “You’ve there th’ Advantage of a *Sideling Line*” to gauge the distance in advance of the bird to shoot (15). Finally, there is the circular shot, of which “There’s nothing more requir’d, but the steady Care T’attend the Motion of the Bird, and gain / The best and farthest *Lineal Point* you can” (16). Patience is required for this shot, and the important skill to master is learning how to manoeuvre the weapon in order to find the best angle before finally firing.

A recurring theme in the poem is the necessity of gaining experience in performing the shots properly; to this end, Markland repeatedly sets up a contrast between youths and masters. The latter are those who, through practice and patience, have arrived at the proper temperament to succeed at the sport. Their knowledge resides foremost in the first rule of the sport; they have

Learn’d to *Take Time*, the Chief and Only Rule
 First to be practis’d in the Marksman’s School.
 Most Youths undisciplin’d, the Sport confound,
 By random Firing on improper Ground:
 For as in Flights of hasty Wit, the same
 Examin’d, will be Parallel in Game. (5)

The last couplet here offers an interesting simile, where both shooting and poetry are understood as art – they are both rule-bound. True wit is exhibited in controlled, measured expression, just as in shooting. A calm, detached demeanour can more often than not overcome the psychological challenges of the sport, as it takes “A *Stoick’s Temper*” to conduct it properly (6). A lack of patience distinguishes the youthful shooter, and haste in

making a shot is typically the most common error that results in a missed target. Another fault of behaviour and character is to try to kill too many birds too quickly. When confronting a scattering flock of birds, the young shooter might become distracted by the sheer number of targets, unable to choose one in particular. Or conversely, in the same situation, the “Novice” shooter might be overcome with a greedy desire to kill as many as possible and “By random Fate to pick a Number up” (17). But Markland provides a contrasting example to this youthful approach in order to supply a valuable lesson about the way he defines the sport: “Experience’d Sportsmen will of one make sure, / Rest honestly content of one secure” (17). The old cliché of a bird in the hand springs to mind, and in the sport of shooting-flying this is not merely a platitude but an important strategic consideration. Just as importantly, this execution of a strict process is also what makes the activity a sport rather than an indiscriminate slaughter.

The greatest contrast Markland underscores between the youth and the experienced shooter comes in a warning on the dangers of handling a gun. He admonishes parents by way of a cautionary fable (a digression in the Virgilian manner) to be shared with aspiring young shooters so they can be safe in their pursuit of the sport:

A blooming Youth, who had just past the Boy,
 The Father’s only Child and only Joy,
 As he intent design’d the Larks his Prey,
 Himself as sweet and innocent as They,
 The fatal Powder in the Porch of Death,
 Having in vain discharg’d its Flash of Breath,
 The tender Reas’ner, curious to know
 Whether the Piece were really charg’d or no,

With mouth to Mouth apply'd, began to blow.
 A dreadful Kiss! For now the silent Bane
 Had bor'd a Passage thro' the whizzing Train,
 The Shot all rent his skull, and dash'd around his Brain! (28-29)

This digression comes after Markland has offered some advice on how to shoot in the wind; hence, the young man's blowing into the firearm is the significant moment of the story.

Moreover, the follow-up to the digression offers a further warning for always keeping a gun pointed away from others accompanying the shooting excursion. Through the digression, the didactic purpose remains – that of inculcating hunting techniques. The impact of the violence might be jarring, but it is not at odds with the other instructions offered. Proper performance in the sport involves safety, Markland is asserting here, and his behaviour is inclined to that of the specialist-conservationist concerned with the safety of his fellow shooters and with the health and maintenance of the sport itself.

It is thus in a related thought that Markland considers how his sport can co-exist peacefully with other rural activities. He describes an episode in which a pack of hounds in pursuit of a hare passes through his line of sight. Frustrated that his sport is interrupted, he ponders what his reaction should be to the disruption, asking even whether he himself should dispatch the hare in his anger:

Hold! What d'ye do? Sure you don't mean to Fire!
 Constrain that base, ungenerous Desire,
 And let the Courser and the Huntsman share
 Their just and proper Title to the Hare.
 Let the poor Creature pass, and have fair Play,
 And fight the Prize of Life out her own way.

The tracing Hound by Nature was design'd
 Both for Use and Pleasure of Mankind;
 Form'd for the Hare, the Hare too for the Hound:
 In enmity each to each other bound:
 Then he who dares by diff'rent means destroy
 Than Nature meant, offends 'gainst *Nature's Law*. (21)

The engagement between the shooter and the hunter should be genial, if the sporting impulse is to prevail. Even though he personally does not choose to engage in chasing, Markland sees in the handling of hounds a parallel discipline that should be respected. The hounds serve a useful purpose for their master's sport, and they must be allowed to fulfill their function within a grand design he sees presiding over all sport. The attitude of letting others experience their proper sport supplants baser human instincts, which are overcome with a show of reason, manifests in this expression of "fair play." This rationale contributes to his understanding of "Nature's Law," as he puts it, an order maintained through natural conflict. In this case, the conflict between hare and hound serves as an example of *concordia discors*, or nature's fine balance on display. To intrude on that conflict disrupts the harmony he appreciates. A proper mode of conduct is thus set out in the poem. We could call this, in analogy with poetry, the decorum of sport. His shooting is a polite activity.

In 1735, *Shooting-Flying*, a poem was published anonymously, only a few years after Markland's poem. Scarcely one hundred lines of verse, it offers some supplementary insights into shooting's evolution in England, as well as a few instructive concepts of some complexity. Referring to the relatively youthful nature of the sport in his country, the poet perceives the level of practice in shooting-flying to be high, despite the sport's novelty: "Long was this art to BRITAIN's sons unknown, / And, but of late, the pleasing science

shown.”¹⁴ The traditional techniques, involving nets and falconry, are on the wane. Progressively superior firearms, in combination with “ranging dogs,” have changed the nature of the sport (4). It is now a different test of the sportsman, and this particular poet revels in its codes:

Mean was the triumph on the ground to kill,
 But in the air to slay, shews nobler skill:
 To such perfection now that skill is brought,
 ’Tis worthy of the muse’s farther thought. (4)

In fact, it is precisely because of the technical advances in the sport that the poet believes it to be worthy of poetic consideration.

The marksman in *Shooting-Flying* is motivated by many factors at once, as he is keen to share his knowledge and his spoils. “Pleasure and profit all his toils attend,” he asserts of his sportsman, “Game for himself, and Presents for his friend” (7). The shooter depicted in the poem makes functional use of the game he accumulates, providing for others in his community; the act of writing is for him a parallel act by which he shares his knowledge. He pauses to contemplate his position as a poet, wondering if he can successfully teach others what he himself is able to perform: “But whilst I sing of this destructive art, / Can I to others, what I sing, impart?” (7). He never directly answers his own query, conceding that “Hard is the task” and “I’ll do my best,” though he knows finally that he can only offer what he can, and that the reader will only perfect the skills through practice and time devoted to the art (7).

¹⁴ *Shooting Flying, a poem* (London: 1735), 3. Hereafter cited in text.

Once he completes his poetic self-assessment, he returns to practical advice geared to particular shooting locations. For a situation in the woods, for example, the best strategy as regards the best position to take up is different than from that required in open lands: “If shelving, ever keep the lower side, / Where the birds skim down when the covert’s try’d; / The distant sight may well prepare your eye” (7). Different methods are essential in more open spaces, and the poet proceeds to address what one should do in thickets, in marshes, and in fields. The technical information is juxtaposed in the poem with a psychological perspective as well, as the poet advocates boldly, and perhaps liberally, to take one’s shots according to the adage that if nothing is ventured, nothing is gained: “Yet miss you may, and probably you will, / But if you never shoot, you never kill” (9). The sportsman represented in the poem is one who knows how to get into productive shooting positions because he possesses advanced environmental and technical knowledge. Most importantly, he has the courage to take the shot when the chance arises, and he generously shares his spoils and his knowledge with others. This shooter is toward the advanced end of the specialization continuum.

The next shooting poem to appear was Robert Coote’s *The Compleat Marksman: or, the True Art of Shooting-Flying* (1759). It follows much of the same instructional and theoretical ground we have seen in Markland’s *Pteryplegia*. In a prefatory address “To All Qualified Sportsmen,” Coote likewise comments on the relation of theory to practice, noting that reading instructions alone will not make a good marksman. His hope is that his readers will “regard the Substance” of his lines, rather than the expression, since “Poetry is not his

Trade.”¹⁵ He justifies his poetry as bringing to bear his knowledge in poetic form in a series of “Maxims” (4) on how best to shoot pheasant, partridge, woodcock, quail, and mallard duck.

His use of the term “maxim” is significant. A maxim today is understood usually as a pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct, so proverbial as to play little to no role in the formation of scientific thought. But, in the eighteenth century, as Frans De Bruyn has shown, a broader understanding of the term permitted it a greater role in the construction of scientific knowledge.¹⁶ Linguistic sources help us clarify what the term meant in the eighteenth century. “By *Axioms*, call’d also *Maxims*,” according to Ephraim Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia* of 1728, “are understood all common Notions of the Mind, whose evidence is so clear and forcible, that a Man cannot deny them without renouncing common Sense and natural Reason.”¹⁷ And the *OED* defines the term “maxim” as a “proposition . . . expressing a general truth drawn from science or experience.”¹⁸ Coote is drawing upon insights attained through experience rather than an incidental collection of observations. He wants to share his findings, so that “the Rules here set down, when joined with a little Practice, will compleat the Workman, or raise him to a very high degree of Perfection” (i). The poem is in iambic tetrameter, a fitting meter for maxims consisting of simple expressions that can be committed to memory, in contrast, for example, to Somerville’s heroic style.

¹⁵ Robert Coote, *The compleat marksman, or the true art of shooting-flying: a poem* (London: 1759), 2. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁶ Frans De Bruyn, “Reading Virgil’s *Georgics* as a Scientific Text: The Eighteenth-Century Debate Between Jethro Tull and Stephen Switzer,” *English Literary History* 71 (2004): 667.

¹⁷ *Cyclopaedia*, ed. Ephraim Chambers, 2 vols. (London: 1728), I: 182.

¹⁸ “maxim, *n.*” *OED Online*.

Unfortunately, however, even though Coote makes claims of systematic rigor, there is little species-specific observation and detail in his commentary on each type of prey. In a poetic section almost entirely plagiarized from Markland, Coote explains the five shooting techniques, with passages depicting the two lineals, the traverse, the circular, and the oblique marks. But this contains little to set it apart instructionally from his predecessor. Similarly, the thematic content in the poem reiterates the sporting standards Markland had laid out previously, though Coote does develop some points further.

In particular, Coote reinforces the value the sport places on experience, as once again the good marksman is contrasted with a youthful novice to affirm what makes for good shooting. “Be sure *Take Time*, – the chiefest rule,” Coote declares, emphasizing the virtues of patience and care as paramount to the activity, in contrast with the impetuosity of “Most giddy Youths” whom “the Sport confound, / By firing on improper Ground” (9-10). Once this contrasting example is set up between the novice and the master’s behaviour, the true temperament of the shooter can be articulated:

True Sportsman *Stoic-like* should be
 Quite easy, unconcern’d, and free;
 Not eager firing off at Randam [sic],
 Or let a tim’rous Fear command ’em. (10)

It is notable that, like in Markland’s poem, an emphasis on a stoic demeanour is foregrounded in the ideal marksman, particularly as it relates to success and happiness. Sportsmanship was conceived of in the eighteenth century as a process for discovering happiness and can thus be situated within the larger philosophical understanding of that project. The “pursuit of happiness” – Thomas Jefferson’s phrase, which has embedded in it a hunting metaphor – remained a significant preoccupation in the sporting poetry of the

eighteenth century. In the fishing section of this study, we examined how the *beatus ille* tradition was adapted to late-seventeenth-century interests. While angling poets expressed a tension between stoic and epicurean sensibilities, mid-eighteenth-century shooters favoured a stoic sensibility over the epicurean as a vehicle for expressing their ethical sense of their sporting activity.

This approach manifests itself in a valuation of the wisdom that comes with age over impetuous youth derived from a mastery over emotions. In practical sporting terms, Coote emphasizes how necessary it is to focus on a single bird when an entire flock springs up. “Experience’d Men of One make sure,” the poet avows, and we can recall Markland making the same pronouncement in his poem (21). The veteran shooter can be content with himself and his sport in taking a single bird, whereas the “giddy” juvenile sacrifices all to his impatience:

Young giddy Fools, who vainly hope
By Chance, to pick a Number up,
Do often find themselves deceiv’d
And wish the random Fire retriev’d;
Tho’ many they may slightly wound,
They’ll see none bounding on the Ground. (22)

Not only is the experienced shooter more likely to go home with his trophy, but also there is less likelihood of a deplorable, unsportsmanlike outcome, such as wounding rather than killing the prey. The patient shooter is more likely to achieve the satisfaction he seeks from his engagement in the sport. Thus, the neo-stoic attitude, with its links to the mid-seventeenth-century sporting ideals of Izaak Walton, represents for Coote and Markland the best approach to their sport and its practice.

In a contrasting example to this model, Coote speaks out against poachers, those who shoot a flock of woodcocks or pheasants where they sit, rather than sportingly frightening them so they can attempt escape in flight while the shooter takes aim: “*Poachers* alone that Crime commit, / Tis scorn’d by Men of Sense and Wit” (30). The terms “sense and wit” here characterize the proper awareness and behaviour of the gentleman in the field. The good sportsman employs his good sense in knowing the appropriate objectives, rules, and procedures of the activity, and his wit surfaces in how expertly and aptly he expresses his art through the form of his shot-making. He combines the two in order to achieve a heightened sense of pleasure in the activity. The sportsman who exhibits the proper attitudes and conduct embodies this philosophical projection.

John Aldington presents a competing notion of what makes for proper gentlemanly behaviour in *A Poem on the Cruelty of Shooting* (1769). He takes up a sentimental viewpoint on the killing of animals, labeling it cruel and calling for men to abandon all forms of animal killing, except for safety and subsistence purposes. In the opening section, he positions himself as a man who is destined to speak out on this matter. Just as other men “their different Schemes pursue, / As Custom teaches or their Genius Turns,”¹⁹ so Aldington is called to denounce the cruelty of shooting: “To treat of Shooting, Cruelty, and Death, / And touch the tender Passions of the Soul; / That Task be mine” (4). In this declaration, Aldington distinguishes between the passions of the sport, felt by those who derive their pleasure from the emotional and psychological thrills of its performance, and the passions of the soul, which he characterizes as the sentimental moral centering that guides an individual ethically. These actions do not involve the killing of animals for sport, for Aldington elevates

¹⁹ John Aldington, *A poem on the cruelty of shooting* (London: 1769), 4. Hereafter cited in text.

all creatures to the level of humans, attributing to them human responses and emotions in his descriptions. The poem consists mainly of extended descriptive sections of the many different shooting targets, outlining their distressing plight when confronted with shooters. He even anthropomorphizes the animals to the degree that we are provided with soliloquies from some of them. In contrast with their innocence, he draws a stern sportsman who stalks them pitilessly. After he has slaughtered the poor hare, the hunter “trudges home / Elate, and loudly joyous, long harangues / The listening Inmates, on *Pompey’s Feats*” (7). The hunter brags and laughs in this ironic deconstruction of martial Roman heroism. He “glories in the Murder of the Day” (7).

In a departure from the georgic modal features that distinguish most of the poetry we have seen, Aldington’s poem is structured as a series of vignettes consisting of unpleasant representations of the many different animal slaughters he has observed in the countryside. For example, in a sympathetic section on the snipe, the poet paints a reproachful picture of what he deems the lowest form of sportsman:

The clumsy Lout, who never durst
 So much as once a flying Shot attempt,
 Sly, base unfairly, conceals himself
 Behind some hollow Tree or tufted Bank,
 Designing to destroy, by cunning Stealth,
 The Innocent. (9)

The vilest shooter is the one who sneaks up on the bird and shoots it before it has a chance at flight. This does not even conform to the most basic of shooting codes observed in Markland and Coote’s verse, which insists that the bird must be alerted to the shooter’s presence and

given a chance at escape. The bird must be in flight in order for shooting skill to be measured properly. This is the sporting component to the action, not simply killing the prey.

But Aldington does not make this distinction in his ethical plea. He sympathizes with the plight of the bird even when marksmen engage it sportingly. Any act of shooting offends him. He even regards experienced sportsmen to be more dangerous because of their practice in killing. He illustrates this belief in a vignette on grouse. Upon being frightened by dogs, the grouse spring into flight. Grouse have a primitive defense against attack, the unsettling springing noise of the flock's quick attempt at escape:

Up rise the Pack of Grouse; whose stunning Noise
 Makes all the gossy Heaths and vaulted Hills
 Resound, and frequently intimidates
 The young unstable Shooter; but dreads not him,
 Whose gather'd Knowledge, Years and Years ago,
 Has conquer'd all Surprize the rushing, furr'd,
 Or feather'd Game can give. He, cool as Time,
 Unconcern'd amid the mighty Clamour stands,
 And makes a steady Point discreetly tim'd: (19)

Aldington is perceptive enough to note the continuum of specialization amongst shooters and that the more youthful ones are “unstable” in the face of the noise made by the escaping flock. This weakness might allow the grouse a short window of opportunity for escape, part of their natural defence against predators. But the grouse's outcry and commotion have little effect on the experienced shooter, whose years of practice have conditioned him to focus, despite the distraction, and make his shot. Even if Aldington understands the technical

attributes of the experienced shooters, this still does not compensate for the brutal killing they perform in such cases.

Curiously, Aldington does offer a scenario in which it is justifiable to shoot. He implores shooters to spare and pity the “weak” species and, rather, if they must destroy, go after such menacing creatures as the wolf, boar, wolverine, lynx, bear, panther, snake, or lion. There is a proper honour in so doing, and, to Aldington, this is the only redemptive and virtuous action one can perform with a gun:

To conquer such
Is something really meritorious, bold
And manly too; but thus to vent your Rage
On poor defenceless Birds, exhibits clear
A narrow, barren, cold, degenerate Soul,
A cruel Mind, a despicable Heart. (28)

Aldington does acknowledge that experienced shooters do not let their emotions dominate the act; they have clear purposes, channeling their passions through their sport in distinct ways. For Aldington, the more legitimate focus for the hunter’s “rage” is on the dangerous brutes he lists, as there can be a “bold” and “manly” quality to hunting this game. But to kill small birds – which he observes principally in England’s forests as the sport of men who are shooting-flying – is dreadful to him, and it speaks poorly of the souls of the individuals who perform it. Those individuals lack the necessary sentimental perspective to be considered properly virtuous and moral men. In his section on the quail, for example, he moralizes on the proper reaction one should have upon witnessing a killing: “At such extreme Variety of Woe, / The conscious Eye must surely drop a Tear; / Or all its tender Faculties are lost” (7). Aldington here signals his attachment to ideals of sensibility that had become increasingly

prevalent in England during the second half of the century. He displays his reaction of sympathy to actions he deems cruel, an attitude he is inviting in the reader as well.

Aldington's sensibility rests on finding a universal morality cultivated through our capacity to feel, rather than on our capacity for logical thinking. "A sentimental work moralizes more than it analyzes," Janet Todd remarks, "and emphasis is not on the subtleties of a particular emotional state but on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience."²⁰ We are tacitly asked to overlook the argumentative inconsistencies that abound in Aldington's representations of cruelty – between the poacher's act and that of the sportsman, between the vulnerable small creatures and the large dangerous beasts he gives permission to pursue – to see all killing acts as cruel. In terms of structural and thematic content, this poem presents a significant departure from the other shooting poems of the period. As a contrasting example, and in dialogue with the other poems surveyed here, Aldington's poem offers us an alternative version of gentlemanly behaviour, commensurate with the sensibility he expounds. His outlook rivals the sporting attitudes of poets such as Markland and Somervile by offering a conception of masculinity not based upon displays of excellence in one's leisure but rather on the capacity for refined emotion and a willingness to show compassion for suffering. For Aldington, this represents a change in how virtue ought to be displayed and understood.

But, despite Aldington's protestations, recreational shooting remained a popular field activity, and it was celebrated in verse again in Henry James Pye's *Shooting: A Poem* (1784). A noted lover of field sports, Pye was Member of Parliament for Berkshire from 1784 until George III appointed him Poet Laureate in 1790, a position he held until his death in 1813.

²⁰ Janet Todd, *An Introduction to Sensibility* (London: Methuen, 1986), 4.

His contemporaries, however, did not hold his poetry in high regard. Robert Southey, his successor as Poet Laureate, while complaining that the position offered insubstantial remuneration and little opportunity for inspiring poetic expression, jibed that “I have been rhyming as doggedly and dully as if my name had been Henry James Pye.”²¹ And twentieth-century historian Lord Robert Blake called Pye “the worst Poet Laureate in English history with the possible exception of Alfred Austin.”²² Despite his poetic shortcomings, Pye’s love of shooting and his sporting prowess rise to the surface in his poem. He celebrates his sport while offering instruction in the georgic vein, following in the footsteps of his sporting poet predecessors. In particular, he invokes William Somervile early in the poem: “’Twas thine, immortal Somervile! to trace / The livelier raptures of the breathless chace.”²³ And, in the advertisement preceding the poem, he indicates that he is writing in the shadow of George Markland’s *Pteryplegia*, noting that “its having passed through several editions is a proof that the subject of it is generally interesting” (i). However, his assessment of the scope of Markland’s work is less gracious, judging it “by no means of sufficient merit to preclude future attempts of a similar nature” (i).

In particular, he revisits the issues of theory versus practice and of youth versus experience. Pye paints the experienced shooter as one who cares little for appearance and fashions while participating in the activity. He is not interested in being noticed for his clothing or for carrying the latest gear:

Yet oft the experienc’d shooter will deride

This quaint exactness of fastidious pride;

²¹ *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 312.

²² Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), 11.

²³ H.J. Pye, *Shooting: a poem* (London: 1784), 2. Hereafter cited in text.

In some old coat that whilom charm'd the eye,
 Till time had worn it into slovenry,
 His dusky weapon, all by rust conceal'd,
 Thro' rainy service in the sportive field,
 He issues to the plain, secure to kill,
 And founds his glory on superior skill. (10)

Technique only is what distinguishes the good shooter, as he makes his art the definable trait of his character in the field, and his unostentatious nature keeps him from extravagant displays of prowess. His experience literally shows itself in his dress: past excursions are marked in his well-worn clothing and rusted gun barrel, and he makes no effort to impress by means that are not strictly tied to his performance of the activity.

The temperamental characteristics of the good marksman remain patience and care in shot selection, and Pye uses several circumstances a shooter might encounter to illustrate these traits. One example is the anticipation a “warm youth” faces on an early excursion in his shooting career, an excitement that must be kept under control (14). Here, when “anxious hopes enflame,” Pye advises “the reasoning calm of placid sense,” so that the shooter may “Pursue the fleeting mark with steady aim” (14). In other words, the mind ultimately controls the body: “By temp’rate thought your glowing passions cool, / And bow the swelling heart to reason’s rule” (14). In the heat of the moment, the heart rate climbs to such levels that it is difficult to keep the body still and maintain a true aim. Even the slightest disturbance of a steady posture can cause a missed shot. The experienced shooter cultivates self-control in the face of the physiological effects. This, for the shooter, serves as the mechanism to overcome the natural physical manifestations of his excitement and nerves.

Pye also explores what motivates the good shooter, the sport of the activity itself. Killing for its own sake does not interest the true sportsman: “the ambition of the sportsman lies / More in the certain shot than bleeding prize” (16). Here, Pye makes a critical distinction between the sportsman and the poacher, as the latter makes killing his objective, resulting in a disagreeable scene, where “Among the covey random slaughter pour” (16). This is a classist view. The poacher is dismissed as low, and Pye makes no effort to explore the poacher’s survival motives. It is against the poacher’s behaviour that the marksman must measure his own conduct:

O let your breast such selfish views disclaim,
 And scorn the triumph of a casual aim:
 Not urg’d by rapine, but of honor proud,
 One object single from the scatt’ring croud;
 So, when you see the destin’d quarry down,
 Shall just applause your skilful labor crown. (16-17)

The scattering of a flock of birds is a common situation shooters encounter. The poacher seeks to kill as many birds as possible, whereas the sportsman takes aim at a single one, delighting in the challenge of hitting one skillfully rather than painting the field red in slaughter. The one is honourable; the other is distasteful. While John Aldington does not ethically distinguish between the sporting kill and the poaching kill, Pye sees this as a crucial difference, and morally he elevates the noble sportsman over the dishonourable poacher.

Pye finally considers the seasonal effects encountered by the sportsmen and some of the technical and psychological challenges to be overcome. Notably, he offers technical advice on how to shoot in the open moor or when faced with obstructing branches. In the latter case, Pye’s instruction is succinct: “Here let your care the shorten’d gun employ” (36).

When venturing into wooded areas, the shooter should choose a weapon with a barrel of smaller length so as to allow for greater manoeuvrability. This counsel is seconded in such prose sources as *The Sportsman's Dictionary*, which advises that “it is necessary for any gentleman who sports much to have two guns; the barrel of one about two feet nine inches which will serve very well for the beginning of the season, and for wood shooting: the other about three feet three inches, for open-shooting after *Michelmas*, the birds by that time are grown so shy that your shoots must be at longer distance.”²⁴ Depending on the conditions and objectives of the season, different weapons are required. An expanding arsenal styled to various conditions is analogous to the advanced concentration on equipment exercised by the most specialized of anglers we observed in the fishing section of this study. The advanced shooter can be similarly identified by his preferences in technique and equipment.

Pye also addresses the difficulties of shooting in the winter, when snow and ice make the approach and positioning more challenging. This obstacle is an element of the exercise that separates the capable marksman from the lesser performers who cannot make a shot unless conditions are ideal. Pye contrasts the scene of the winter shooter at the edge of a stream observing wildfowl with the angler enjoying the comforts of his sport. Pye values hardiness and hardships as elements of his sport:

The patient fowler stands with silent aim
 To watch the station of the watery game:
 Not like the gentle angler, careless laid
 In cool shelter of the summer shade,
 But train'd with hardy sinews to defy

²⁴ *The sportsman's dictionary; or, the gentleman's companion: for town and country* (London, 1800), 434.

The chilling keenness of a wintery sky (39)

Shooting is difficult in the coldest months. The shooter's disposition must be more hardy, his determination greater. The skilled shooter can track the mallard as he would other birds and find the rewards commensurate with his efforts when he finally does make his shot. This example is yet another instance of individual sporting codes determining the levels of personal satisfaction one experiences in the activity. The man who succeeds in winter will never be as prolific as shooters in fairer seasons, but he fits the pattern of the specialist marksman, for whom "glory more than gain allures the brave" (16).

In a showy display of poetic form, Pye inserts a lengthy and decorative georgic digression at the centre of the poem, a recounting of the episode of Atys and Adrastus from Book I of *The Histories* by Herodotus. In this ostentatiously poetic display, Atys is fatally wounded by his companion Adrastus – who errantly tosses his spear, puncturing Atys's chest in an attempt to kill a dangerous creature that had been terrorizing the countryside. The story is significant in the way it is juxtaposed with the technical subjects that make up the rest of the poem, particularly a passage of instruction on the correct and careful handling of a gun. The poet warns of the urgent necessity of being assured in one's shot-making so that "From erring shots your brave compeers secure, / That prudence guard those ills which erst might flow / From the wing'd javelin, and the sounding bow" (45). To this end, the army is praised for its utility in training safe and competent shooters:

'Tis hence the military race prepare
 The novice youth with such assiduous care,
 And teach him with punctilious art to wield
 The weighty fire-lock in the embattled field... (46)

The themes of military training and warfare thus enter Pye's discussion, the timing notable because the poem was published the year after the end of the American Revolution, when England had lost the war and was nursing the unaccustomed experience of defeat. Hence, the poem takes on a heroic colouring throughout, reaffirming the classical links between sport and warfare. As the poem draws to its conclusion, Pye warns those "Votaries of rural joy" to take special care in learning "to shun / The hidden dangers of the unguarded gun" (49). This is important for the good of the nation because safe use of the gun is presented as a patriotic duty. It is pride on display and ultimately serves the good of England and the well-being of its citizens and its Empire. In this admonition, Pye's focus broadens, demonstrating concern for all shooters and Britain as a whole, befitting a gentleman and specialist in the sport.

The final eighteenth-century poem that makes shooting its subject matter is William Greenwood's *A Poem Written During a Shooting Excursion on the Moors* (1787). It contains many of the thematic modal features of the other shooting poems we have looked at, but what distinguishes this poem is that the sport takes place in the moors of the northern part of England, ranging into Scotland. The poem is dedicated to Greenwood's friend John Reed of Chipchace, Northumberland, "in remembrance of the many happy days" the author passed there, "Far from the lazy South."²⁵ The poem is structured similarly to other descriptive poetry on the field sports, incorporating illuminating digressions to complement the instruction. One prominent set piece involves a dream sequence experienced while the poet sits in a "Romantic scene," staking out some prey in the woods (21). He imagines the forest before him as akin to that of William Shakespeare's great forest scenes, particularly the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, in which "the banish'd Lord," Duke Frederick, enjoys the

²⁵ Rev. William Greenwood, *A poem written During a shooting excursion on the moors* (Bath: 1787), i, 17. Hereafter cited in text.

chase, which raises his spirits in the face of his troubles at home, “whist JAQUES told / the moral tale, or rail’d at fortune’s fools” (22). He similarly likens the hills of Kielder, the large forest area in Northumberland, to *Macbeth*’s Burnham Wood, wherein he can see “The weird sisters shape their murky flight / Scowling on *Dunsinane*” (22). These allusions to the pastoral delights of the former play and the menacing qualities of the latter signal the extremes of experience one can encounter on the moors.

The northern moors are open areas of land, often high above sea level, featuring poor drainage that make for a rough climate and landscape, though in the summer they can contain spectacular heather growth. The sportsman who ventures into the moors needs to be hardier in character and ready for the mental and physical challenges they present. In fact, the poem’s conclusion is dark and ominous, as the elements defeat any endeavour to sport there; this is conveyed metaphorically by a flower upon which the poet meditates, which was ripening beautifully but for “an angry blast” of northern wind and cold that speeds in “And kills its sweetness” (24). The flower is a symbol of youth and health, and the suggestion at the poem’s conclusion is that one should enjoy oneself while one is healthy because the weather will inevitably turn: “on the stilly air the tempest broods / In horrid silence,” leaving a “darken’d world” (24).

But, for most of the poem, the presiding emotion is one of happiness, edging toward joy, as Greenwood recalls his experience of his first shot as a youth: “my weak arm / Rais’d the tube trembling; but if haply fell / the flutt’ring victim, then how throb’d the heart, / How flush’d the little triumph on the cheek!” (3). As typically happens over the course of one’s sporting career, the nature of the experience evolves, and the young shooter passes through maturity in the sport to eventually find new ways to appreciate it. Greenwood is no different; he has developed that sense and is proud to share it now:

Such pleas'd me once! – and still, as manhood's prime
 Leads on to ripening skill and nobler spoils,
 True to its source the genuine passion lives.
 Long may it live (3)

Greenwood duly gestures toward William Somerville as his model of a mature sportsman, whose literary accomplishment has served first and foremost in “Aiding the poet's with the sportsman's fire,” thus making him “Monarch of rural sports, unrivall'd sung!” (1). But Greenwood draws only general inspiration from Somerville, for he announces in his opening line – “Enough of hunting” – that he has his own subject, the sister discipline of shooting, to pursue (1).

As a mature shooter, his broader perspective on the sport manifests itself as well in a greater social and historical understanding. He traces its historical development from archery and falconry, noting that until recently, in each of these endeavours, there was still much room for improvement in heightening the pleasure of the experience: “Yet still imperfect were the fowler's joys!” (6). But what changed substantially is that “science rose” (7). Advances in metallurgy created better ammunition and artillery, and now, “Arm'd with new pow'rs,” forged from the latest steel and lead, “improving art / Gave a new zest to pastimes, best enjoy'd” (11). For Greenwood, the development of the gun designed to shoot prey constitutes the height of his sport's evolution.

The poem, however, still considers some of the tensions between pleasure and violence. When the gun was first invented, there was an undermining of traditional valour, where the rules of engagement in warfare and sport were overwhelmed by the awesome power of the invention, occasionally manifesting itself in abuses of privilege. The sport “fell destruction to the feather'd race,” as too many birds were killed indiscriminately using this

form of sport (11). In his interest in wild nature, Greenwood veers toward a sentimental attitude. He shows sympathy for newborn birds – “They too can feel!” (15) – and counsels against shooting parenting birds in a plea for ethical sporting: “How low the triumph, and how poor the prize!” (15).

Greenwood shows how over time man learned to temper his passions, just as a youthful shooter matures into an experienced specialist. The sportsman does so ultimately for the good of his sport. As Greenwood sees it, man was able to channel properly the technological advancement of the gun into an improved fowling experience. This evolution in equipment and attitude has a direct impact on his enjoyment of the activity, allowing the sportsman finally to celebrate the sport’s “social joys,” the high point in the civilizing of the experience that allows him to find friendship in his pursuit (9). But it is his sporting behaviour – his rational understanding and performance of his activity – that allows him to reconcile his recreation with the sentimental critique that shooting is immoral. At this moment, toward the end of the eighteenth century, we see in Greenwood a return to tradition and the core values of sport that permits joyful and responsible participation in the activity.

Chapter 8. Hunting and Humanitarianism in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

P.B. Munsche argues that there was “a fundamental change in the character of field sports between 1660 and 1830.”¹ Some traditional sports, such as netting and hawking, disappeared almost entirely, while others, such as shooting, significantly transformed. Sports come into vogue and recede from fashion based on sporting preference, technological change, social or political factors, and cultural tastes that all change over time. Evolving alongside the field sports were an increasing number of spectator sports, particularly cricket and boxing, that appeared on the scene in the eighteenth century and were attended in large numbers by an expanding middle class. The trend toward increasingly regularized sporting activities had implications for the field sports as they had been traditionally played. As Munsche points out, “In the late seventeenth century, field sports were generally spontaneous affairs, involving a small number of participants and little preparation. A hundred years later, they tended to be scheduled, highly structured events, which drew as many spectators as sportsmen” (38). Donna Landry has also noted how hunting was transformed during this time period: “The pleasures of the chase as they developed between the 1730s and the 1830s were self-professedly imperial, patriotic, progressive and discriminating, like the peers and gentlemen who enjoyed them. They were increasingly technological pleasures, products of the agricultural revolution, but they were accompanied by social pleasures in a similar state of constant ‘improvement.’”² This chapter will explore the competing notions of what

¹ P.B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 38. Hereafter cited in text.

² Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 176.

constituted the sporting Englishman in the last half of the eighteenth century, as the hunting aristocratic figure was challenged and displaced in a changing social and political context.

As we have seen in such examples as Somerville's *The Chace* and Markland's *Pteryplegia*, poets in the second quarter of the eighteenth century strove to make the sports of hunting and shooting worthy subject matter for poetic representation. These sports were represented in the poetry as activities enjoyed by country gentlemen primarily for what we might call "sporting" reasons, where the activities themselves, when performed to a degree of mastery, brought pleasure to the individual, with supplementary benefits to the community. The poems tended to fall under the category of country poetry addressed to a group of like-minded adepts. The poetry reflects the concerns of the gentry and yeomanry, as much as the aristocracy.

The georgic's instructional characteristics accommodated this tendency in a combination of description and technical instruction, and as such it became the mode of choice for the sub-genre of hunting verse. Interestingly, a similar development was occurring in the world of visual art. In his study of sporting portraiture, Stephen Deuchar notes that hunting paintings in the period showed similar transformations, tending by mid-century toward "the steadily increasing popularity of overtly 'realistic', 'documentary' pictures."³ The sporting ideal as portrayed in art in the early part of the eighteenth century was of restful escape for participants of royal or elite rank. But, in the century's second quarter, the paintings reflected that ideal less and less. Marking a departure from the lofty idealizations of royal portraiture, these new documentary pictures focused more on the details of the sports themselves and the displays of excellence by the gentlemen performing them. Despite this

³ Stephen Deuchar, *Sporting Art in Eighteenth-Century England: A Social and Political History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), 66. Hereafter cited in text.

trend, however, the pictures were still “quite as didactic as those more obviously related to the traditional aspects of the sporting ideal” (67). These traditional aspects were centered on displays of power and privilege. The emergent style of portraiture did not “so much supersede the old ideal as provide a supplement to it – a supplement that was less recognizably ‘ideological’ to the casual spectator, and a good deal more attuned to contemporary notions about sport” (Deuchar 67). We can remark a parallel trend in the hunting poetry of the period after Pope’s *Windsor Forest* and Gay’s *Rural Sports*, a growing emphasis on the sports themselves as a primary focus, as they became more socially inclusive, reflecting a changing balance of social and political power.

As the century progressed, hunting’s associations with royalty or even with an excessively elitist outlook were fading. As a result, the field sports became accessible to greater numbers of people. The stag hunt remained first in order of nobility and priority, but it was now placed next to the other types, so there was room for participants of those other hunts to grasp a similar prestige and enjoyment in their sport. These participants were typically members of the squirearchy who were permitted to sport under the game laws. As the century progressed, even they typically came to choose the fox – still considered vermin and not covered by the game laws – as their sport of choice, creating a hunting pursuit that would bridge the social classes even further and situate fox hunting as Britain’s most popular sport in the following century.

Deuchar argues that we can see this transition in the art of the period. On the one hand were pictures displaying traditional royal or aristocratic exploits, “and their themes were also likely to be accessible to spectators with no more than a passing commitment to the sporting world” (72). These paintings reflect the older sporting ideals of privileged access and performance. But, Deuchar continues, “on the other hand were pictures based on newer

more purely sporting themes, stressing the details and intricacies of sport and committed to a style which purported to be purely descriptive; they appeared to represent sporting reality and in doing so might provide an antidote to, say, the unwelcome ‘Tory fox-hunting squire’ image created by satirists” (72-73). Sporting art was tending toward realistic representation in conveying the interests of its land-owning patrons. As we will see, the poetry of the period was also moving to question increasingly the links between class and sport, particularly as regards the “noble” forms of chase such as the stag and hare. Poets considered who was participating and what such activity signified. Hence, teaching the skills of the activities was devalued as a priority, and the formal georgic started to wane as the framing device for works on hunting. The didactic qualities so crucial to *The Chace* and *Pteryplegia* became a recessive trait in hunting poetry not long afterward. The georgic’s didacticism was attenuated by a shifting thematic focus toward the prospect outlook offered in such poems as Thomson’s *Seasons*, and the georgic ultimately dissipated as a named genre in the sporting poetry in the century’s second half.

We can add to this generic shift that there was an increasing humanitarian strain in the public dialogue surrounding sport’s place in society; this was evident, as we have seen, in such writers as James Thomson and John Aldington. Existing views that rural sports were manly and noble, and could even be royal and patriotic in their application, were supplemented by an awareness of the need to justify the sport in humanitarian terms. Thus, discussions of hunting’s place in society came to be considered not only historically and politically, but in terms of social responsibility as well. The poetry of the last half of the eighteenth century can be characterized as holding both impulses in balance. At the very least there was an awareness that humanitarian concerns needed to be addressed in a progressive society.

To this end, many of the later hunting poets drew heavily on Pope's *Essay on Man* as a means of articulating how humans and animals relate to one another in hierarchical terms. In *An Essay on Man*, Pope provides his view of the universe, which functions, despite apparent imperfections, in a rational manner governed by divine laws. We do not fully understand such laws because of our limited intellectual capacity, but in order to find happiness we must accept our position in the "Great Chain of Being." This hierarchical arrangement explains, for Pope, why God made so many less perfect creatures or why one social class or link in the chain should be subordinate to another. The universe as a whole would not be perfect unless it were complete, and it would not be complete unless it comprised a spectrum of all possible kinds of beings. The chain, according to its proponents, accounts also for animal suffering because those lesser creatures serve a purpose in providing amusement and sustenance for man. Though few would deny that man is superior to other animals, many thinkers of the eighteenth century increasingly doubted that beasts were in fact created for man's use. Pope accounted for this by claiming a two-way relation between all links in the chain, where man makes use of animals and is likewise beneficial to them:

Has God, thou fool! work'd solely for thy good,
 Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food? ...
 While Man exclaims, "See all things for my use!"
 "See man for mine!" replies a pamper'd goose;
 And just as short of Reason he must fall,
 Who thinks all made for one, not one for all.⁴

⁴ Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed. Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 120-157, ll. 27-48.

Pope's claim of philosophic optimism that "Whatever is, is RIGHT" (I, 294) was challenged, particularly by Voltaire, who heaped scorn on it in *Candide*, and by Samuel Johnson, who found Pope's logic circular and tautological.⁵ Nonetheless, for poets who considered the ethics of hunting, Pope's verse articulated an influential model to be engaged with and challenged. Echoes of his lines characterize the hunting verse that followed.

We can witness some of these ethical and generic concerns beginning to be played out in Wetenhall Wilkes's *Hounslow-Heath, a Poem* (1747). Part of the extensive forest of Middlesex, the heath occupied twenty-five square miles of uncultivated land known for its sporting opportunities. Wilkes celebrates this county's natural beauty that allows for good sport: "Pure is the Air, the Prospects unconfin'd, / And numerous the Sports t' unbend the Mind."⁶

Wilkes's poem is dedicated to the third Duke of Argyll, who was the most political of men. A Walpolean Whig and the government's advisor on Scottish affairs, Argyll had in 1722 established an estate in Whitton Park, an area enclosed from Hounslow Heath. He embodies the virtues Wilkes sets out in sporting terms throughout the poem. The passage of Wilkes's homage to Argyll is worth examining at length here to observe how the noble virtues once reserved for royalty have been transferred to the landowning man:

Argyll to native Elegance of Mind

⁵ In his *Lives of the English Poets*, he scoffs, "Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised." Earlier, in an essay published in *The Literary Magazine* in 1757 in response to Soame Jenyns's *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1756), Johnson had expanded on this view of Pope's poem: "But that he may not be thought to conceive nothing but things inconceivable, he has thought on a way by which human sufferings may produce good effects. He imagines that as we have not only animals for food, but choose some for our diversion, the same privilege may be allowed to some beings above us, *who may deceive, torment, or destroy us for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility*. This he again finds impossible to be conceived, *but that impossibility lessens not the probability of the conjecture, which by analogy is so strongly affirmed.*" Samuel Johnson, "From The Literary Magazine: or, Universal Review," in *Eighteenth Century English Literature*, Eds. Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr., and Marshall Waingrow (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 1015.

⁶ Wetenhall Wilkes, *Hounslow-Heath, A Poem* (London, 1747), 2. Hereafter cited in text.

Has contemplation and Experience join'd;
 Unblemish'd Honour, Tenderness of Heart;
 Genius of Wisdom, well improv'd by Art;
 A firm, unshaken, uncorrupted Zeal,
 Not vainly blazing for his Country's Weal,
 But steady, bold, and regularly Free,
 For Britain's Glory, and for Liberty;
 Fitted to shine in Courts – to rule the State;
 Or to appear in soft Retirement – Great.
 His patriot Virtues, and pure Light of Mind,
 With Goodness, in sweet Harmony combin'd,
 With unaffected Grace are so display'd, –
 The Statesman through the Friend is so convey'd (3)

This passage is reminiscent of Thomson's panegyric to George Lyttelton (later Lord Lyttelton), inserted into the 1744 version of *Spring*. In that poem, Lyttelton is lauded for his virtues, as he sits "beneath the Shade / Of solemn Oaks" to enjoy "Nature's careless Hand, / And pensive listen to the various Voice / Of rural Peace."⁷ As Ralph Cohen notes, the purpose of the panegyric in this case is "to give precision to the earthly ideal by naming a specific example."⁸ Lyttelton's retreat allows him a meditative space from which he can improve society through his virtue:

From these abstracted oft,
 You wander through the Philosophic World;

⁷ James Thomson, *The Seasons* (London: 1944), 40. Hereafter cited in text.

⁸ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of "The Seasons"* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), 68.

Where in bright Train continual Wonders rise,
 Or to the curious or the pious Eye.
 And oft, conducted by Historic Truth,
 You tread the long Extend of backward Time:
 Planning, with warm Benevolence of Mind,
 And honest Zeal unwarp'd by Party-Rage,
Britannia's Weal; how from the venal Gulph
 To raise her Virtue, and her Arts revive. (40)

We can see in Wilkes's tribute to Argyll the same attributes as those Thomson lavishes upon Lord Lyttelton in *The Seasons*. In particular, we can note how the qualities of the sporting experience come through in this description, namely the blending of contemplation and skillful application, which, through the practice of leisure in "soft Retirement," serves to balance Argyll's public role. He is at once a statesman and a friend, a combination forged through his sport in the heath. It is standard in Whig panegyric to present thought's relation to action in such terms; in fact, all such political dedications tend to sound alike. The language in Wilkes's poem is reminiscent of a political dedication, even if Argyll was not part of the Whig opposition of the 1730s, as Lyttelton was. What Wilkes's dedicatory passage ultimately says about sporting ideals is that they are formed in parallel with political ones as part of a greater gentlemanly ideal. Genteel virtues can be imparted to others through virtuous conduct in sport.

Hounslow-Heath has short descriptive passages of the three main types of hunt: hare, fox, and stag. All are valued as part of rural society, and each requires its own skills. The hare hunt is realistic in its description, to the point of prolixity, as the poet catalogues the names of the dogs used on this occasion: "Fleet *Fortune*, *Ve'let*, *Darling*, *Dainty*, *Tatler*, /

Slider and Music, Fav'rite, Beauty, Ratler; / Topspot and Ringwood, Jewel, Fumy, Tipler,” and so on for five more lines of verse (11). Their chase of the hare passes straightforwardly, except for one human command correcting the pack’s course before the “tim’rous” hare’s “stiff’ning Limbs” finally betray her, and “Death dissolves her Fear” (13). The account of the hare hunt is given without judgment about its relative value amongst the field sports, except that it is part of the tapestry of activity that takes place at Hounslow Heath and, as such, is part of the sporting society out of which “arises all that’s masculine” (13). The fox hunt is described in much the same way. The main tonal difference from the hare hunt is that the fox is scorned as a “Felon” (15). No sympathy is accorded it, and in its demise it is rendered as a villain: “with a Grin disdainful he expires; / And Malice flashes from his Eyes” (15).

The stag hunt, however, departs from the other two types of hunt because of its lingering connection with royal privilege. In this instance, “The Royal Sisters . . . condescend to grace the sportive Scenes” (15). Princess Amelia, the second daughter of George II, leads her entourage through the heath to enjoy her sport:

When thus distinguish’d at the Sylvan Game,
As chaste *Diana* she appears the same,
With this small Difference, – On *Amelia* wait,
Instead of Nymphs, a Train of Men in State. (16)

We can note in this allusive passage a return to the styling of the royal hunter in the manner of Pope, and this distinguishes the stag hunt from the other forms of hunt in the poem; it takes on symbolic associations in its performance, rather than the individualistic display of sporting excellence that characterizes the hunts of lesser game. Significantly, upon the capture of the stag, the creature is spared through Amelia’s royal decree, echoing the climax to Somerville’s stag chase. Like Prince Frederick’s display of royal mercy in that poem, the

nature of the symbolic exhibition by the regal hunter has evolved so that killing the stag is no longer understood as necessary to the display of royal power.

In the second edition of *Hounslow Heath* (1748), Wilkes added a “Preface” in which he sets out a brief defence of hunting against those who perceive it as a “barbarous persecution of innocent Creatures.”⁹ While the explanation Wilkes provides largely echoes previous such justifications, Eric Rothstein argues that this does not entirely save the poem “from defensiveness and the ambiguity of values one expects in a mid-century hunting poem.”¹⁰ The excessively bloody conclusion to the hare chase – “From ev’ry Wound springs forth a purple flood, / Sprouts in his face, and stains his Hands with Blood” (13) – stands as a necessary truth that the poet must begrudgingly dwell upon, even in a poem celebrating the hunt. Thus, the poem for Rothstein highlights “Wilkes’s socially induced confusion” at the ethical and philosophical questions that were surrounding hunting at his time of writing (346). But what Rothstein overlooks is that the bloody picture drawn in that instance and the poet’s understanding of the hare’s plight present a realistic portrayal of the scene rather than highlighting his conflicted sympathy. There are slightly differing treatments given to the conclusions of the three hunts: the hare is portrayed as innocent, the fox is personified as a guilty felon, and the stag averts death. Wilkes acknowledges the brutality of the sport, but this does not detract from his endorsement of it, which is uncompromisingly bloody. And it can be positive as well. Wilkes immediately follows the scene of blood with a proclamation of sport’s benefits: “How far superior are the rural Sports / To Ease inglorious, or the Toil of Courts!” (13). While he does see a need to defend the sport in the preface to the second

⁹ Wetenhall Wilkes, “Prelude,” in *Hounslow-Heath, A Poem*. 2nd Ed. (London, 1748), xii.

¹⁰ Eric Rothstein, “*Discordia Non Concors*: The Motif of Hunting in Eighteenth-Century Verse,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83 (1984): 345. Hereafter cited in text.

edition and acknowledge that there is an ethical question to address, the poem itself shows no real undercurrents of complexity or irony. Rothstein's thesis that ambivalence pervades the hunting poetry of the eighteenth century is highlighted much more clearly in the more nuanced and intellectually conflicted poems that came later.

One minor hunting poem that does not portray hunting as morally troubling is George Roberts's topographical poem *The Prospect, or Rural Sports; a poem* (1754). The poem offers only superficial insights into rural sports, concentrating instead on hunting's place in a larger survey of rural delights. The poem is divided into six sections, with descriptive accounts of sport appearing in the middle two sections. Because of this structure, the poem stands as an interesting, if inelegant, experiment in linking sporting content to larger ethical contemplation. Even though the sports are juxtaposed with a final section consisting of a physico-theological reflection "on the Mysteries of Creation," the sports themselves do not feature directly in these philosophical deliberations. Roberts's choice of epigraph, taken from Pope's pastoral "Spring," signals that the sports remain for him a means simply to playful enjoyment, even if he is trying to imitate Pope's depth of ethical reflection.

There is no sporting instruction. As a "prospect" or "topographical" poem, *The Prospect* provides only a visual overview of the field sports in their rural context. For example, a sequence involving the shooting of a quail is rendered plainly, as the sportsman follows his pointers and takes down the bird with one shot: "He bagg'd the Bird, now eas'd of all her Pain, / Then wip'd the Pan, and charg'd his Piece again."¹¹ The lack of irony is telling – the poet can only understand the bird's life as a pained existence. The episode of the fox hunt that follows is more colourfully drawn, though the action of the climactic sequence

¹¹ George Roberts, *The Prospect, or Rural Sports; a poem* (London: 1754), 7. Hereafter cited in text.

is hindered by the limits of the poet's abilities. The fox has escaped through covey and thicket, and fatigue is setting in as he resorts to any means to survive:

But, finding all his vulpine Arts to fail,
 His stinking Piss he scatter'd on his Tail;
 And as the leading Hounds, with dreadful Cries,
 Came near his Breech, he swish'd it in their eyes:
 But that indeed ne'er signify'd a Rush,
Thunder ne'er valu'd any Fox's Brush;
 Bold he advanc'd, and seis'd him by the Throat,
 And to a period soon old *Reynard* brought. (10)

Perhaps the most remarkable moment in the poem is the action of the first hunter to arrive on the scene “(fleetest in the Field),” who leaps from his horse and “quickly cut[s] away / The Fox's tail, the Trophy of the day” (10). The other huntsmen come along and sever the fox's foot “To decorate the Bowl, from whence they quaff” (10). While readers might reasonably judge this behaviour as savage, the poem does not take any time to meditate on this issue. The taking of trophies serves only as validation of the victory of the day, a symbolism that is uncritically presented as part of the rural festivities, followed by a celebration at the “Squire's House,” where a spread of food and drink is waiting for the men upon their return (11). It is unclear precisely who this squire is, though he is evidently a gentleman who uses his sport as escape from his duties, for “No Cares of State” enter his head during the celebration. Rural sports are used in equal measure to buttress his image and provide escape in recreation.

Rothstein's point about a rising social ambivalence toward the hunt is more fully realized poetically later in the century. We can look to Gerald Fitzgerald's *The Academick*

Sportsman: or, A Winter's Day (1773) as a prime expression of the perceived tensions of the hunt. The academic – the Rev. Fitzgerald, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin – offers a conflicted view of the hunter's place in society, and he presents himself as one who is being tested intellectually by the larger social implications of his recreation. Fitzgerald describes himself as a capable sportsman, a man who has long appreciated the country – “These are the Scenes which lur'd my earliest Days, / And Scenes like these continue still to please” – though he proceeds to complicate the rural scene through a series of meditations on far-reaching political and social issues.¹² His encounter with a farmer who pays too much rent, resulting in a dwindling population of livestock, leads him to lament that the rural scenes in which he so delights are anything but delightful to many. He reflects also on the human toll paid for Britain's expansive empire, and he meditates on the plight of a displaced peasant who has emigrated to North America to find opportunity not afforded to him in Britain's or Ireland's countryside. All these issues concern him to the point that he wonders if these social crises are the price of his and the landed class's enjoyment of the country.

More than any other hunting poem of the era, this poem links a social conscience to its sporting subject. In the topographical tradition, Fitzgerald celebrates the Wicklow Hills south of Dublin, where

Contemplation lifts th'internal Eye,
 Fix'd on the Love of PROVIDENCE on high,
 ...
 But soon the visionary Scene withdraws,
 And active Sports solicit new Applause” (24-25).

¹² Gerald Fitzgerald, *The Academick Sportsman: or, A Winter's Day* (Dublin, 1773), 8. Hereafter cited in text.

He invokes a Thomsonian harmony in his description of the scene, but throughout the poem he proceeds to problematize it. In looking over the landscapes away from the city, he realizes that the questions nagging at him are becoming increasingly unavoidable, even as he tries to enjoy his recreation. He laments that he cannot find an escape from them:

But why, my Muse! when livelier Themes I sought,
 Why change the rural Scenes to sober Thought?
 Why rouse the patriot Ardour in my Breast,
 Useless its Glow, when Freedom droops deprest? (14)

Even though he experiences “pleasing toil” in his pursuits, his mind persists in pondering some of the larger implications of his sport (18). The use of his gun prompts him to meditate on war in the Niagara and Oswego regions of America, where he observes that the “Sons of Britain” are being struck down by the very instrument he is using to pursue his pleasure: “The Gun relentless no Compassion shews, / And no Respect of diff’rent Object knows” (26). He cannot dismiss this paradox, and so he is driven to seek a satisfactory answer on the ethics of gun use, settling on the explanation that humans finally must bear responsibility for the evils perpetrated with firearms:

But while I thus its dire Effects attend,
 ’Tis Man alone must answer for the End;
 The Gun, like Riches, claims no genuine Use,
 But just as rul’d, will Good or Bad produce,
 Whether it rolls the raging Tide of War,
 Or only frights the Tenants of the Air,
 The Empire level’d, or for Health caress’d,
 The Motive, not the Mean, is curs’d or blest. (26)

Personal responsibility remains the basis on which Fitzgerald is able to balance his conscience and his pleasures. “His inconsistencies are society’s,” Rothstein observes, noting how the speaker can lament the evils of gun use while still enjoying its sporting utility (331). He can show great sympathy for fallen birds while still finding exhilaration in their destruction; and he can lament the class segregation and mass emigration abroad that ultimately stems in some part from the enclosure of land that allows for his sporting pleasure. These conflicts reside internally in the academic sportsman.

This man is more self-reflective than any other hunting poet we have seen. In order to structure his thoughts poetically, Fitzgerald employs some overt allusions to Alexander Pope’s hunting verse to revisit some of the tensions expressed there. Fitzgerald borrows from *Windsor Forest*’s ixieutic section: “Ah! what avails him now the varnish’d Die, / The tortoise-colour’d Back, the brilliant Eye,” recalling the vivid fowl of Pope’s verse (13).¹³ Fitzgerald modifies the allusion for his own ends. As we have seen in the earlier chapter on *Windsor Forest*, for Pope the birds are lovely, but their deaths are less regrettable than the violence of Norman oppression – a violence that hunting and shooting are seen to sublimate. But Fitzgerald alters Pope’s image so that the dead pheasants are equated with distressed peasants who have migrated to the new world. Unfortunately, in so doing, they have run to their deaths, the Indian’s pierced arrow extinguishing their lives. Rothstein comments on the differences between the poems. In *Windsor Forest*, “the speaker’s ethos is ancillary to a characteristic early eighteenth-century focus on inter-relationships,” he asserts (332). But, in *The Academic Sportsman*, “the speaker’s ethos becomes the primary vehicle for the

¹³ From *Windsor Forest*: “Ah! what avail his glossie, varying dyes, / His Purple Crest, and Scarlet-circled Eyes, / The vivid Green his shining Plumes unfold; / His painted Wings, and Breast that flames with Gold?” (ll. 115-118).

characteristic later eighteenth-century focus on sympathy” (332). The violence of killing birds is used to different effect, suggesting that Pope’s verse by this time served as a template upon which to expand one’s poetic vision by appropriating its images. In fact, echoes of Pope occur in nearly every poem in this chapter.

While Rothstein also mentions another of Fitzgerald’s allusions to Pope, he does not fully explore the implications of its use. In the poem’s early passages praising the delights of the countryside and its sports, Fitzgerald announces his design for the poem: “Since Life is short, prolong it while we can, / *And vindicate the Ways of Health to Man*” (9). The allusion is to the opening lines of Pope’s *An Essay on Man*, where the poet declares his aim to “vindicate the ways of God to Man.”¹⁴ Rothstein recognizes that “Pope’s own line comes at the end of a prolonged hunting metaphor” (331). But he does not note that Fitzgerald has made another reversal in the force of the metaphor. Pope’s metaphor refers to a hunt for speculative ideas, or thoughts, in the manner of a hunter pursuing prey. But Fitzgerald turns the focus back on the vehicle of the metaphor. The speaker finds himself reflecting on great conundrums that afflict society and that hinder his enjoyment of the chase. But these concerns, he affirms, are those of the statesman and the sovereign. The sportsman-poet’s reach is far more circumscribed, and changing “God” to “Health” reduces the scope and ambition of Fitzgerald’s endeavour. So, in alluding to Pope, he concentrates instead on hunting, the tenor of his comparison: “Be mine the Care, to range this ample Field / Try what it Springs, and what its Thickets yield” (15). His metaphor suggests that hunting helps him as an academic; it allows him to “Pursue the Game that to the Skies aspire, / And purge the Æther with successive Fire, / Spring o’er the Fence that bars my active Mind” (15). He hunts

¹⁴ Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man,” in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed., Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 120-157, l. 16.

in order to help himself explain the value of hunting; it becomes finally for him an academic exercise. And so, while he ultimately has to be ambivalent about hunting because he is all too aware of the social cost he sees stemming from it, he sees also the value he can personally derive from it in his role as a thinking man. Even though he is more modest than Pope in his aims, his allusions suggest that those ethical problems persist, as they are the ways of Providence. But he finally comes to different answers – or non-answers, to be more accurate – in addressing them. In challenging his mind to face the paradoxes of his sport, Fitzgerald produces a hunting poem of high quality.

Richard Gardiner's *September, a Rural Poem, Humbly Inscribed to All Sportsmen* (1780) similarly counters the overt sentimentalism observed in Aldington's *A Poem on the Cruelty of Shooting* by reasoning its way through some of the sport's contradictions. Gardiner offers a class-based critique of the conduct of hunters, while simultaneously defining what gentlemanly behaviour should entail in the context of hunting. This is not to say that all passion for the sport is buried – in fact, it remains important – but it must be aligned with reason to balance some of the contradictory issues of masculinity, happiness, and animal suffering that surround hunting.

Gardiner presents himself as a generalist hunter, declaring a love of field sports and stressing their value: "Pastime and sports, by Heav'n's own will design'd, / Relieve the body, and assist the mind."¹⁵ But the manner of their performance becomes the focus of his disapproval as the poem progresses. He wonders how "Young fiery sportsmen lose their pow'rs to feel," a development related to many of the troubles Gardiner perceives

¹⁵ Richard Gardiner, *September: a rural poem humbly inscribed to all sportsmen* (London: 1780), 7. Hereafter cited in text.

surrounding the hunt (8). So, the sentimental component does enter into hunt, particularly in this passage, which displays some empathy for anthropomorphized prey:

Speak! is it pleasure, or the lust of food?
 That makes thy arm thus prodigal of blood.
 The new-fledg'd birds, now breathless at thy side,
 This morn, like thee, were all their parents' pride;
 Stretch'd their young wings, and fondly bask'd around,
 And felt no torture, till thou gav'st the wound. (11)

But Gardiner's resistance to allowing sentimentalism to dictate his estimation of hunting, as Thomson or Aldington had, can be observed in his assertion that hunting represents a less offensive alternative to many worse deeds a man might commit: "This better far, (for this is lawful game) / Than plunge a dagger thro' a brother's fame" (11). He defers here to "lawful" action as a guide, and hunting is, after all, legal for those who possess property. So, clearly, even though Gardiner values the lives of the creatures he pursues, they come a distant second to human considerations, and in his view one must ultimately respect fellow human sentiment foremost. The implication therefore is that hunting can actually sublimate some of the more dangerous emotions and impulses men exhibit. Society has actually moved too far already, Gardiner suggests, in focusing its sympathetic energies: "Mercy for all, e'en rogues in jail, / But who forgives the murd'rer of a quail?" (13). Those who blame hunters uncompromisingly, while showing leniency to far worse offenders, have their values inverted, Gardiner believes.

He thus assigns reason's failure as the origin of the troubles he perceives on both sides – in the field by hunters and in society by those who judge hunting evil. Much of Gardiner's definition of masculinity, in fact, is rooted in the capacity to reason, and this helps

him find a middle ground in such conflicts. He pronounces that killing during breeding season, leaving offspring to perish, is morally wrong. There is no sense to it: “Is this a triumph? This that manly pride, / Which boasts so much of reason for its guide?” (9). Because Gardiner is so offended by men acting disgracefully in this way, he believes his account of gentlemanly conduct must extend beyond mere sporting advice.

First of all, a man should adopt a paternalistic attitude toward women: “Be every sportsman, every woman’s friend, / Nor wound that honour which you should defend” (11). The sense of honour men ought to display toward women should apply equally, and in a parallel manner, to acts of hunting. Sportsmen ought to combine their honourable values with sympathy in order to establish a measured idea of what is appropriate in their sport. Men who cannot do this tend toward displays of avarice in the taking of prey:

But in excess alone the mischief lies;
Men might be sportsmen, would they but be wise:
Manners with sense, and decency combin’d
Need no restraint, nor want to be confin’d;
But in their sports men are unequal found,
These want indulgence, those too much abound. (14)

In order to provide a context for this reasonable approach, Gardiner echoes Pope’s *Essay on Man*. We see in this passage the ancient idea of the golden mean, the felicitous middle between the extremes of excess and deficiency. We should balance extremes to find a middle ground in which to operate ethically.

It is against this notion of excess that Gardiner makes a second point on manly conduct. He addresses select landowning men who overindulge in their sport, killing too many creatures. A form of the sin of gluttony, this robs others of sporting enjoyment because

there is a limited economy of prey available. The greatest offence a gentleman can make is pursuing his sport at the expense of other men who engage in hunting. This reliance extends to ties of family and friendship. Gardiner asks what the values of friendship and kinship mean to the landed man who excludes all others from access to the hunt. We can even detect some sympathy for the poacher in his rebuke. The sportsman's selfish overindulgence in sport is tantamount to establishing a despotic reign over all others in the country:

But what is friendship? what a brother's blood?
 To live and reign, sole tyrant of a wood;
 To hear at once a hundred pheasants rise,
 To feel a triumph, when a poacher dies (15)

Gardiner knows that many gentlemen are generous in their sporting habits, but he is reproachful of those who, by sheer force of personality or an unfounded sense of superiority, greedily assert their claim to the land and its spoils: "why those sullen shrugs, that cinic sneer? / That cits should taste a partridge once a year" (16). The accusation from Gardiner is that these ignoble men do not exemplify the gentlemanly obligations that accompany privilege in a hierarchical society; privilege demands a certain noblesse oblige. In fact, he suggests that claims to land ownership as the sole marker of nobility and sporting enjoyment are entirely misguided:

Sad, horrid tale! by much too often told;
 My worth is acres, and my virtues gold:
 But as one blemish marring an angel's face,
 So wealth alone is coupled with disgrace.
 Wealth without worth, serves only to assert,
 The rich man's claim to gilded hoards of dirt:

Inglorious triumph, when each sober clown,
Lives more at ease, less mean, with half-a-crown... (20)

The poor man is just as capable of displays of sportsmanship as the traditional gentleman, for it is actions that make the man. Gardiner's definition of the gentleman is one who has capacity for pity, the ability to feel what other beings are feeling, including the creatures pursued in the hunt. The gentleman is therefore grounded in moral sense; he has a personal moral rectitude rather than the presumed virtue grounded in land and rank.

As a poetic display of the changing conception of hunting nobility, we can note a satirical tone directed at unsportsmanlike gentlemen. The poem is littered with footnotes – some serious, others mocking – that illustrate the poet's attitude toward the subject of his rebuke. He adopts a mock-scholarly stance in a style aligning him with Pope's Scriblerian satire in *The Dunciad*. One footnote is particularly earnest in encapsulating the poet's position: "Field amusements are joyous, rational and manly; but the eternal pursuit of game, as the practice of some of our modern sportsmen is, makes it rather a nuisance than an entertainment" (27). Greed characterizes the unsportsmanlike, and it stands as the negative value Gardiner sees all too often in sporting exploits. "True sporting is true honour, temper'd right," he affirms finally, and he offers negative examples of unsporting behaviour in those who "fire with unremitting rage" (31). By contrast, the proper sportsman is defined by his temperance and courtesy, set in contrast to the greedy and emotional pillager of the forest. This is Gardiner's standard of true sporting masculinity.

Fitzgerald and Gardiner acknowledge some of the contradictions and cultural tensions in attitudes toward the hunt, while still celebrating its virtues. But anti-hunting sentiment grew as the century wore on. One poem in particular makes its complaints against perceived injustices in the sport by playing with the sub-genre's expected conventions:

William Stevenson's "Rural Sports, Descriptive and Elegiac, In Three Parts," published in his *Poems Moral and Descriptive, On Several Subjects* (1782).¹⁶ The title is suggestive of the poem's structure, as its three parts are divided along the classical categories of halieutic, ixieutic, and cynegetic, and they consist of some description of those activities, combined with elegiac sentiment in the form of somber meditation that veers into a formal or sustained lament on the performance and effects of these sports. In playing with the formal categories, Stevenson subverts the expected conventions of field sports poetry to such an extent that the poem becomes a sustained critique of the sports themselves, as well as the poetic tradition celebrating them.

The poem's first section, on angling, illustrates this undermining of expectations. As we saw in the first part of this thesis, georgic instructional qualities were typically combined with pastoral sentiment in angling verse, and Stevenson is keenly aware of this convention. He draws an idealized image of the angler enjoying his sport in leisure before entering into a mock instructional phase:

But first some precepts would the muse propose,
Haply not foreign to the sportsman's care;
Success in angling still depends on those,
Which still the best instructed oft'nest share.¹⁷

In acknowledging how the most experienced and specialized anglers take on the role of instructors in the sport, he adopts a poetic voice ostensibly aligned with this convention. In this guise, he offers advice to the reader on the line, the rod, and the proper manner of

¹⁶ An early version of the "Angling" section of this poem appeared in the *Edinburgh Magazine* in August 1759 as "Conclusion of the ESSAY on Angling."

¹⁷ William Stevenson, "Rural Sports, Descriptive and Elegiac, In Three Parts," in *Poems Moral and Descriptive, On Several Subjects* (Edinburgh: 1782), 190. Hereafter cited in text.

creating a fly as bait: “Form not its body of too large a size, / Nor yet too small – the happy medium chuse” (191). The tutoring proceeds with advice on moving down the stream to find the best location and on casting, and it enumerates further techniques right up to the point when the fish consumes the hook. He describes at length an angler expertly bringing the fish ashore by properly employing his advice. But it is at this climactic moment, when the fish has been bested, that Stevenson reverses the thrust of the verse to shift the focus onto the ethically dubious facets of the experience:

O could the Muse end here her sylvan strain,
Nor wake to harsher notes the conscious reed!
Must pleasure ever be allied to pain,
As shadows from the substances ne'er freed! (196)

Here, he abandons the sylvan voice to critique the sport's simultaneous mixture of pleasure and pain. He applies his question to both the fish's capture as well as the use of the “reptile” as bait, which is “Design'd to feel, by Nature's sapient laws, / The thrill of pleasure and the smart of pain” (197). Stevenson's insinuation is clear: how can man be moral in so coldly administering pain in the pursuit of his own pleasure?

The description of live bait in its death throes is starkly drawn, forcing us to consider the experience from the animal's perspective: “And on the hook with merc'less hand empales, / Twisting convuls'd in agonizing wo” (197). The instructional elements of the verse are thus infused with jarring and distressing images that upturn the modal characteristics that define angling verse. The critique becomes even more overt in the section's final lines, which remove all subtlety from the censure:

Blame not, ye youths, to rural sports inclin'd,
The angry Muse, but as a friend severe.

Pity's the noblest passion of the mind,
 A fiend an angel without pity were. (197)

At the very least, anglers should show pity toward the bait and the fish they take. The poet here portrays himself as a friend who admonishes the youthful angler in order to improve his character and his sporting conduct. The sportsman who shows no pity is the vile sort of man who does not conform to the codes of the sport and certainly not to the broader social and ethical codes that underpin concepts of good sportsmanship.

Immediately following a preliminary version of the poem published some years earlier in *The Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1759) is a short poem in response to Stevenson's, titled "To the Author of the ESSAY on ANGLING, &c." The author given is "R.G.," who might be Richard Gardiner, though we can only speculate. The poem praises Stevenson's apt descriptions, noting that he expertly captures the flavour of the angling pastoral: his "flowery meadows" and the "river's grassy banks" that allow for contemplation to "Exhaust each philosophic theme."¹⁸ Interestingly, the poet makes an overt literary comparison between Stevenson's poem and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard:"

A matchless poet (GRAY his name!)
 Chose for his verse a mournful theme.
 The country churchyard's lonely walks,
 Where death, with sullen triumph, stalks... (423)

Stevenson's poem is in fact frankly imitative of Gray's contemplation on morality in his elegy, though the tone of Gray's elegy is more somber and mournful. Both authors devote

¹⁸ "To the Author of the ESSAY on ANGLING, &c." *Edinburgh Magazine* 3 (Aug. 1759), 423. Hereafter cited in text.

initial passages to the setting, establishing the meditative context for the observations to come. Gray's poem expands the scope of human sympathy to include other ranks of human society; he mourns not the great or the famous, but common men. R.G.'s compliment in comparing Stevenson to Gray is in noting how Stevenson combines his ordered and rational consideration of angling with pity for lesser beings. Gray's elegy thus serves as a useful model for the emotional inflection the poetry on sport was endeavouring to take on in the century's second half. The poetic sympathy includes animals, and so the ethical underpinning is broadening, even if it might seem incongruous when the net is cast wide enough to include fish.

The second part of "Rural Sports," on fowling, follows much the same pattern as the angling part. Stevenson pursues his imitation of Gray's isolated figure looking upon a scene, with verbal echoes of Gray's poem shaping the tone. It leads off with a description of the youthful fowler, gun and nets in hand, led through the woods by his pointer. At first, he successfully ensnares a nut-brown partridge, displaying his prowess and style. But once again the celebration of the sport is abruptly suspended, as Stevenson lingers on an important moral concern, this time on man's moral disposition behind his gun use:

What endless methods tyrant man invents
 His universal empire to assert!
 Seldom his eye, suffus'd with tears, relents,
 Seldom one throb of pity melts his heart! (204)

The image drawn of this sportsman is of an unfeeling tyrant who maliciously and indiscriminately pursues all prey: "Nothing lies hid from his officious view, / No creature safe, if fit for sport or – food" (205). Stevenson takes this unfeeling, cold shooter for granted, assuming that nothing will change his hard-hearted nature. But he does implore the shooter

to choose more carefully just which birds he will take down. He asks him to spare the songbirds at least – “What else can charm our solitary hours” (207) – so that the natural setting is preserved and others can enjoy the rural retreats. “Rather let birds of prey your wrath awake,” Stevenson pleads, revealing that he is not categorically opposed to fowling but that he favours a discrimination and selectiveness on the fowler’s part, informed by an ethical awareness.

This theme of choosing appropriate targets in order to preserve a more pleasant and harmonious countryside is developed more fully in the final section of the poem. The third part, on the hare hunt, is structurally parallel with the first two. The scene is more elaborately descriptive than those in the angling and fowling sections. The joys of the hunt are introduced artfully under the shining sun, whose “beams inspire delight before unknown” (211). The picture is one of pure delight at this point, and the hunters proceed to work in harmony: “In distinct roving parties they divide, / Each has his station and his task assign’d” (211). The hare tries to evade the hounds, and Stevenson displays some knowledge of the ruses the animal employs: his description accurately depicts the hare’s attempts at escape, her winding course and diversion into water, before finally tiring. As the hounds close in at the moment of capture, a reversal takes place, when suddenly the speaker is overcome by sentimental feeling for the hare: “How terrible this moment of suspense!” he cries, as he suddenly exclaims that “Her cries infantile pity seem to crave” (217). The anguished sounds of the hare’s death, inflicted by the pack of hounds, prompts a question of reproach from the poet: “Harmless and meek, alas! what has she done, / From tyrant man to meet a fate so hard?” (218). But, instead of pursuing his attack on the tyranny of man, he offers a change in target for hunters – the fox, whom he calls a “wily knave” and an “arch thief” who necessarily “dies for the public good” (218). Perhaps there is a measure of hypocrisy in this

suggestion of the fox and birds of prey as alternate targets for sport. But it must be remembered that the fox was still seen as vermin through the eighteenth century. We might consider this poem as being reflective of public tastes more than a principled defence of humanitarian and sentimental views.

The poem is notable for its blending of formal genres, a mixture of which the poet himself is acutely aware:

But let the numbers farther cease to flow,
 Haply, to sport enthusiastic swains,
 Blended too much with elegiac wo,
 The Muse when she should triumph, but complains. (219)

This admission near the poem's end confirms that Stevenson is familiar with the convention that poetry on the rural sports typically takes up a celebratory tone. But he deliberately undermines this expectation and does so with such directness that sympathy and consideration for lesser creatures itself appears an inadequate response:

But vainly would the weeping muse engage
 Compassion to her woes – behold! they tear
 Her guiltless breast, with more than savage rage;
 Gentler the famish'd hound, or forest-bear.

And while her dying sobs relief implore,
 Dash down her quiv'ring entrails on the ground,
 While dogs impure lick up the reckless gore,
 And men and steeds exulting gather round. (218-219)

He asserts, in effect, that the poetry on the sport is guilty of reinforcing an ideology of human superiority that has been endlessly harmful to animals. At the very least, a change in target to the fox, a target that does not so overtly offend the sensibilities of a public whose tastes have changed in recent decades, strikes Stevenson as a move in the right direction. In changing the generic thrust of his poem, he sets about altering the nature of the discussion of rural sports in the direction of the sensibility he espouses.

This conception of sympathy is visible also in Edward Lovibond's unremarkable poem "On Rural Sports," from his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785). In Lovibond's poem, however, a religious incentive to treat God's creatures with pity replaces a rational explanation. Lovibond similarly sees man's cold nature on display in the hunt; he asks, "Have rigid hearts no sympathising chords / For concord, order, for th'harmonious whole?"¹⁹ He too often sees hunters killing senselessly, so he offers a simple answer to the problem, a decidedly non-sporting understanding of when a creature ought to be slaughtered: "Yet slay the Wolf for safety, Lamb for food; / But shorten Misery's pangs, and drop a tear!" (49). The affirmation that man should shed a tear when killing a fellow creature is illustrative of the pity and sympathy common to the anti-hunting arguments that ran through the period. The lines also offer a sentimental turn to Pope's verses in *An Essay on Man*. Pope argues that God conceals "From brutes what men, what spirits know: / Or who could suffer Being here below? / The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day, / Had he thy Reason, would he skip and play?"²⁰ For Pope, the lamb is to man, as man is to God. There is no overt need for man to consider the lamb's perspective; he should only consider his own interest, as God has a

¹⁹ Edward Lovibond, "On Rural Sports" in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: 1785), 49. Hereafter cited in text.

²⁰ Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," in *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*, ed., Aubrey Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 120-157, ll. 79-82.

larger design that exists beyond the comprehension of either man or creature. But Lovibond's reasoning is modestly rendered in his religious explanation that "God's decree / To spare thy own, nor shed another's blood" applies in this case because "Each Being's bliss consummates general Good" (53). While some earlier hunters we have looked at, including Somerville, used God's word as justification for hunting, Lovibond does the reverse. Killing any creature has the undesirable effect of disrupting the harmony he understands to be divinely ordained in the creation.

The short anonymous poem *The Royal Chase; A Poem. Wherein are Described Some Humourous Incidents of a Hunt at Windsor* (1782) illustrates how the stag hunt had by late-century become a pretense for aspiring social climbers to meet as part of the day's courtship rituals. The event features commingling between "Ambitious beaux" who endeavour to show off their skills by trying "To run their hackney'd geldings 'gainst the K---'s," and the lovely "belles" who turn out in force to spot celebrities and in turn attract attention from the circling men.²¹ The author is likely punning on "royal chase," as the ladies aggressively ride to catch a glimpse of the sport's greatest celebrity, the Prince of Wales, later George IV. In fact, the stag hunt is quite incidental in the poem to this intermingling of the status seekers who make an appearance at the event, as we are informed directly that "many a lord was there, / To see the stag turn'd out, but not to share / The pleasures of the chase" (7). From a sporting perspective, we learn little about the hunt, except that the author ascribes royal qualities to the manner in which the Prince performs his chase. We are told he is "daring" and "more obstinate than wise" in his equestrian skills (9). The author hopes that such youthful tendencies will pass before he claims the throne, or that he will at least learn his lessons. The

²¹ *The Royal Chase; A Poem. Wherein are Described Some Humourous Incidents of a Hunt at Windsor* (London: 1782), 5, 6. Hereafter cited in text.

poem contains no descriptive climax of the killing of the stag, only a mere mention that it has occurred, as the poem concludes with retreats to alehouses for drink and merriment, suggesting that this is in fact the high point of the experience. The hunt itself is but secondary to the social games, and Donna Landry quite rightly observes that the poem reveals in satiric detail how “the stag hunt had lost its allegorical power to signify great matters of state” and that it “had become entirely a space of sociability and celebrity” (160-161). This is yet another circumstance that explains why aspiring sportsmen now chose other forms of hunt.

But this poem helps illustrate the gender divide that persisted in sport through the eighteenth century. We can see in *The Royal Chase* how the stag hunt, traditionally elevated and socially exclusive, appealed more directly to women. While they are lampooned in the poem – “Though few the belles who shar’d the sport they sought, / (Nay, none were present when the stag was caught)” (10) – this stag hunt is nonetheless far more welcoming than the hare or fox hunts, their practitioners usually shunning the presence of women altogether. William Stevenson, for example, registers his disgust in “Rural Sports” at the thought that a lady would lower herself to participate in the meaner chases. He offers a lengthy diatribe against female presence at the hunt upon seeing a woman appear at the scene of his sport:

But what fine *form* attracts the Muse’s eye,
 Mounted on yonder steed of dappled brown?
 An angel, sure, descending from the sky,
 Ne’er mixes with the huntsman and the clown.

A female form? – to elegance of taste,
 To delicacy, to refinement born!

Let not the modest sex be thus disgrac'd,
 The banter of the other, or the scorn – (214)

The implication is clear that women degrade themselves by associating with men in a rough setting, where language and actions are unflinchingly dirty and predatory. Stevenson deplores the upsetting of traditional roles when women enter the male domain of sport:

Heav'n has affix'd the boundaries of sex,
 For each religiously to keep within,
 Else, all wise order wantonly perplex,
 Rebel 'gainst Reason, and 'gainst Nature sin.

Can gentle love inspire that *sturdy* heart
 Which for the chace with awkward ardour pants?
 To be *pursu'd* be still the woman's part,
 If wishing to be something more than – aunts. (214)

The fixed role of woman as object to be pursued (in a very different hunt) is threatened and undermined spectacularly when she joins in the sport. This is especially distressing to Stevenson, and we see in this passage a wish for an overt segregation of the sexes. According to Stevenson, the hare and fox hunts are not a domain for any woman to enter. The royal chase does offer some avenue of participation, albeit indirectly. We can see that the sporting poets of the period echo long held assumptions about the separate spheres in which the two sexes should remain.

To conclude, the hunting poetry at the end of the century featured a decreasing reliance on neoclassicism and in particular on georgic conceptions of form. The shift in poetics toward investigating subjective states of mind that accompanied the arrival of

Romanticism manifests itself in the hunting poetry as well, with radical generic shifts, including a de-emphasizing of sport as primary subject matter. Indeed, the sport serves mainly as a metaphor for other social and ethical concerns; as such, it offers little to the sportsman looking to be both instructed and entertained in the quintessential manner of Somerville's *The Chace*. A poem such as Peter Newby's "The Hunted Deer, a Fable" (1790) is not at all about the skill of hunting, nor does it even present descriptions of the sport, but, as its title suggests, it is a short fable exemplifying an abstract moral principle of human behaviour. The characters of the story hearken to the long established figures of the pitiless hunters who relentlessly pursue a deer, and here we see an example of how hunting tropes had been turned to exaggeration and even misrepresentation based on sentimental ideas. The story follows a deer, to which human emotions and thoughts are ascribed, as the creature endeavours to escape pursuing hunters. After seeking asylum with his fellow deer and being rejected, the deer comes across a maiden who shelters him while she can and commiserates with him about his plight. But the inevitable occurs, as the hunters find the deer and kill it, though they choose to honour it by planting a cypress tree in the place where it lies, a symbol that they acknowledge its passage from life to death. The declaration of the moral at the end of the poem signals the lesson we are to take from the episode:

Peruse the tale, the moral's clear,
 And who the Pack, and who the Deer;
 The keen and eager Hunters those
 Who are from thoughtlessness his foes:
 Full many a chase has he withstood,
 And long has sharply been pursu'd
 Weary'd at last, he'll cease to sigh,

And only wish in peace to die.
When he is lock'd in lasting sleep,
Some friend, perhaps, his fate will weep.
And, like the pitying maid, will turn
The breath of malice from his urn.²²

The formal genre of the fable can accommodate the sentiment of the anti-hunting perspective, though it relies necessarily on the established sentimentalizing of previous verse and averse public perceptions of the hunt. The deer had long been anthropomorphized and allegorized but never in the form of a simple fable revealing of human nature. Here, it has become a children's subject, a striking departure from the long-held function of the deer hunt poetically through the eighteenth century.

²² Peter Newby, "The Hunted Deer. A Fable," in *Poems* (Liverpool: 1790), 235.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to discover what we might learn about rural sport through a reading of the poetry on the subject from 1650 to 1800. Likewise, I undertook to see what we might learn about literature through the sporting ideals that were transmitted. The broad conclusion to be drawn is that the trajectory of the poetry follows the larger path of the efflorescence and decline of the formal georgic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it is a narrative with its own distinctive marks and features. The process by which the georgic came to prominence can be observed in the angling literature that left behind its pastoral roots to take on the didactic features requisite in sharing a body of knowledge. In order to fish well, one learns through a process of socialization that makes receiving instruction a crucial facet of the experience. Current sociological insights into angling have helped illustrate that process as it occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the poetry after Izaak Walton maintained a dialogue between pastoral and georgic elements, as the two modes offered scope for the experience of angling.

A massive upswing in the popularity of angling occurred in the second half of the seventeenth century. Royalists seeking refuge from Civil War tensions sought escape to the serenity of their country retreats, and fishing became emblematic of peaceful and productive leisure. The sport came to be understood as personally edifying to its individual practitioners, allowing for Stoic or Epicurean values to be displayed. It served as a vehicle to forge homosocial bonds, whereby participants became initiated into “the brotherhood of the angle.” As part of that community, fishers shared their sporting knowledge with others to mark their passion for the sport, and the poetry on angling should be understood as part of

that process. The culmination of this trend was in the 1690s, when no fewer than four major fishing poems were published.

The upsurge in fishing poetry coincided with a dearth in poetic accounts of hunting. I believe it no coincidence that these two trends manifested themselves simultaneously: fishing poetry occupied the void left by hunting in representations of rural sport in the decades after the Restoration. After John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1655), which featured a traumatic beheading of the king metaphorically depicted as a stag hunt, only one notable hunting poem appeared for the rest of the century. This was Thomas Heyrick's "The Chase of the Fox at Welby, 1677," an unusually early treatment of the fox hunt and an early indication of changing trends in the types of hunting being practiced. My historical narrative credits Alexander Pope's hunting passages in *Windsor Forest* for rehabilitating hunting as a poetic subject after the Civil War. John Gay's *Rural Sports* cemented that reclamation. The period also saw the assimilation of new scientific materials into thought and literature. The hunt, as well as new methods of fowling stemming from advances in firearm technology, formed the basis for sometimes quite technical georgic verse. The high point in the hunting and shooting poetry occurred with the publishing of George Markland's *Pteryplegia* and William Somervile's *The Chace*, two avowedly didactic georgic poems that proffer sporting expertise.

We can look at the changing nature of the poems that followed in light of the political and social evolution of eighteenth-century Britain. Generally, the writers of hunting verse balance a passion for sport with social and political awareness: hence, they turned to prospect view and topographical poetry. After Markland and Somervile's didacticism, the trend was toward more descriptive representations of the sports. Some poets decried hunting as cruel, in line with the growing sentimental ethos of the last half of the eighteenth century. James

Thomson became influential in this regard – both in terms of a sentimental outlook and in terms of a descriptive approach to the subject matter. Thomson pitied the stag and condemned fox hunters as drunken savages. As the century progressed, hunting and shooting were either reprov'd in an increasing number of sentimental poems representing hunters as uncaring and pitiless toward their fellow creatures, or they were celebrated for their positive virtues, as in Gerald Fitzgerald's *Academick Sportsman*, which shows some ambivalence toward hunting's place in society but ultimately sings its merits.

By century's end, hunting was no longer associated with an overtly elitist outlook. The stag hunt had waned in terms of its symbolic weight, supplanted by the ever-exciting fox hunt, which would remain popular through the next century, particularly amongst the gentry. As Peter Beckford wrote in his *Thoughts Upon Hunting* (1782), "Fox-hunting is now become the amusement of gentlemen; nor need any gentleman be ashamed of it."¹ In 1792, *The Sporting Magazine*, the first of the great sporting journals that emerged in the nineteenth century, began its run. For the first time, hunting men throughout the country could read about events at Melton Mowbray or other great hunting locations. These periodicals signaled a shift in the way the sport was transmitted to the reading public. Moreover, by century's end, new forms of "imaginative" literature overwhelmed the georgic's didactic and descriptive representations of knowledge and the ways these expressed an appreciation of nature and country life. Durling notes that this transition signaled the end of georgic functionality: "Romantic subjectivity found other forms, especially the kind of lyric in which the poet and the nature he described were merged."² The transition to Romanticism presents

¹ Peter Beckford, *Thoughts Upon Hunting. In a Series of Familiar Letters to a Friend* (London: 1782), 187.

² Dwight L. Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1964), 210.

some very difficult questions, extending well beyond the scope of my study. This movement – which we can observe in the short poems that conclude the fishing and hunting parts of this thesis – effectively overwhelmed the type of writing that occurred through most of the eighteenth century, and, as the century drew to a close, the georgic, according to Kurt Heinzelman, ceased to be used “by name.”³

For nearly 150 years, georgic poetry played a useful role in shaping how a young angler came to learn the techniques and values of the brotherhood into which he was entering. And it provided a useful frame for the gentlemanly discourse in which technical material on breeding hounds and chasing prey could be disseminated as part of a prospect view of the British countryside, with varying proportions of didactic precept and literary-aesthetic description.

But the georgic frame also pointed outward as well, to the larger reading public that might not have had a place in their lives for the recreations of angling, shooting, or hunting. We can recall Samuel Johnson’s definition of sport as “Play; diversion; game; frolick and tumultuous merriment.” Sport is always secondary in importance to “real world” concerns; it is, after all, diversion. In praising the literary merits of Somerville’s *The Chase*, Chalker notes that, but for its modal features, the subject matter might be considered esoteric at best:

It can reasonably be claimed that without the *Georgics*, and without the literary techniques that the notion of imitation gave him, Somerville would have produced a much more limited poem, and one of much less general value than he in fact achieved. In a sense *The Chase* cannot be adequately discussed in purely literary terms at all. Its justification is partly in

³ Kurt Heinzelman, “Roman Georgic in the Georgian Age: A Theory of Romantic Genre,” *Texas Studies of Literature and Language* 32 (1991): 182.

sociological terms, in its value for a particular social group in raising a shared experience to a new level of meaning.⁴

The same can be said of any of the works discussed in the preceding pages. This study is about how such works endeavoured to reach that “new level of meaning,” both in their historically specific settings and for us today. Sport remains important to our culture, particularly as “a shared experience” that imparts pleasure to its participants and brings them together as a community. While the society of leisure changes over time, the equestrian thrill, for example, of crossing the countryside through wildlife corridors remains. Any outlet for such happiness is always bound to compel writers to promote its virtues by singing its glories, just as Somerville set the example, when he smiled and reflected on his great chases: “We speak our inmost Souls; good Humour, Mirth, / Soft Compliance, and Wit from Malice free, / Smooth ev’ry Brow, and glow on ev’ry Cheek.”⁵

⁴ John Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 194.

⁵ William Somerville, *The Chace* (London, 1735), 129.

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