

Chapter 3

Structure

Repetition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a key feature of popular literature. The most obvious form that this repetition can take is what I will call *internal repetition*, the deliberate reiteration of one or more key literary or narrative elements: epithets, descriptions, choruses, incidents, images, and so on. Strong internal repetition tends to create a clear-cut and somewhat inflexible textual framework. The repetition of a chorus, for example, divides a ballad (or inept poetry, like Kipling's) into discrete narrative and/or conceptual sections; the text is thus immobilized and arranged before the reader like a fresco, each stanza or event framed on either side by predictable repetitive sequences.

Literature of any sort, and popular literature in particular, can also gain meaning through what I will call *external repetition*. External repetition, in its most obvious form, is communal: for example, a particular tale might be told, or a particular ballad might be sung, over and over again and in more or less the same form by a group of people, perhaps over the course of several generations. (Or, to take a more modern example from a different medium, certain films that have achieved so-called "cult" status are watched again and again by certain sectors of the population, and these viewings are communal, as a rule.) However, external repetition can also be a private affair: the child who wants to hear a fairy tale told over and over and the devout reader who makes it a point to read a religious text on a regular basis are both engaging in private external repetition of a particular reading (or listening) experience, despite the fact that the literature in question is very different in each case.

Finally, all popular literature, even more disposable forms that do not rely on either internal or external repetition to any appreciable extent, gain appeal and meaning from the wider cultural phenomenon of what we might call *experiential*

repetition. An audience's repeated exposure to a particular formula or genre builds up a layered template through which they read every new example of that formula or genre. Experiential repetition conditions audiences to expect certain stylistic and narrative elements, so the success or failure of a work of popular literature is largely (perhaps almost wholly) based upon how well it adheres to the conventions established by its predecessors. Reading a detective novel, for example, is an activity that necessarily evokes one's prior experience of reading detective novels, assuming that one has some prior experience with the genre in the first place. A reader's exposure to experiential repetition has taught him that there are certain narrative conventions to which the novel "must" adhere (the crime must be solved) and certain ones that are relatively flexible (the character of the detective; the nature of the crime). If a particular detective novel does not adhere closely enough to that reader's expectations for the conventions of the genre, he will feel disappointed, betrayed, or even infuriated, depending on his level of personal involvement with the text.

The hunting manual, like other types of popular literature, achieves its effects through several kinds of repetition. *Internal repetition* is the most obvious technique: the manuals repeat themselves continually, both in terms of form (on every level, from the repetition of sentence structure to the repetition of the construction of chapters) and content (both narrative and ideological). In fact, the structural repetition is so pronounced that we could describe each manual as a narrative cycle revolving around the activity of the hunt.

Furthermore, the manuals' construction encourages and almost demands *external repetition*: they are texts that are designed to be read and re-read. On one level, the manual is very formulaic and completely predictable; on another, it is a uniquely manifold and seemingly limitless text. It draws upon, refers to, and is in occasional dialogue with, a number of other genres: the romance, the bestiary, and the fabliau, to name only the most obvious. Consequently, there are many ways in which

it can be read (as a hunter's guide, as an adventure story, as an encyclopedia, as an etiquette book).

Furthermore, the manual encompasses all *moods* (the indicative, the subjunctive, the imperative), thus further expanding its already very capacious dimensions. The authors talk about what the ideal hunter *will* do during the course of the day; tell the reader what he *should* or *could* do in various situations that may or may not arise (or tell the reader what he should tell his trainee) or simply demand *that* the reader do such-and-such (or that his trainee do such-and-such); and either celebrate or lament the things that *did* happen in the past, the things that *are* happening in the present, and what *might* happen in the future. Each hunt narrative hints at the existence of an infinitely expandable template from which any alternative narrative, in any mood, can be constructed. Yet almost every venture ends in success, though we can clearly see how in many places it could have gone awry and how many unpleasant outcomes have been miraculously averted.

Finally, as we will see, the hunt stories themselves are not single-stranded narratives but webs of an almost unlimited number of subjunctive narratives; a reader can go over the same ground many times without ever exhausting the narrative possibilities of the text. The manual's apparent immeasurability is, of course, only an illusion: because it both claims and seems to be all-inclusive, everything that it does not include necessarily fades into obscurity.

The manuals are marked by other features that encourage casual, desultory reading. Numerous, clearly marked and titled chapters allow reading (or listening) to progress by increments which can be as large or as small as readers or listeners need or desire; in fact, this frankly episodic construction is reminiscent of the sections or "fitts" of a long romance, divisions that are designed to break down an unwieldy narrative into manageable portions, each one just the right size for an evening's entertainment. A romance, like most things, must be read from beginning to end in

order for it to make much sense, but the manual does not demand any such ordered reading. It is a sort of commonplace book whose items, each more or less independent of the others, revolve around the general theme of hunting; because it has no obvious starting or ending point, it invites the reader to begin perusing anywhere.

Furthermore, since the later sections of the manual do not, except in minor ways, build upon the earlier sections, the reader does not need to read or remember what came before in order to enjoy or understand what comes later. (This also means, unfortunately, that the reader who does not have a mastery of the immensely complicated system of medieval hunting terminology will be unlikely to find the answers to his questions, no matter where he looks.) Thus the manual absolves the reader from that most unpleasant but sacred of obligations: the commitment to read to the end of the book, no matter how weary one might have become in the meantime.

In the first chapter, we saw how the manuals utilize *experiential repetition* to their advantage by repeating certain narrative and thematic elements of the hunts found in literature from other genres, primarily the chivalric romance. This chapter will examine the ways in which the manual's *internal repetition* encourages and almost demands an *external repetition* of the text on two levels. The reader can read the text in a myriad of different ways and for different purposes. He or she is also encouraged to literally act out the narratives (or implied narratives) contained within, or at least to imagine what it would be like to act them out, thereby forcing "real life" to repeat and amplify the themes and narratives found in literature. This imagining and its subsequent play-acting is made as easy as possible because, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the "characters" of the manual are themselves nothing more than heroic templates, at once admirable and devoid of any distinguishing physical or psychological characteristics. Thus the manual, by its very construction, encourages continual re-reading, re-imagining, and re-performing.

One kind of internal repetition: interlace.

In The Rise of Romance, Eugène Vinaver compares the narrative structure of the thirteenth-century French cyclical romances to certain design elements in Romanesque art, a description which is worth quoting in full:

Historians of Romanesque art have shown us, among other things, that the so-called ‘ribbon’ ornament, which has no beginning, no end, and above all no centre – no ‘means of guidance’, as one critic puts it – is nevertheless a remarkably *coherent* composition. It contains the same seemingly impossible combination of *acentricity* and *cohesion* as that which characterizes the structure of cyclic romances, and the same excess of constructive subtlety. More than that: the ‘morphology’ and the ‘syntax’ of Romanesque motifs have been defined in terms almost directly applicable to the narrative devices of thirteenth-century romance writers; the ‘formation of sequences’ recalls the formation of ‘threads’ in a cyclic narrative, and the complex continuity of curves, spirals, and entwined stems corresponds closely to the cyclic interlace. Straightforward progression is abandoned in favour of intertwined patterns, ‘the themes run parallel or entwined, or are brought together as in a chequer of knotting and plaiting’.¹

The “interlace” that Vinaver describes is both thematic and narrative in nature; not only do individual knights or “adventures” keep coming to the forefront, but individual themes continually recur, as well. Each narrative and thematic “thread” is inextricably interwoven with the others (“coherence” or “cohesion”), and yet none of the threads entirely dominates the others (“acentricity”). The result is an intricate textual tapestry whose design can only be seen from a distance, whose integrity is dependent upon the precise placement of each of its constituent parts, and whose meaning is created through a continual reversion to the same characters and themes.

¹ The Rise of Romance (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 77.

In general, repetition tends to have a narrowing effect: the more a proposition is repeated, the less it is possible to envision the form that an alternate proposition might take; this, we might note, is why repetition is a key element in all modes of social control.² But interlace is a form of repetition – a continual reversion to the same characters, narratives, and themes – that creates the opposite effect, an illusion of complexity and immeasurable vastness. It tricks the eye into seeing more than is really there; as C. S. Lewis explains in his discussion of Spenser’s The Faerie Queene, this is because

... the (improbable) adventure which we are following is liable at any moment to be interrupted by some quite different (improbable) adventures, there steals upon us unawares the conviction that adventures of this sort are going on all round us, that in this vast forest (we are nearly always in a forest) this is the sort of thing that goes on all the time, that it was going on before we arrived and will continue after we have left.³

As helpful as Vinaver’s “interlace” model is, it is important to note that it only accurately describes the longest and most complex romances: the romances of the Grail cycle or the Morte Darthur, for example. The narrative structure of many, if not most, romances is much simpler; if individual romances seem complex, it is because they achieve the illusion of complexity through paratactic elaboration (adding yet another adventure) or organizational interlace (describing the activities of different characters in turn). It is rare that writers of romances conceive of characters or adventures as interdependent in any more than the crudest ways.

² Compare Northrop Frye’s observation: “[In the rhetoric of persuasion] the repetitions are hypnotic and incantatory, aimed at breaking down customary associations of ideas and habitual responses, and at excluding any alternative line of action. Such a rhetoric may be heard in its purest form in the speech rhythms of a boy talking to a dog, with the object of persuading him to sit up or shake hands or otherwise move out of the normal line of canine endeavor” (Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000) 327).

³ C. S. Lewis, Major British Writers, vol. 1, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954) 98.

Furthermore, we should note that the metaphor of woven stuff is flawed in one important sense. In a real tapestry, although the threads overlap, the integrity of each individual fiber remains intact; by contrast, in the sorts of romances for which Vinaver attempts to account, individual narratives and themes do not merely *overlap*, but actually *intersect* and *intermingle*. Each one directly influences those on either side and no narrative is entirely free of the others: knights' paths cross, important objects are handed around, various people take up a quest in turn.

Vinaver's "interlace" model of the romance is helpful for understanding some of the narrative and thematic structures of Livre de chasse and Master of Game. Both texts are woven out of a number of different narratives that are derived from both personal experience and literary sources (earlier hunting manuals, of course, but also works of other genres such as bestiaries, encyclopedias, fabliaux, and romances). As these narratives progress, certain themes also persistently come to the forefront. In Livre de chasse, these themes are the degeneration of the world, the importance of social contracts and the dangers of disrupting those contracts, and, in a very general sense, the acquisition of knowledge through experience. It is no coincidence that these are also the main themes of romance and of the "ideal" aristocratic life.

In some ways, Vinaver's metaphor works even better for the manuals than it does for the romances: as has been noted, the narrative and thematic threads of the romance literally *intersect*, but the narrative interlace of the manuals accurately resembles weaving: narrative threads run in and among and around each other, but they rarely converge. In other ways, the metaphor is not as helpful. Where the interlace of romances is smooth and reasonably regular, the interlace of the manuals is rough and uneven: some narrative threads appear repeatedly; some are taken up for a time and then suddenly dropped; some remain permanently in view. For this reason, although the manuals are *acentric*, they are not strictly *coherent*, as most of the narratives are not essential (though all of them contribute) to the shape of the whole.

Knots and lost stitches are defects in tapestries and cyclical romances alike, and the irregular texture of the manuals would point to careless authorship – that is, if the manuals were intended to exactly imitate the romances, which they were not. It is more helpful to think of the manuals as composite works – multi-media collages, perhaps, rather than tapestries – in which romance narratives and romance sensibilities are predominant. Despite, or perhaps because of, the rough and unpredictable interlace of narratives and themes, the texts seem larger than they actually are: they seem to stretch out endlessly in every direction, past our peripheral vision. The project of Livre de chasse is especially large: as we will see, it attempts to describe the totality of the world, if only metaphorically. As such, I would argue that it deserves to be connected with the adjective, if not necessarily the appositive, “epic.” The texture of Livre de chasse is far more complex than that of Master of Game, so I will keep it at the forefront during the discussion which follows, making reference to the latter only by way of contrast.

Leaving aside for the moment the *petites chasses* (LC 60-85), Livre de chasse contains fourteen “primary hunt narratives,” one for each of the animals that Gaston describes (LC 28-59, MG 23-36). In contrast, Master of Game contains only three primary hunt narratives: the hunt *par force* of the hart and the hare, and the bowhunt of the red deer of both sexes. Both manuals privilege the most noble animals (though Gaston and Edward do not always agree on what those animals are) by spending a proportionately longer time describing their hunts. Thus Livre de chasse’s longest description of a hunt (the *chasse a force* of the hart) is thirty-eight times as long as its shortest (that of the badger). Although Gaston devotes only one chapter to most animals, he spends five chapters on the hunt of the boar (LC 37, 42, 43, 53-54) and thirteen chapters on the hunt of the hart (28-36, 39-41, 45). On the other hand, though Edward considers the hare the “king of venery,” he is faithful to his Gascon source

and spends only one chapter on the hare hunt (MG 35) but twelve chapters on the hunt of the hart (MG 23-32, 34, 36).

As was detailed in the first chapter, the hunt *a force* of any given animal generally took place in five distinct stages: the quest for the animal, the assembly (pre-hunt banquet), the *laissier courre* (releasing of the dogs), the chasing and taking, and the *curee* or *fouail* (dissection of the carcass and rewarding of the hounds). Yet the manuals do not present these dramatic stages in the expected chronological order, as the organization of LC 28-59 shows:

- ch. 28-36 the quests for the hart
- ch. 37 the quest for the boar
- ch. 38 the *assemblee*
- ch. 39 the *laissier courre* of the hart
- ch. 40-41 the *curee* of the hart
- ch. 42 the *laissier courre* of the boar
- ch. 43 the *fouail* of the boar
- ch. 44 how to be a good *aide*
- ch. 45 the chasing and taking of the hart
- ch. 46-52 the chasing and taking of the reindeer, fallow deer, wild goat, roe deer, hare, rabbit, and bear
- ch. 53-54 the chasing and taking of the boar
- ch. 55-59 the chasing and taking of the wolf, fox, badger, cat, and otter

Although all of the *chasces a force* presumably involve the same protagonist (the boy whom Gaston is training), each one of them is a self-contained unit, related to the ones on either side only by virtue of textual proximity (and, in some cases, similarity of

content). The continuity of these chapters must be external (insofar as it is apparently envisioned by the author and seen by the audience) because it is certainly not internal (on the level of the action described by the text). The chapters dealing with the hart and boar could be either different parts of different hunts (the quest taken from one hunt, the *laissier courre* from another, and so on), or different parts of the same hunts (deconstructed, rearranged).

No matter what we try to do with them, these chapters resist all of our attempts to order them either temporally or spatially. They do not appear to be in chronological order (the hunter shows no physical or psychological development throughout the sequence and seems quite capable of following Gaston's instructions from the outset; the hunts do not seem to progress in the order of the seasons in which they would ordinarily take place; the stages of each hunt are out of order), but they do not appear to be taking place at the same time in different parts of the forest, either (hunters never meet each other and the paths of their quarries never cross). We must conclude either that each hunt takes place in a timeless, hermetically sealed space outside of all mundane exigencies – that is, in the space of romance and folktale – or, on the other hand, that the forest is infinitely large.

Though one hunt never overlaps with the next (or, for that matter, with any other narrative at all), the nature, course, and outcome of each particular hunt are quite malleable. Hunts can be abandoned before they start, for lack of suitable game (though this is not a possibility that the authors make explicit). There are times when the hunter will begin by chasing a desirable animal but end up on the tracks of an undesirable one (LC *le change*; MG *rascaïl, folie*). Occasionally, too, one adventure will lead to another and a hunter will come across an animal of a wholly different species than the one which he intended to hunt; in fact, the only way to have certain hunt-related adventures is to stumble across them:

Et, quant le veneur voudra chascier le chat, il ne li couvient ja aler en queste, maiz couvient que aucun li enseigne qu'il l'ayt veü ou qu'il le treuve d'aventure en querant regnartz, lievres ou autres bestes. (LC 58: 2-4)

[And when the hunter wishes to hunt the lynx, it will never be necessary for him to go in quest for it, but it is necessary that someone communicate to him that he has seen the cat or that he has found it by chance while searching for foxes, hares, or other beasts.]

The possible course of any given hunt bifurcates endlessly. Each narrative crossroads (at which the hunt *might* veer off into something unexpected and potentially disastrous) is clearly marked by *si*, “if”; the reassuring lexical signpost *quant*, “when,” shows the hunter that he is still on the right path. For example, while questing for the hart, the protagonist must navigate a complicated narrative landscape of subjunctives:

Et, quant il trouvera la ou il entre au boys, gete une brisee, le bout rompu devers la ou la beste va, et ne le poursuye plus avant par mi le boys. Preigne donc un grant tour par aucunes voyes ou sentiers. Et, s'il voit qu'il ne passe hors de son tour, il le puet tenir pour destourné, et si s'en puet revenir a l'assemblee et fere tel raport. Et, s'il voit qu'il passe par la ou il prendra son tour, son limier devant soy, il doit regarder si c'est de celui cerf qu'il a destourné. Et, s'il n'en voit bien a son aise, il doit raler la contreongle jusques a tant qu'il en voye a son aise bien a plain, mes garde que son limier ne crie. Et, s'il voit que ce soit son cerf, il ne le doit pas poursuyr mes prendre encore autre tour, mes garde qu'il ne preinhe par le long des voyes, quar il n'i a si mauvés treere comme le long des voyes, quar un limier y trespasse volentiers routes, mes aille un pou hors chemin par l'un des costez et einsi touz jours jusques a tant qu'il l'ait mis dedanz son tour, quar lors en est il plus seür et la suite en sera plus courte. Mes, s'il estoit trop tart pour leisser courre et il voit qu'il aille le pas et entre en fort pays, il ne li convient ja fere toutes ces choses. (LC 35: 16-24, emphasis mine)

[And, when he has found where it has entered into the woods, let him break a branch (to mark the spot), the end broken in the direction in which the beast has gone, and let him not pursue it further into the woods. Let him then take a great tour by some of the *voyes* or *sentiers*

(two categories of paths along which wild animals may travel). And if he sees that the stag has not gone outside of his *tour*, he can consider it *destourné* (contained within the *tour*), and so he can return to the *assemblee* and make thus his report. And, if he sees that it has passed by where he takes his *tour*, his scent hound before him, he must see whether it is the same one that he has *destourné*. And, if he cannot see clearly, he must go in the opposite direction until he can see quite clearly, but let him take care that his scent hound not give voice. And, if he sees that it is his stag, he must not pursue it but take another *tour*. But let him take care that he should not go alongside the *voyes*, for there is no way of going that is so bad as alongside the *voyes*, for a scent hound will generally lose the track; but let him go a little outside the road on one side and go always thus until he has put it [the stag] inside his *tour*, for then it is more certain and the pursuit of the stag will be shorter. But if he is too late to release the dogs on it and he sees that it goes at a slow pace and enters into the thickets, it is never necessary to do these things.]

Either the hart has remained within the circular path that the hunter has walked, *or* it has not. If the first condition is true, all is well and this stage of the story is over. If not, then the narrative road forks again and again: *either* it is the deer that he has been chasing, *or* it is not; *either* he can tell, *or* he cannot. The quest is reducible to a paratactic series of narrative modules which can be joined, one after another, in an almost unlimited number of possible configurations. The *ets* give the sequence of events a sense of inevitable logic, but in truth it is nothing but a fragile indicative narrative wavering its way through the dense network of subjunctive narratives which hem it in on every side. Everything worked perfectly *this* time, but at every *si* the hunter is in danger of veering off the path to success.

Though the hunt can proceed along countless narrative paths, the construction of the manual all but ensures the hunter's triumph. Livre de chasse and Master of Game, we might say, are comprehensive grammars of success. Almost any misfortune is remediable: there is always a way for the smart hunter to outwit chance, if chance is working against him. If the train of events is tangled by some unforeseen contingency, the relentless pull of the narrative almost always smooth it out again:

Aprés il monte a cheval a grant haste pour acompaigner ses chiens, et, pour ce que par aventure les chiens auront un petit esloigné le país ou il les aura lessié courre, il prant aucun avantaige pour venir au devant de ses chiens. Et lors il verra passer le cerf devant luy et le fort huera et verra quieulx chiens viennent en la premiere bataille ne en la seconde ne en la tierce ou quarte, selon ce qu'ilz venront. (LC Prologue: 40-42)

[Afterwards, he hurriedly gets on horseback in order to accompany his dogs, and, because perhaps the dogs will have gone a little bit from the countryside where he has released them, he looks for a chance to get in front of his dogs. And then he sees the stag pass in front of him and he calls loudly and sees which dogs come in the first group or in the second or in the third or fourth, according to how they come.]

Perhaps the dogs will have gone some distance away, but there is no uncertainty about whether they are lost or have gone so far that he cannot catch up: they are *not* lost, and he *can* catch up, and the stag *will* suddenly appear ahead of the hunter, with all of the pack running dutifully behind. The manuals encompass occasional detours, disappointment, and even disaster, though these possible narrative outcomes are usually implied rather than clearly delineated. The authors allow us to look a little way down less auspicious paths, and even to follow them for a short amount of time, but they tend to leave unhappy endings in tactful obscurity or securely in the subjunctive, as when Gaston counsels a man not to enter into a *haie* (hedge-like trap strung with nets) after a boar:

Et, s'il fiert ou laz, il ne doit pas aler après par le pertuis ou il est entré, quar c'est grant perill, quar, quant il est alé avant le long des meistesres ou meistre qui sont atachiez, et il ne puet aler plus avant et se sent feru ou d'espieu ou d'espee, il retourne et tue et blesce l'omme, aussi bien come s'il n'estoit point dedanz les laz. (LC 60: 86-87)

[And, if it [the boar] is fierce in the net, he must not afterwards go through the hole where it has entered, for this is very dangerous; for, when it has gone ahead along the master cords or cord which are attached, and it cannot go further ahead and it feels itself struck either with a boar-spear or a sword, it turns around and kills and wounds the man, just as easily as if it had not been within the net at all.]

The potentially fatal outcome of a *chasse a l'haie* is phrased as a hypothetical situation that can only take place if the hunter willfully steps outside of the prescriptive boundaries of the manual itself.

Indicative narratives, even fantastic ones, have a certain solidity: they have happened, or they are happening, or they will happen, even if only in imagination or madness. Subjunctive narratives, on the other hand, because they need not ever happen (though, of course, they might), are ephemeral; they leave nothing but a faint trace in the reader's mind and can be entirely obliterated by the next reading. They are, by their very nature, endlessly recyclable.

Interestingly, the narratives appear to be *so* subjunctive that although Gaston can suggest possible courses of action to his protagonist, he cannot demand that he do anything in particular, nor can he prevent him from making foolish and potentially fatal decisions:

Et, s'il veult descendre aux abaiz en mi les fortz, ce ne sera mie de mon consoill, se il n'i a levriers ou alanz ou mastins, quar, s'il faut a le bien ferir, ce que on fet bien volentiers, quar il se cuevre trop bien de sa teste, le sangler ne le faudra pas a tuer ou blescier. ... Toutes voyes, s'il est si fol, il doit avoir son espieu croisié, bien agu et bien taillant et bonne hante et forte. Et doit regarder son coup qu'il ne faille et tenir son espieu par le milieu, et qu'il en ait autant devant come darriere, quar, s'il le tenoit trop court devant, pour quant qu'il ferist le sangler, a ce qu'il a longue teste, le musel toucheroit ja a luy, quar l'espieu entreroit touz jours dedanz, et le sangler seroit trop pres de luy, si le pourroit blescier ou tuer. Et, quant le sangler vient a luy, il ne doit mie tenir la hante dessoubz l'aisselle pour mieulx asseoir son coup ou pour tourner sa main la ou mestier sera, mes, des qu'il l'aura feru, il doit mettre l'espieu soubz l'aisselle et bouter bien fort. Et, si le sangler estoit plus fort que li, il doit guencher, ore d'une part, ore d'autre, sanz laisser l'espieu, et touz jours bien bouter juques a tant que Diex li aide ou que secours li soit venu. (LC 54: 12-22, emphasis mine)

[And, if he wishes to dismount at the baying in the thicket, this will not at all be (in accordance with) my advice, if he does not have greyhounds or *alants* (large, powerful dogs) or mastiffs, for, if he fails to strike it accurately, which indeed generally happens because the boar

covers itself too well with its head, the boar will not fail to kill or wound him. Nevertheless, if he is so foolish, he must have his *espieu croisié* (boar-spear with a cross-piece behind the head), very keen and very sharp and with a good strong shaft. And he must aim his blow so that it does not fail and hold his spear by the middle, so that there is as much (of the shaft) before as behind, for, if he holds it too short in front, even if he struck the boar, which has a long head, the snout would already be touching him, for the spear would continue to go inside [the boar], and the boar would be too close to him, and so could wound or kill him. And, when the boar comes at him, he must not hold the shaft beneath his armpit in order to place his blow better, or in order to turn his hand where it will be needed, but, as soon as he has struck, he must put the spear under his armpit and push very hard. And, if the boar was stronger than he, he must turn about, now on one side, now on the other, without leaving the spear, and always pushing hard until God comes to his aid or help had arrived.]

We are left to imagine the end of this dire situation: God or man may come to the aid of the foolish huntsman; or perhaps neither one will, in which case the huntsman will be gored by the furious animal. We can resolve the narrative any way we like, and since everything is only subjunctive, we need have only a little anxiety about its outcome. Another reading, another re-imagining, and the tragic scene will be obliterated.

As tentative and impermanent as a subjunctive narrative tends to be, it is, in some ways, a more effective and versatile basis for fantasy than the corresponding indicative narrative. First of all, because the narrative only happens in one possible reality, any negative emotions that may be evoked by the narrative (fear, discomfort, and so on) are always firmly contained within the structure of the text. Second of all, in an indicative narrative, we have no choice but to imagine ourselves in the place of the protagonist(s). The more closely the protagonist resembles ourselves (or who we imagine or wish ourselves to be), of course, the easier the psychological transference. However, in the manuals, the narrative is transmitted via a rather roundabout route: the author-narrator-instructor speaks directly to us, detailing what he would have the protagonist(s) do (or what the protagonist(s) “must” or “should” do, or what we, the

audience, should make the protagonist(s) do). On the one hand, we are peers of the authors and a polite (though informed) audience for these *subjunctive* narratives; on the other hand, we are indirect recipients of the authors' advice and admonitions, listeners to an *imperative* narrative. Thus we are involved with the text on many levels: we are simultaneously actors, directors, and spectators of the narratives that (potentially) unfold. The multiplicity of perspectives and roles open to the reader increases the possibility of multiple readings (and therefore re-readings) of the text.

Our identities as readers sometimes intersect or conflict in strange ways with the identities of the characters within the manuals. For example, Gaston describes many hunts in terms of one or more of those which he has already mentioned: that is, he appeals to *our* knowledge of the manual as readers, not to the experience or memory of the huntsman himself.

Et, quant le veneur voudra chascier le rangier, il le doit querir en traillant de ses chienz et non pas quester ne laisser courre du limier, comme j'ay dit du cerf ... (LC 46: 2-3)

[And, when the huntsman wishes to hunt the reindeer, he must search for it *en traillant* (without having a track to follow and without having used a scenting dog first) and not by questing nor by releasing the scent hound, as I have said for the stag ...]

Et, se le veneur veult chascier le dain, il le doit querir, tout ainsi que j'ay dit du rangier ... (LC 47: 2)

[And, if the hunter wishes to hunt the fallow deer, he must quest for it, just as I have said for the reindeer ...]

And so on. Although the hunts are narratively independent of each other (all are separate and complete stories), each one is rhetorically dependent on the preceding ones. Each hunt is a kind of formulaic narrative that gains meaning from its repeated elements.⁴

Though they seem to take place in mutually exclusive universes, these hunts are, in fact, organized *on the page* according to several competing criteria. First, Gaston attempts to preserve, as far as possible, the order of the animals as he introduced them in chapters 1-14; it is a sequence that is based to some degree on a rudimentary taxonomy: hoofed animals, carnivores, other animals. However, he is also obligated to privilege (in terms of placement, length of chapters, and total number of chapters) the two animals whose hunts are the “noblest,” the hart and the boar. Each of the hunts of all of the lesser animals (LC 46-52, 55-59) – as well as all the *petites chasses* (LC 60-85) – begins and ends in a single chapter; each, we might say, runs parallel to the next. The hunts of the hart and boar, on the other hand, span many chapters apiece and together form a simple organizational interlace (whose narratives *overlap* but never *intersect*, as the hunters in one party never come across the hunters in another). Finally, because the overarching narrative of chapters 22-60 is the training and development of a young boy into a hunter, Gaston literally deconstructs the hunt into its constituent parts, or “narrative modules,” and rearranges those constituent parts to create a new narrative, one that privileges the experience of the hunter-in-training over the “actual” chronology of each individual hunt. So, for example, although the chasing and taking of the animal necessarily precedes the butchering of the carcass in the normal scheme of things, the order of these sections is reversed in Livre de chasse because the boy hunter would have learned how to participate in the relatively easy *desfaire* before he was up to the demanding and dangerous *chascier et prendre*.⁵

Such flagrant violations of both time and space serve to reinforce the reader’s

⁴ My definition of the “narrative crossroads” is something akin to Barthes’ “cardinal function” (“nucleus”) (Image-Music-Text, 1978). However, whereas Barthes defines a “cardinal function” as a “hinge-point” of the narrative (suggesting that the story, at this point, must swing to one narrative path or another), I use the phrase “narrative crossroads” to emphasize that, in the medieval hunting manual, at least, there is no one “story,” only a number of possible stories.

sense that the hunt is made up of a series of endlessly reorganizable narrative segments. In the same way that the medieval hunt itself elaborated a relatively “natural” event (the pursuit of an animal) into a highly artificial one, so LC takes a “natural” chronology (past, present, future) and renders it deliberately artificial. The outcome of these hunts is never in question – the clockwork consistency of success in the manual lulled us into complacency long ago and, even barring that, if the beast is being undone then we know that it must necessarily have been killed – so their narratives create little natural suspense. The pleasure in reading thus comes not from any uncertainty regarding how the stories will end but from our certain knowledge that all the vast sprawling uncertainties of “real life” must, in the end, be neatly contained within the firm framework of narrative convention. (In much the same way, we accept the failures of a folktale hero without anxiety because we are absolutely certain that all setbacks are only temporary and that on the third try he must succeed.) On the other hand, the artificial narrative chronology of the hart and boar hunts (which are, not incidentally, those hunts that were the most difficult, dangerous and, therefore, thrilling) creates an artificial suspense: because the climax of each hunt sequence is postponed, the reader is kept in a state of heightened expectation for a longer period of time.⁶

⁵ Yet even here there are discrepancies. The chapters describe what the more experienced hunters would do during these stages of the hunt, and say nothing about what duties would have been given to an inexperienced huntsman-in-training.

⁶ This artificial narrative structure is similar to that which is exploited by many modern mystery writers. Typically, what we might call the *primary narrative* of a mystery story (the story of the unraveling of the mystery) begins at the denouement of a crucial *secondary narrative* (the source of the mystery: say, a murder). The secondary narrative provides no suspense in itself, as there is rarely any question about its outcome. The primary narrative is the story of how the hero uses various clues to reconstruct the secondary narrative, and the climax of the primary narrative usually corresponds with the moment at which the climax of the secondary narrative (the murder) becomes clear to both the hero and the readers. Thus the secondary narrative is revealed to the hero (and reader) in the following order: denouement (the discovery of the body), opening/rising action (the events surrounding the murder), climax (the murder’s method, instigator(s), and/or motives). Similarly, we might identify an overarching and extratextual “primary narrative” for this section of *Livre de chasse*: namely, the story of how the reader pieces together the disjointed narratives into a cohesive whole.

Armand Strubel and Chantal de Saulnier read the intermingling of the hunts of the stag and the

The story that emerges from these “deconstructed hunts” is thus a narrative about the acquisition of knowledge that plays itself out on two levels. On the intratextual level, the boy learns from his master; on the extratextual level, the reader learns (or is reminded of) the same information from the author. The reader, no matter what his experience or understanding of hunting, is forced into the position of the lowest of *valets*; Gaston forcibly creates an ignorant audience so that he has a plausible excuse to discourse at length upon a subject he prides himself on knowing very well. It is a self-aggrandizing tactic, to be sure, but it is not without benefit for the reader. We can reasonably assume that a sizable minority of Gaston’s readers did *not* know the details of the information he was imparting (the inept, women, the very young, the permanently infirm); Gaston’s conceit of “training the young huntsman” thus allows him to accommodate the inexperienced reader without drawing attention to the fact that he is doing so and thereby running the risk of boring or insulting the more experienced reader.

It seems reasonable to assume that the two types of readers, experienced and inexperienced, derived different sorts of pleasure out of reading this section. The inexperienced reader could experience the pleasure of learning and the excitement of joining the most elite society of all – and, perhaps, the thrill of having access to illicit or classified knowledge. The experienced reader, on the other hand, felt the easy pleasure of reading about things he already understood well. And every reader, whatever his status or level of knowledge, got to feel as if he or she were the peer and confidant of the great Gaston Phébus or Edward of Norwich.

boar differently, however: “C’est un adversaire [the boar] qui force le respect, et à qui la vénerie réserve un prestige presque égal à celui du cerf. Le comte de Foix interrompt son exposé sur la chasse au cerf pour traiter de la poursuite du sanglier et de son découpage” [“It is an adversary that demands respect, and to which venery awards a prestige nearly equal to that given to the stag. The Count of Foix interrupts his account of the hunt of the stag in order to treat the pursuit of the boar and its carving”] (La poésie de la chasse au Moyen Âge: les livres de chasse du xive siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994) 251).

Other sorts of internal repetition.

Repetition, on every textual level, is the primary organizing technique of the hunting manuals. The authors express themselves using fairly limited vocabularies, using and re-using the same words and idioms. Gaston, for instance, begins each of the first fourteen chapters by classifying the animal in question as either “assez commune beste,” familiar to everyone, or “bien diverse beste,” unusual or polymorphic enough to merit more precise physical description. Chapters within the same section tend to present the same sorts of information in the same order, though the sequence seems to follow no particular logic: for example, Gaston generally begins with an animal’s mating habits and ends with a description of its preferred habitat. Even the tables of contents are strikingly repetitious, with each of the eighty-five chapters of Livre de chasse beginning with “Ci devise ...” [“Here is related ...”]; Master of Game has only slightly more variety in its chapter headings. Repetition is a useful aid to learning and recall, but the manuals are only incidentally didactic. More important is the fact that the reiterated elements lend weight, sonorousness, and a largely artificial sense of importance to the information that they frame, as well as emphasizing and subtly magnifying the impressive volume of that information.⁷

In several places in LC, Gaston extends his repetition so far as to tell what is essentially the same story two or more times: the most obvious examples of this phenomenon are the two stories of the Everyhunter that start both manuals, the two greyhound stories at the beginning of Livre de chasse ch. 15 and Master of Game ch. 12, and many of the hunt narratives scattered throughout. In these cases, repetition is variously used as intensifier, as mimesis, and as incantation.

The greyhound stories (Livre de chasse ch. 15 and Master of Game ch. 12).

In the first half of Livre de chasse 15 (LC 15: 2-69), in order to demonstrate “les noblesces des chiens qui ont esté” [the nobleness of dogs that have been] (LC 15:

9), Gaston tells two stories, both involving faithful greyhounds. As he does not refer to these stories or their characters again, and as the stories have no direct bearing on the rest of the manual, these narratives are all the more striking: they stand alone, like illuminations that adorn but do not directly illustrate the main text.

In the first story, taken from Barthélemy l'Anglais' Livre des propriétés des choses, King Apollo de Lionois comes to the court of his liege lord King Clodoveus of France, bringing with him his wife and his greyhound, a dog which is "tres bel et tres bon" ["very handsome and very good"] (LC 15: 11-12). (The wife, on the other hand, is described as merely a "bonne dame" ["good lady"] (LC 15: 13).) Clodoveus' unnamed son desires Apollo's wife and begs her for her love, but she spurns his advances. As Apollo and his wife are returning to their own land, they are ambushed by a band of armed men, led by the frustrated prince. The unarmed Apollo defends his wife until he is mortally wounded and they are forced into a tower. The prince gains entry to the phallic tower and thus to the coveted woman, but his desire is again thwarted when she throws herself into the Loire rather than submit to him. Apollo dies of his wounds that same day and his body is also thrown into the river.

Apollo's faithful greyhound drags the body of his master (but apparently not that of his mistress) out of the river, buries it, and remains by the grave for half a year, keeping beasts and birds away. One day, as King Clodoveus is riding by, he sees the dog behaving in a strange manner; further investigation reveals the body of Apollo. In great anger, Clodoveus announces throughout his realm that whoever can reveal the killer of Apollo will be granted whatever boon he or she asks. A demoiselle who was present in the besieged tower steps forward and names Clodoveus' son as the

⁷ Interestingly, and, I would argue, not coincidentally, some of the illustrated manuscripts utilize visual repetition that deliberately mirrors the semantic, thematic, and topical repetition of the text. Bibliothèque Nationale ms fr 616, the most lavish extant manuscript of Livre de chasse, consistently begins each chapter with an illumination; chapters 32-35 and 37, which describe how the huntsman goes in quest for the stag or boar in various environments, are illustrated by nearly identical illuminations.

murderer, demanding the young man himself as her reward. Despite the fact that the prince is his only son and heir, Clodoveus immediately denounces him as a *ribaut* (“villain”) and has him burnt. When the king offers the body of his son to the demoiselle, quite understandably “La demoisele n’i osa aprouchier, quar ja estoit tout ars” [“The demoiselle didn’t dare approach, for he was all burnt”] (LC 15: 41).

In the second story, borrowed from Gace de la Buigne’s Roman des déduits et des oyseaulx, Auberi de Mondidier, a servant of the king of France⁸ (or “squier,” as Edward translates it (MG 12: 1299), is passing through the wood of Bondis on his way from the king’s court to his own lodging when he is waylaid and killed by a man named Machaire, “un homme qui le heoit par envie sanz autre raison” [“a man who hated him for envy, without other reason”] (LC 15: 51-52). Auberi’s body is buried by his “tres biau et bon” [“very handsome and good”] (LC 15: 51) greyhound; the dog remains by the grave for three days until it is forced by hunger to return to the court. When the dog sees Machaire, it rushes upon him; but when it is prevented from doing him any harm, it carries food back to the dead body of its master and feeds the corpse with it. The dog repeats this behavior for several days, until the king has it followed and Auberi’s body is discovered. The greyhound refuses to leave the body of its master except to attack Machaire. The king’s suspicions are aroused and he orders the alleged murderer to duel with the greyhound. The man and the dog fight their duel on the Isle of Notre Dame, and the man is defeated. Machaire confesses to the murder and is hung and drawn; the fate of the greyhound goes unremarked.

Both stories, of course, demonstrate the inherent *noblesce* of the greyhound, as they are intended to do. However, both the content and the sequence of the stories also treat the three themes mentioned above (which, we might logically deduce, were Gaston’s particular concerns as well): the importance of maintaining social contracts

⁸ Auberi de Mondidier was a lord of the court of Charles V (1364-1380).

and natural order, the regulating influence of knowledge, and the degeneration of the world.

In the first tale, the bonds that are threatened are those between an overlord (Clodoveus) and his vassal (Apollo), as well as those between family members (the de Lionois “family” consists of Apollo, his wife, and their dog-child, who is at least as faithful as any human son could be). The prince’s unnatural lust turns the world upside down: lords can no longer protect their lieges, husbands can no longer protect their wives, and, ultimately, fathers can no longer protect their sons. The situation, ironically, can only be rectified by the complete upending of the social order, with a dog and a girl accomplishing what a king cannot. This general disorder ultimately causes three deaths, including that of the king’s only son and heir: in other words, it is a political as well as a personal tragedy. The second tale also explores the consequences of chaos derived from irrational and unregulated emotions. The initial incident, an unprovoked and motiveless surprise attack by a man of higher rank (“grant gentilz homs” [“great gentleman”] (LC 15: 54)) on his inferior, violates every code of acceptable conduct; it poses an unmistakably serious threat to a society founded on a set of generally unwritten but universally agreed-upon relationships between men. In both cases, the greyhound, symbol of the hunt and of the French aristocracy, is the key to restoring order.

When illicit passions turn the world upside down, only knowledge can right it again. It is notable that the greyhound narratives are not so much concerned with the wrongful deaths themselves as they are with the discovery of the truths behind those deaths. The narratives, we might say, are “hunts” for knowledge, counterparts of both the hunter’s quest for his prey and the reader’s quest for information or pleasure. In both cases, the truth can only be discovered when a canny man watches and correctly interprets the behavior of a dog, “reading” the behavior of the dog in order to “read” the circumstances that surrounded its owner’s wrongful death.

These two episodes, it should be obvious, are the same narratives in all but their details: a good man is waylaid and treacherously killed; his faithful greyhound gives him a Christian burial and eventually avenges his death. However, it is precisely those repeated elements that call our attention to the subtle differences between the two stories: the second story is noticeably shorter, more perfunctory, and less significant than the first. Together, the stories form a progression that reflects a persistent theme of Livre de chasse, that of the decline of the world.

The monarch of the first story is the great Clovis, but that of the second story is only an unnamed “roy de France.” The name of Clovis anchors the story of Apollo’s greyhound at the glorious beginning of France and thereby gives it a patina of history, or at least of legend. The story of Auberi’s greyhound presumably takes place after the reign of Clovis, but its lack of temporal markers ultimately relegates it to the no-time of fable and folktale.⁹

The conflict in the first narrative between the son of a king and a vassal of that same king creates dire consequences for the entire realm. The second conflict, on the other hand, is a fairly private affair between a gentleman and a servant, a senseless murder with no real political ramifications. Both greyhounds are faithful, but the dog of the first story is clearly superior. Apollo’s dog digs a “grant fosse” (LC 15: 23) for the body of its master and stays at the grave for six months, making a poor living off of carrion and whatever else it can find. Auberi’s dog, on the other hand, apparently only covers its master’s body superficially – the burial is not so deep that it cannot put food in the corpse’s mouth every day, an action which suggests that it is less intelligent, as well as less conscientious, than Apollo’s dog – and initially stays with

⁹ It is perhaps significant that Gaston identifies both of these tales as “French,” rather than Gascon. Elsewhere, he takes great pains to distinguish “French” vocabulary and practices from those that were current in Languedoc or Gascony. Perhaps we can read into these stories a wry comment on the degeneration of the French kings since Clovis; not surprising, given the fact that Gaston’s relations with the French monarchy were ever strained and potentially explosive.

the body for only three days before it gets hungry and goes home to steal food from the tables.

When Apollo's body is exhumed, it, like those of the saints, is found to be "trestout entire" ["entirely whole"] (LC 15: 30), even after six months underground. The religious overtones in the story of Auberi's greyhound, on the other hand, are grotesque, bordering on the ridiculous. The king of France orders Machaire to duel with the dog so that God may decide which one is in the right – "Et Machaire si commença a rire" ["And Machaire began to laugh at this"] (LC 15: 64), as well he might, given such a ridiculous command: apparently, not even the characters can take their own story seriously. One of Auberi's kinsman makes a "pilgrimage" to see "le grant mervoille dou levrier" ["the great marvel of the greyhound"] (LC 15: 68), whereupon he agrees to take the preliminary oath for the dog since it, of course, cannot speak or understand human language (though it appears to understand the rules of the *duellum*). The absolute propriety of the duel, and its prominent placement at the center of Paris, only serve to underline the irrationality of the contest. The final absurdity is that Machaire, armed not with a sword (the usual weapon of an aristocratic trial by battle) but with "un grant baston a deux mains" ["a great two-handed cudgel"] (LC 15: 67), is defeated by a thirty-pound dog. The son of Clodoveus is given a traitor's death at the stake, but Machaire dies a thief's or murderer's death at the gallows. Apollo is his dog's *seigneur*, "lord," but Auberi is only his dog's *maistre* ("master"). Even the names of the victims are telling: "Apollo" is regal and vaguely Classical; "Auberi" is neither.

Just as the second greyhound story is clearly a parodic or debased echo of the first, so the current state of the world is only a sad shadow of what it once was. This is the conclusion to which Livre de chasse returns again and again: "Toutes natures s'abrejent et descendent" ["All natures (or spirits) shorten and decline"] (LC 22: 3-4) and history continually repeats itself in ever more debased configurations.¹⁰

Knowledge – the knowledge of how a murder was committed, or, presumably, how an aristocratic hunt is properly conducted – can mend rents in the social fabric, but it cannot restore that fabric to its former glory. Sprinkled throughout the text are melancholy references to an era within Gaston’s lifetime but now over, when men were more heroic, dogs were hardier and more loyal, and *seigneurs* far more worthy than they are now.

... quar nous trouvons es anciennes ystoires tant de noblesces de chienz et veons touz jour en eulz, qui bien le veult cognoistre, que nul, comme j’ay dit, ne le pourroit croire ne pense, combien que toutes natures et de hommes et de toutes autre bestes ont en descendant et en apetissant et de vie et de bonté et de force et de toutes autres choses si tres merveilleusement que, quant je voy les chienz qui au jour d’uy chascent et je pense aux chiens que j’ay veüz ou temps passé, et aussi je voy la bonté et la loyauté qui souloit estre es seigneurs dou monde et autres gens et voy ce que maintenant y est, je di bien qu’il n’i a nulle comparaison, et ce scet bien tout homme qui a bonne raison. (LC 15: 5-7)

[... for we find in the old stories so much about the nobility of dogs and we see it continually in them (whoever wishes, indeed, to know it) that no one, I say, could believe or think it, how much all natures of both men and beasts are descending and diminishing in life and excellence and power and all other things so very astonishingly that, when I see the dogs that hunt today and I think about the dogs that I have seen in days past, and also I see the goodness and the loyalty that was wont to be in worldly lords and other men and I see that which is (customary) nowadays, I say indeed that there is no comparison, and every man who has good reason knows this well.]

Et par les choses sus dites l’ay je veü faillir aux deux meutes ensemble du roy Phelipe et du comte d’Alanson, son frer, qui avoyent meilleurz chienz, lors qu’il n’en a nulz maintenant ou monde, es fustoyes de la forest de Compieigne. (LC 45: 156-7)

¹⁰ Strubel and de Saulnier extract the opposite conclusion from LC’s greyhound episodes: “Mais le lévrier d’Aubery apporte la preuve que tout n’a pas succombé à l’irrésistible dégénérescence, et que la noblesse des chiens ne s’est pas perdue” [“But the greyhound of Aubery provides proof that not everything has succumbed to the irresistible degeneration, and that the nobleness of dogs is not lost”] (*La poésie de la chasse au Moyen Âge* 201).

[And because of the aforementioned things I saw two packs miss a stag at the same time – those belonging to King Philippe and his brother the Count of Alançon (who had the best dogs, whereas there are none such now in the world), in the *fustoyes* [stands of mature trees] of the forest of Compiègne.]

...ilz [les bons chienz] n'osent ne veulent chascier tant comme leur droit soit avec le change, espiciaument au jour d'ui ou il n'a nul chien baut ne si bons chienz d'assez comme ilz souloyent estre, aussi n'a il de nulles autres creatures. (LC 45: 179-80)

[... they [good dogs] do not dare nor wish to hunt so much while their *droit* (the chosen quarry) is with the *change* (the decoy animal), especially today when there is no *chien baut* (a superior type of running hound) nor such good dogs in plenty as there were wont to be, just as there are not any other [good] creatures.]

Chien baut ne doit laisser, ne pour vent ne pour pluye ne pour chaut ne pour nul mal temps, sa beste, mais pou en y a maintenant de tieulx. (LC 19: 46-47)

[The *chien baut* must not leave its quarry, neither for wind nor for rain nor for heat nor for any bad weather; but there are few such dogs now.]

Not surprisingly, only Gaston's own hounds uphold the standards of former ages:

Et ilz m'entendent et font ce que je leur di mieulx que homme qui soit en mon ostel, mes je ne croy mie que onques homme leur feïst fere ce que je fais, ne par aventure, quant je seray mort, ne le fera. (LC 49: 23-24)

[And they hear me and do what I say better than [they do with] any man in my house, but I do not believe that there was ever a man who had made them do what I [make them] do, nor, perhaps, when I am dead, will do so.]

At the same time that his hounds are more like Apollo's than Auberi's, so too does Gaston bear striking resemblance to the founder of the Frankish dynasty. Like Clodoveus, Gaston killed his only son and heir when he suspected him of treachery, and so it is not surprising that he grimly applauds Clodoveus' "perfect justice" in punishing his own son:

Cest exemple ay je mis avant pour la noblesce des chienz et aussi des seigneurs qui ont esté, mais maintenant je croy que on en trouveroit pou qui feïssent si parfetes justices. (LC 15: 42)¹¹

[I have set forth this example in order to show the nobility of the dogs and also of the lords who have been, but nowadays I believe that one would find few of them who would perform such perfect justice.]

The pattern of the two repeated greyhound stories mirrors the overall downward movement of the Livre de chasse as a whole. To borrow Classical terminology, the text begins with a sketch of a paradisiacal world (a “Golden Age”) in which the hunter has nothing to do but to roam daily through beautiful forests without fear either of death or of God’s displeasure (LC Prologue). Chapters 1-59 depict a chivalric Silver Age in which men are noble in character (if not always in rank) but sometimes foolhardy; the blood on the ground is real, and it does not always come from the quarry. Chapters 60-85 portray a debased Bronze Age populated by men who are in some way less than men – old men, fat men, lazy men, poor men, *vilains* of all sorts – who must catch their prey by *engins* and other despicable forms of trickery. The Epilogue describes a corrupt Iron Age, a world of pain and remorse surveyed by an indifferent God.

The reader constantly expects Gaston to urge a return to the glory of the past through a renaissance of hunting (which might perhaps be sparked by the Livre de chasse itself), but he never does. The past must be remembered and its stories retold, but its glories can never be regained. When Gaston dies, he seems to imply, the old order will die with him; even if his readers were to follow his instructions word for

¹¹ One wonders whether Edward of Norwich felt any discomfort while translating this passage for Master of Game (MG 1281-1283), given his impressive record of treason and subsequent reprieve. In 1397, he sent his servants to assist in the assassination of his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. In 1400, he plotted against the life of Henry IV. In 1405, with the assistance of his sister, Lady le Despenser, he again plotted against the king’s life, and furthermore planned to abduct the two young Mortimers, the elder of whom was heir presumptive to the throne, treasonous acts that landed him in prison for nine months. Each time, he was pardoned, apparently without much difficulty. It seems doubtful that Edward could truly have agreed with Gaston’s grim call for justice.

word, the best they could hope to produce would be a cheap imitation of *le temps passé*. Livre de chasse thus functions as not as an instruction book but as a memorial to an unrecoverable past, the repetition of words, phrases, and narratives an incantatory, stylized lament like the tolling of a bell calling mourners to pay their final respects.

As we have seen, the middle chapters of Livre de chasse are a model for how repetition, both of storytelling and of reading, can be infinitely prolonged. The manual is a model of internal repetition, endlessly repeating itself, each part echoing those that came before and anticipating those parts that will come after. However, because the manual is primarily a mnemonic for the reader's own memory or fantasy, despite its dogged repetitiveness, it appears as large (or as small) as the reader's imagination and endurance.

The world of the manual is a strange combination of the sure and the uncertain: on the one hand, it contains a road map of any possible story and directions for each step of the way; on the other hand, it is a conditional adventure and nothing ever *needs* to happen. The individual elements of the manual (the events of each narrative, the narratives in the text as a whole) are joined by the simple and seemingly inevitable logic of *lors, quant, et puis, et si*, each one following the previous in a reassuringly consistent rhythm. At the same time, the way in which these elements are densely interwoven and overlapped gives the world of the manuals a feeling of infinite capaciousness. The interlacing and imbrication of narratives, characters, and scenes creates the impression that the forests of the manual are even bigger than those of the chivalric romance – or, for that matter, than the immeasurable forest of folklore.

When we factor in the full range of moods (indicative, imperative, subjunctive) that the manuals utilize, the result is not merely vastness, but totality. They appear to contain everything: all the world, the present, the past, and all possible futures. Like

the Welsh Triads, they allow for an infinite number of possible narrative expansions, in any direction. With the addition of some imagination, they allow for endless external repetition, as the reader goes down one path after the next.
