

Chapter 5

Cynegetical chivalry

Writers of medieval cynegetical manuals claimed that the hunter, by his very nature, was possessed of “droite noblesce et gentillesce de cuer, de quel que estat que l’omme soit” [“pure nobility and gentleness of heart, no matter his estate”]. However, he was not merely noble in spirit: he was also a knight in his own realm, a domain that stretched from his lord’s (or his own) *ostel* to the furthest reaches of the forest and, ultimately, of the imagination. Although military knights were expected, at least in theory, to come from a distinguished lineage,¹ cynegetical knights are often, or even usually, of common birth. The primary concerns of both hunters and warriors were fighting, horsemanship, and proper behavior (the definition of the last, as we will see, was slightly different for each vocation). Like a military knight, the cynegetical knight put his body in peril in order to defend his territory or livelihood from invaders, to remove evil from the world, to win glory for himself, and to serve his lord – or, with some stretch of the imagination, his God. After all, *venerie*, like *chevalerie*, was considered something of a lay order by its advocates: the hunter, no less than the knight, theoretically served God through his work and thereby theoretically reserved

¹ See, for example, The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, translated and printed by William Caxton from a French version of Ramón Lull's "Le libre del orde de cauayleria," together with Adam Loutfut's Scottish transcript (Harleian ms. 6149), ed. Alfred T. P. Byles, E. E. T. S. 168 (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 57-60. Lull, however, seems to be referring primarily to the importance of nobility of spirit rather than nobility of family. The emphasis on a knight’s lineage sat uneasily with the chivalric ideology that a honor and *noblesce* originate from a man’s prowess and conduct. Most romance writers get around this uncomfortable paradox by making their heroes superior in both birth and abilities.

for himself a place in heaven. The critical difference between the orders was that a man's membership in the cynegetical brotherhood was not predicated upon his membership in any other order or estate,² or even in any particular species: dogs and wild animals, as well as men, can be knights.

There were still more similarities between *venerie* and *chevalerie*. Both orders emphasized the necessity of physical discipline: a hunter, no less than a knight, must be able to endure heat and cold, the strain of riding or running all day, and the shock of a lance charge. Both demanded that a man (or, in the case of hunting, a dog) be wise (*saige*) and courteous (*courtois*) as well as physically capable (*preu*). Naturally, it was recognized that a man's skills in one area would aid his performance in the other, and the argument that hunting was good training for warfare was at least as old as Xenophon. In short, a man who hunted was “mielz chevauchant et plus viste et plus entendant et plus apert et plus aisié et plus entreprenent et mieulx cognoissent touz pays et touz passages” [“better riding and faster and more perceptive and more skillful and more at ease and more enterprising and more familiar with all the countryside and the paths”] (LC Prologue: 13-14) – that is, a more perfect knight and a more perfect man – than one who did not.

Hunting and fighting were both considered skills that took a lifetime of diligent practice to master. Apprentices to either occupation began their education early, were

² The attraction of hunting was so great that men of all estates wanted to be hunters. Although both Gaston and Edward deplore the hunting practices of those villainous (and probably poor) men who hunt only for fur or meat using snares and various ignoble expedients, they recognize that even night poachers are hunters of a sort and will be granted a place in Paradise. Although both hunting and hawking were, at least in theory, forbidden to the clergy, this injunction did not stop ecclesiastics from enjoying these pleasurable diversions. Finally, the proliferation of hunting manuals suggests that, by the end of the fourteenth century, the urban bourgeoisie had the desire and the rudimentary knowledge, if not yet the means or the privilege, to hunt.

often sent away from home to be educated, and worked their way up remarkably similar professional hierarchies.

Aristocratic or noble boys would have picked up hunting and riding skills at a young age by watching and participating in the goings-on about them; later, they would have received more formal training from their fathers' huntsmen. But a boy who was to be a professional, and not merely a recreational, hunter had to start early in order that his body and mind might become accustomed to the demands of the occupation. Gaston suggests beginning a boy's training at the age of no later than seven, though he himself admits that this is very young:

Et, pour ce que moult de genz me blasmeroient, pour ce que de si pou d'age je met enfant au travaill des chienz, je leur respons que toutes natures s'abrejent et descendent, quar chascun scet que plus scet un enfant au jour d'ui de ce qui lui plest ou l'en li aprent en l'aige de set anz que ne souloit fere au temps que j'ay veü en l'aige de douze. Et pour ce l'i vueill je mettre si jeune, quar un mestier requiert toute la vie d'un homme anzais qu'il en soit parfet. Et aussi dit on: ce que on aprent en denteüre, on veult tenir en sa vielleüre. (LC 22: 3-6)

[And, because some men might blame me because I put a child to work at so young of an age, I answer them that all natures diminish and decay; for anyone knows that a child knows more at the age of seven years of what pleases him or what one teaches him than he was wont to at the age of twelve in my time. And for this reason I wish to put him to work so young, for a trade requires a man's whole life before he is perfect at it. And also they say: what one learns while cutting his teeth, one wants to hold on to in his old age.]

Edward suggests, similarly, that the boy be “passed vii. or viii. yere of age, or litill eldare” (MG 19: 1971-1972).³ Despite the young age at which hunters were inducted

³ On the other hand, Ramón Llull warns against rushing the training of a knight, for yf thesqyer that be a kny3t be ouer yong / he is not worthy to be it / by cause he may not be so wyse that he hath lerned the thynges that apperteyne a squyer for to knowe tofore that he be a knyght / & yf he be a kny3t in his enfancy he may neuer so moche remembre that / whiche he promyseth to thordre of chyualrye / whan nede shal be that he remembre it (The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry 56: 4-11)

into the profession, they presumably entered it voluntarily and willingly: one of the requirements for a *bon veneur* is that he wholeheartedly “aime son mestier” (LC 43: 49).

From the ages of roughly seven to fourteen, a boy in training to be either a knight or a huntsman was called a *page* and was expected to acquire the fundamental skills of his profession. The military page (also called a *daimoiseau* or *babee*) learned the basics of the chivalric life: horsemanship, the handling of weapons, languages, music, and manners; later, he received training in religion, as well as venery and falconry. The cynegetical page also learned the fundamentals of his profession: he slept in the kennel, cared for the dogs, and familiarized himself as much as he could with the work. Senior hunters rode on horseback, so the page must have also been taught how to ride, though the writers say nothing about this point. In these early years, boys were expected to be humble, courteous, and serviceable to their masters.

At the age of fourteen or thereabouts, the military page was promoted to the rank of *escuyer* or *squire*; during this stage, he was expected to further develop his social, intellectual, and martial skills, and to assist his lord in various capacities as circumstances demanded. Likewise, at fourteen, a cynegetical page became a *valet de chiens* and was given still more responsibility. He learned to quest in the field and read the signs left by passing animals so that he could eventually help his master with the arduous work of preparing for a *chasse a force*. The *valet* also learned the subtleties of cynegetical language (including horn music) and demeanor.

According to Ramón Llull, the squire should be verbally examined as to his beliefs and disposition before he can be knighted.⁴ Although neither Gaston nor Edward mention the necessity for a formal examination of the *valet*, both include a

⁴ The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry 47-65.

very long section in which the hypothetical protagonist is (hypothetically) intensively questioned as to his knowledge of the various cynegetical terms:

Et, s'il avient qu'il soit entre autres veneurs qui en parlent, il en doit parler par la maniere qui s'en suit. Premièrement, se on li demande ou il parle de menjues ou de viandeïs de bestes, il doit dire des cerfs et de toutes bestes rousses douces viander, et de toutes bestes mordanz, comme sont ours, porcs, loups et autres bestes mordanz, mangier, comme j'ay dit dessus. (LC 30: 31-32)

[And, if happens that he should be among other hunters who speak of such things, he must speak of them in the manner which follows. First, if one of them asks him whether he speaks of the *menjues* or the *viandeïs* [two words for “feeding” or “pasturing”] of beasts, he must say “viander” of stags and of all *bestes rousses douces* [“sweet red beasts”] and of all *bestes mordanz* [“biting beasts”], like bears, boars, wolves, and other biting beasts, “mangier,” as I have said above.]

This interrogation of the *valet* (interspersed with instructions and explications directed at the reader) continues for pages: there is a great deal to know, and a great many places where a young boy could show his ignorance. The importance of speaking properly – of knowing the precise words to say to one’s *limier* when it is confused, for example, or of knowing that one can only describe a deer as *brun* or *fauve* or *blond* and that to describe it as any other color is to commit a grave error, or even knowing what to say to oneself while questing alone in the forest – has of course very little to do with smooth or precise communication and everything to do with professional pride and elitism. By demonstrating that he could use technical jargon easily and correctly, the *valet* proved that he was qualified to be a member of the tight-knit cynegetical circle.⁵ There was, however, no need for a test of the young hunter’s

⁵ John of Salisbury, in his *Policraticus*, remarks derisively on the undue importance placed upon knowing how to use cynegetical terms properly: “Be careful, however, not to misuse any of their [hunters’] hunting jargon in speaking, for you will be flogged or branded with ignorance of all propriety in displaying your lack of knowledge of their technique” (*Policraticus: The Statesman’s Book*, trans. Joseph B. Pike and John Dickinson, ed. Murray F. Markland (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979) I.4: 5-6).

character: after all, although knighthood (at least theoretically) required purity of heart, hunting *created* purity of heart, at least theoretically.

At the age of twenty-one, the squire became a full *chevalier* or *knight*, either in his own employ (if he were a landholder) or under another knight's banner (if he were not).⁶ The valet, on the other hand, completed his training and was promoted to the rank of *aide* at age twenty; although he was still subordinate to the *veneur*, he was given two horses and a *valet* for an assistant. When a man could perform all of the duties of a hunter to perfection (Gaston specifies no particular age at which this should happen), he became a *veneur*. If an *aide* could be considered the cynegetical equivalent of a knight bachelor, then a *veneur* might be the equivalent of a knight banneret, subject to no authority except for that of the *maistre veneur*. *Veneurs* were granted three horses apiece, wore special clothing, and were entitled to carry arms: an *espee* (sword), a *coutel* (hunting knife), and a special stick called an *estortouere* which was used both to turn aside branches while riding and to strike disobedient dogs, horses, and boys.⁷

Although dogs did not go through such a complicated schedule of training and promotion, they also had to be apprenticed while their natures were still somewhat

⁶ All theory aside, the notion of training of boys to knighthood in seven-year stages seems to have been largely a theoretical one. In reality, boys began their training, and won their spurs, at various ages. See Nicholas Orme, From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530 (London and New York : Methuen, 1984) 190-191.

⁷It is more difficult to comprehend the English system of cynegetical hierarchy which, if not more complicated than the French, is at least not very clearly specified by Edward. The English equivalent of the French *valet* appears to be *grome*; the English equivalent of *valet de chiens* is *berner* (The Master of Game: The Oldest English Book on Hunting, William A. and F. Baillie-Grohman, eds. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), Appendix s. v. *berner*). It seems reasonable that the English equivalent of an *aide* should be what Edward calls a *helpe*. But Edward does not himself make any of these equivalencies (if they are true equivalencies at all) and there are many other positions that are much harder to define. For example, Edward specifies that a hart hunt *a force* (MG 26) should involve "pages," "gromes," "gromes that hatten 'chacechiens'," "yomen at hors," "yomen berners at hors," "yomen berners on foot," "lymners," "hunters," "hunters at horse," and "sergeaunts," among others. It is not clear whether a boy in training would play all of these parts at one time or another on his way to the role of full huntsman, whether some or all of them were entirely separate stations (or multiple names for the same position).

malleable. If dogs, like men, are not taught at a young age, they will never be masters of their trade and will always be liabilities to the hunting party (LC 19: 68-69; MG 14: 1797-1798, 1804-1807). At one year old (which is, perhaps not coincidentally, the canine equivalent of seven human years), the *limier* (ME *lymer*), or scent-hound, begins its training with its handler (LC 44: 36-37); ever afterwards, it lives side-by-side with its master and learns to regard him with “bonne creance et doubtance et amour” [“good obedience and fear and love”] (LC 44: 32-33). (For his part, the hunter was reciprocally bound to hold his dogs “en amour et en doubtance” [“in love and fear”] (LC 45: 239-240; 49: 83).) Apprentices, whether human or animal, learned their trade by trial and error, by working together, and sometimes by judiciously administered threats and beatings. It was well recognized that fear (*doubtance*) was one of the best spurs to excellence.

Et, aussi comme j’ay dit dou levrier, on les puet bien aidier a fere bons, en bien les enseigner et duire, en les bien chevauchier et acompaigner, en faisant plaisirs et bonnes cuiries quant ilz ont bien fet et en blasmant et batant quant ilz ont mal fet, quar ilz sont bestes, si leur couvient a moustrer ce que on veult qu’ilz facent. (LC 19: 5-6)

[And, as I have said for the greyhound, one can indeed help them [running hounds] to do good, by teaching them and training them well, and following and accompanying them well on horseback, and being good to them and making them good *curees* when they have done well, and reproaching them and beating them when they have done ill; for they are beasts, so it is necessary to show them what one wishes them to do.]

... son maistre, qui ait amour, cure et diligence aux chienz et qu’il l’apreigne et le bate quant il ne fera ce qu’il li commendera, tant que l’enfant ait doubtance de faillir. (LC 22: 7-8)

[... his [the *valet*’s] master (who should love, care, and have zeal for dogs), let him teach him [the *valet*] and beat him when he does not do what the master commands, so that the child fears to fail.]

The chief knightly virtues celebrated by the writers of chronicle and romance were, with some minor variations, *prouesse* (and its related qualities *courage* and *hardiesse*), *loyauté*, *largesse*, *courtoisie*, and *franchise*.⁸ These virtues, with certain modifications, were also the qualities of the human or canine *bon veneur* celebrated by the writers of hunting manuals. *Maistrise* was probably the nearest cynegetical equivalent to chivalric *prouesse*: the good hunter was expected to be possessed of *maistrise* and to hunt only *par maistrise*, a phrase which implied that the hunt in question was difficult, perhaps dangerous, and did not rely on any ignoble expedients such as hedges or traps. A hunter's *maistrise*, like a knight's *prouesse*, could only be acquired through a combination of natural inclination and rigorous training, plus the peculiarly cynegetical virtue of *diligence*, a quality which encompassed a cluster of related traits: determination, tenacity, and an enthusiasm for hard work. The hunter must also be courageous, hardy, loyal to his master (if he had one) and to God, and, as we have seen above, generous with his subordinates.

The good hunter also had to have a kind of *courtoisie* – that is, if we understand the word in its most basic sense, as meaning “behavior appropriate for court,” and define “court” as “the hunting party and its spectators.” This is not a wholly unreasonable definition, for, as the first chapter showed, the forest was considered to be an extension of the lord's manor and the hunt itself was nothing more than the lord holding court in the open air. Chivalric *courtoisie* was, in large part and in its most obvious manifestation, a stylized set of behaviors that governed the

⁸ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 2. Lull gives a similar list of desirable traits:

To a knyght apperteyneth to speke nobly and curtoisly / and to haue fayr harnoys and to be wel cladde / and to holde a good houshold / and an honest hows / For alle these thynges ben to honoure Chyualrye necessarye / ¶ Curtosye and Chyualrye concorden to gyder / For vylaynous and foule wordes ben ageynst thordre of chyualrye / Pryualte and acqueyntaunce of good folke / loyalte & trouthe / hardynesse / largesse / honeste / humylyte / pyte / and the other thynges semblable to these apperteyne to Chyualry / And in lyke wyse as he ought to god to compare all his noblesse
(*The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry* 113: 6-16)

relations between men and women; cynegetical *courtoisie*, on the other hand, was a stylized set of behaviors that dictated relations between one man and another, and especially those between a man and his dogs. The courteous hunter spoke to his hounds as if they were men (LC 49: 22) and called them by such affectionate sobriquets as “biau frere” or “mon ami” (LC 39: 22). Though he might beat them for disobedience, he always took care to speak to them graciously (LC 45: 95, 182, 202; 49: 20-21), thereby following in the footsteps of the great figures from the Golden Age of hunting:

Huets des Vants et le sire de Monmorenci orent de trop biaux lengaiges et trop bonnes consonances et bonnes voiz et bonnes manieres et beles de parler a leurs chienz. (LC 45: 98)

[Huet de Vants and the lord of Montmorency had the most beautiful speech and the most agreeable words and good voices and good and beautiful ways of speaking to their dogs.]

But animal knights, as we have seen, did not hold themselves to the same standards of behavior as did human knights, and so cynegetical *courtoisie*, as practiced toward wild beasts, could seem distinctly uncourteous even when it was perfectly proper. For instance, although single combat was the honorable way to fight and two or more chivalrous knights would never gang up on a third, whole hunting parties (which might be comprised of dozens of members, including archers and crossbowmen) joined forces against a single animal. Even at the kill, a hunter never challenged a dangerous animal to single combat unless he was reckless or suicidal. Chivalric *courtoisie*, whatever else it might accomplish, never put the hunter in unnecessary danger.

The one primary chivalric value which did not have a direct counterpart in the system of cynegetical values was *franchise*. A bold, forthright, candid demeanor was

a necessary virtue in men whose professional success rested, in large part, on their own personal magnetism, but it might easily become a liability for a man whose work demanded patience and discretion.⁹ Thus the *bon veneur* was expected to be reserved, modest, and discreet, though ever truthful – in other words, to exercise the same delicacy in human relations that he did in the field, a quality which we might call *subtilité*:

... il doit petit parler et soy pou vanter et bien ouvrer et subtilment, et faut qu'il soit sages et diligent en son mestier, quar un bon veneur ne doit mie herauder son mestier. (LC 30: 30-31)

First he shall speke but a litill, and boste litill, and werke wele and sotely; and he most be wyse, and do his craft besilich, for ane hunter shuld not be ane haraude of his craft. (MG 25: 2101-2193).

And also, þat he [the hunter] be both a felde and at wodde deliuered and wele eyed, and wele auysed of his spech and of his termes, and euer glad to lerne, and þat he be no bostere ne ianglere. (MG 19: 1995-1998)

It was likewise of key importance that a hunter speak carefully and sparingly – though of course always courteously and truthfully – to his dogs.

Et bon veneur ne doit dire a ses chienz fors que la pure verite, affin qu'ilz y donnent plus grant creance en ce qu'il leur dit et qu'ilz le croient miex, quar je feroye bien venir mes chienz et mettre le nés a terre mille foiz la ou je vouldroye et crier la ou il n'auroit rien. ... Et vrayement, c'est tres mauvaise chose et mauvaise venerie de trop crier et de trop parler a ses chienz, quar les chienz ne donnent mie si grant foy ne croient si bien quant on parle trop comme ilz font quant on parle pou et verité. Je ne di mie que, quant ilz sont las et en requeste, que on ne doye parler a ses chienz bien et gracieusement et les resbaudir, mes ce doit estre fet par rayson et non pas trop. (LC 49: 15-16, 18-22)

⁹ Aristocratic hunters, of course, would have needed *franchise* as well as *subtilité*. Luckily, and rather paradoxically, hunting tended to make one more *apert*, open or frank (LC Prologue: 13), as well as *subtil*.

[And a good hunter must not tell his dogs anything except the straight truth, so that they should be more obedient to what he says and believe it better, for I have indeed made my dogs come and put their noses to the earth a thousand times wherever I wished, and to give voice where there had been nothing. ... And truly, it is a very bad thing and bad venery to shout too much and to speak to one's dogs too much, for the dogs do not give one as much trust nor believe one as much when one speaks too much as they do when one speaks sparingly and truthfully. I do not say that, when they are tired and in the request, that one should not speak to his dogs well and graciously and encourage them, but this must be done with reason and not in excess.]

Gaston, ironically enough, delivers these injunctions for *subtilité* in his usual arrogant, self-aggrandizing, and sometimes unnecessarily long-winded manner.

Given the importance of modesty, reticence, and quiet watchfulness to the business, it followed that these qualities had to be drilled into young hunters from the beginning of their training. Thus boys learned not only how to speak properly, but also when to speak and how much to say, and how to work subtly and silently.¹⁰

For their part, dogs also had to speak properly and truthfully (e. g. not baying the *change* instead of the *droit*), and to work silently when necessary. It may be desirable that men (and, we might assume, dogs as well) should *jangler* (chatter or banter) at the *assemblee* (LC 38: 10) in order to ensure the gaiety of the party; however, *jangler* (to bark excessively) is unsuitable for the hunt itself and the worst thing which a dog can be is incorrigibly *janglerre*.

Aussi y a il des chienz que, quant on n'a limier et on chasce chevreulx ou lievres ou dains, on les laisse aler querant. Et en y a de tieulx qui crient tant et sont si janglerres que on ne scet si ce est de bonnes erres ou de hautes erres de quoy ilz crient. ... il y a des chienz parlerres et janglerres et estourdiz einsi que des genz. Et, qui trop parole ou chien

¹⁰ All of which is not to suggest, of course, that knights did not also appreciate the value of discretion, despite the fact that knightly *subtilité* was not usually praised. Of the nine vices which Lull specifically mentions as damaging to chivalry, four of them are directly connected with speaking badly, untruthfully, or too much: "A squyer prowde / euyll taught / ful of vylaynous wordes / and of vylayne courage / auarycious / a lyar / vntrewe / slouthful / a glouton / periured / or that hath ony other vyces semblable Accordeth not to chyualry" (*The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry* 65: 2-6).

qui trop crie, ne puet estre qu'il ne faille trop de foiz. A tieulx chienz a moult a fere a les fere taire. (45: 251-255)

[Also there are dogs that (when one does not have a scent hound and one chases roe deer or hares or fallow deer) one uses to track down the quarry. And there are some which bark so much and are so *janglerres* that one does not know if it is the good tracks or the bad tracks that they are barking about. ... there are talkative and *janglerres* and thoughtless dogs as well as people. And a man who speaks too much, or a dog who barks too much, cannot help but fail much of the time. And one has his hands full to make such dogs stay silent.]

Bad *raches* continually “crient and janglent” (LC 19: 66) (“openep and iengeleth” (MG 14: 1793)), scaring the game and confusing their handlers. Gaston warns that hounds which are not properly trained “seront touz jours janglerres” (LC 19: 68-69) (“shall euermore be lauey and wilde” (MG 14: 1797-1798)), worse than useless. The boisterous and largely unteachable spaniels, like their human countrymen, are the most indiscreet of all: they are “rioteur et grans abayeurs” (LC 20:13) (“fyghters and grete baffers” (MG 17: 1940)), and “il fera toute la riote et tout le mal” (LC 20: 17) (“he will make al þe riot and all þe harme” (MG 17: 1948-1949)). The indiscreet spaniel is no good for hunting and Gaston, for his part, would not keep such obnoxious animals at all if he did not also have a taste for hawking.

The word that writers on both chivalry and hunting use to describe the man who embodies all of the finest qualities of his profession is *preudoms*, “worthy.” Gaston twice uses some form of the word in Livre de chasse , both times in reference to a hunter of exemplary qualities. In the Prologue, he declares that he has never seen a *prodomme* who did not love hunting and hawking (LC Prologue: 56), suggesting that even the finest knight cannot be all so fine as that if he does not also engage in the aristocratic outdoor sports. Later, he describes the legendary king Clovis as “preudoms et apercevans” (LC 15: 27). The story that Gaston tells about Clovis (LC 15: 10-41) is a hunting narrative, though an oblique one: Clovis “hunts” down the

murderer of his vassal Apollo by carefully watching the behavior of a hunting dog. It is no coincidence that in this tale, the king displays all of the best qualities of the *bon veneur*, not the *bon chevalier*: perspicacity, discretion, quiet resourcefulness, and unerring judgment.¹¹

Yet even a *preudome* possessed of all the proper knightly or cynegetical qualities was incomplete if he were not also *sage*. Although not usually considered one of the primary chivalric virtues, *sagesce* (or *sens*) was an advantageous characteristic for a knight because it tempered and governed all of the others.

Si devez savoir que se uns homs avoit sens assez et il ne fust preudoms, cilz deust se convertir du tout en mal. Et se uns homs estoit preudoms et ne fust mie assez saiges, tele preudommie est bonne mais non mie tant vallable ne de si grant merite comme li saige de droit sens naturel qui sont vrai preudomme. Et quant a avoir le nom de proesce, et l'on ne soit preudoms ne sages, en tele prouesce n'attendez ja a la fin nulle grant perfection.

[You should know that if a man were sufficiently intelligent but not a man of worth [*preudoms*], his intelligence would be turned wholly to evil. And if a man were of worth and had not enough wisdom, he would still be of merit, but not of such value and of such merit as the wise men of natural good sense who are true men of worth. And as for having a reputation for prowess without being a man of worth or wise, do not expect in the end any great perfection in such prowess.]¹²

The concept of *sagesce* is a complex one. Dictionaries tend to define the word in terms of erudition and mental dexterousness, and perhaps even a bit of cunning.¹³

¹¹ In contrast, Clovis calls his traitorous son a “ribaut,” a word which, although it means something like “scoundrel” in this context, has the primary force of “low-ranking soldier, especially a pillager” – that is, the very opposite of a proper *chevalier* (La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois; glossaire de la langue françoise depuis son origine jusqu'au siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris, H. Champion, 1875-1882), vol. 9 R-S, s. v. *Ribaud-ault-aut*; cf. *ribaude*, “woman of bad repute”).

¹² *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996) 154-155/ 35: 7-13.

¹³ E. g. *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois*, vol. 9 R-S s. v. *sagesce/sagesse*: “science, habilité” [“learning, competency”]. Also s. v. *saige* “savant, habile; avisé, futé” [“learned, skilful; shrewd, cunning”] in A. J. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français* (Paris: Larousse, 1979).

However, *sagesce* appears to have been more than book-learning, and more than shrewdness or good sense; as we see in the example above, it was also apparently considered the key catalyst which, when combined with the other chivalric virtues, compelled one to use one's powers effectively, wisely, and for good. In a cynegetical context, *sagesce* or *sens* (as well as their apparent synonyms *connoissance*, *apercevanche*, and *raison*) imply not only a solid knowledge of cynegetical matters and a quick mind but also (and perhaps more importantly) a strong and accurate intuition – a talent which, although it can be encouraged, cannot be taught. Clovis, as we have seen, is *apercevanz*, and the canny king of France in the second greyhound story is likewise “saiges et apercevanz” (LC 15: 56). Gaston assumes that his readers have this quality, as well: he breaks off his explanations several times with the rather impatient declaration that surely he need say no more, since “chascun qui a bonne rayson” must be able to see that he is right (LC Prologue: 22, 34; 15: 7). The truth is that a hunter without *apercevanche* (depending of course on the kind he game he hunts and on his methods) is not likely to live long anyway (LC 8: 36).

Sagesce may have been merely the crowning glory for a knight, but it was such an essential quality for the *bon veneur* that we should consider it the seventh and final cynegetical virtue.

Ore, se le vallet de chienz aprent bien ce que j'ay dit et aime son mestier et y a bonne diligence et est soubtil et a bonne connoissance et bon sen naturel, je vous promet qu'il sera bon vallet de chienz et bon veneur. (LC 43: 49-50)

[For, if the *valet de chiens* learns well the things that I have said and loves his trade and has good zeal and is *subtil* and has good intelligence and good natural sense, I promise you that he will be a good *valet de chiens* and a good hunter.]

Et en toutes ces choses et autres que on pourroit dire sont et en la main et en la gouvernance du bon sen et de la bonne raison du veneur, quar là tient tout. (LC 45: 260)

[And in all these things and others, one could say that they are in the hand and the governance of the good sense and good judgement of the hunter, on whom everything depends.]

Sagesce appears to be an inherent trait for the most part, but it could be at least partially acquired by a hunter of any species through the practice of his vocation.

Des chienz, comme j'ay dit sa devant, sont les uns plus saiges que les autres einsi que des hommes, quar il y a tieulx chienz, pour quant qu'ilz eussent bon maistre, jamais ne seroyent saiges et tieulx qui seront saiges en une sayson. (LC 45: 236-238)

[As I have said above, some dogs are more *sages* than others, just like men; for there are such dogs, even though they have a good master, will never be *sages*, and there are such which will be *sages* within one season.]

Thus his famous injunction to the reader: “Donc soiez touz veneurs, et ferez que saiges” [So be all hunters, and be *sages*] (LC Prologue: 54).¹⁴

Naturally, hunting dogs were expected to have the all of the qualities of the human *bon veneur*: prowess, courage, endurance, diligence, loyalty, courtesy, *subtilité*, and *sagesce* (they are, of course, excused from generosity because they have nothing to give), and thus the dog is “la plus noble beste et plus raisonnable et plus cognoissant” [“the most noble beast and the most sensible, and the most knowing”]

¹⁴ In the Epilogue to *Livre de chasse*, Gaston begs that Philippe de France will correct the work, for, he claims, “je ne suis pas si saiges comme il me seroit mestier” [“I am not so *sages* as is necessary”] (LC 86: 3). As *sagesce* is the vital quality of a *bon veneur*, Gaston is humbling himself as far as possible by protesting that he has an insufficient amount. It is possible, of course, that this self-abasement is not merely formulaic. At the end of the Epilogue, Gaston indicates that he is also sending to Philippe “unes orysons que je fis jadis quant Nostre Seigneur fut courroucié a moy” [“a prayer that I made once when Our Lord was angry with me”] (LC 86: 12-13) – that is, the verses (now known as the *Oraisons*) that Gaston penned while in mourning for the death of his son and heir. Gaston killed *petit* Gaston in a fit of rage, an act which (surely even Gaston himself agreed in retrospect) demonstrated no *sagesce* at all. Because he left no heir, all of his holdings were eventually inherited by his hated cousin Mathieu de Castelbon.

(LC 15: 4). As *sagesce* was the most important quality that a dog could have, both Edward and Gaston spend a good deal of time determining how *sage* or *wyse* is the behavior of each breed and particular variety, and a hunter must be always aware of which of his pack are the wisest (LC 45: 72-73). Gaston's favorite phrase of approbation for a hound is, simply, "bon et sage."¹⁵ Gaston celebrates the exemplary character of the dog in a sudden and fervent encomium (placed between the two greyhound stories in LC 15) which Edward translates with only minor alterations:

An hounde is trewe to his lorde or to his maistir, and of good loue and verray. An hound is of grete vndirstondyng and of gret knowlech. An hound haþ gret strength and gret bonte.¹⁶ An hounde is a wyse best and a kynd. An hound hath gret mynde and gret smellyng. An hounde haþ gret businesse and gret my3t. An hounde is of gret worthynesse and of gret sotilte. An hounde is of gret lyghtnesse and of grete purueaunce. An hounde is of good obeisaunce, for he wole lerne as a man al þat a man wole tech him. An hounde is ful of good sporte. Houndes be so gode þat vnneþes þere is no man comunelich þat ne wolde haue of him som for o craft, and some for anoþer. Houndes ben hardy, for an hounde dar wel kepe his maistirs house and his bestis, and also he wole kepe al his maisteris goodes; and rather he wole be dede or any þing be lost in his keyng. (MG 12: 1283-1296; translated from LC 15: 44-47)

All good dogs have the above characteristics, but the greyhound is the darling of the cynegetical court, a creature blessed with an inordinate amount of *courtoisie* and (unusual in the world of professional hunters, but a natural part of aristocratic life) *franchise*:

... [le levrier] doit estre courtois et non pas fel, bien suyvant son maistre et faisant ce qu'il li commandera, et doulz et net et gentil et lié et joieux et volenteis et gracieux en toutes manieres fors que aux bestes sauvaiges, ou il doit estre fel, despiteux et aigre. (LC 18: 15)

¹⁵ He often praises good greyhounds as "beau et bon" (e. g. LC 52: 12), which is understandable given that a greyhound's physical conformation largely determined its worth.

¹⁶ Here, *bonte* means simply "goodness" and has nothing to do with generosity.

... he shuld be curteys and noght to fell, wele folowyng his maistir and doyng whateuer he him comaundeth. He shulde be kynde, and goodly, and clene, glad, and ioyfull, and playing, wele wylyng, and goodly to al maner folkes – saue to wilde beestes, vpon whom he shuld be fell, spiteous, and egre. (MG 15: 1857-62)¹⁷

Other breeds are less perfect avatars of knight- or hunterhood: *alanz* are strong of body and courageous, but are lacking in *senz* (LC 17: 7) and tending to brutality; the *rache* or *chien courrant*, running hound, is lively [*baut*] and joyous [*lié*] but not always perfectly *sage* or *subtil*; spaniels are loyal and gay but, as we have seen, have no *subtilité* or *courtoisie*; and mastiffs appear to have no good qualities at all beyond a certain dumb serviceability.

The cynegetical knight's worthiest opponents were naturally the military elite of the animal kingdom. Like a knight, an old and experienced hart travels alone, accompanied only by an *escuyer* or *squire*, a younger deer whose function it is to serve and protect his master, even at the expense of his own life (LC 1: 24-25, 62; MG 3: 461-3, 547-8). Light and swift deer – undesirable as quarry because they are too difficult to catch – are known as *cerfs errants* (LC 35: 11; there is no comparable English term), a clear analogue to the phrase *chevaliers errants*, “knights errant.” Individual stags are even identified by an elaborate system of “heraldry,” though the “heralds” are human hunters, not fellow deer. A hunter must have an extensive memory and a quick eye for detail. He must observe and remember the coat color,

¹⁷ The idea that a warrior should be hard with his enemies but gentle with his friends is a common trope. Compare, for example, Charny's description of a good man-at-arms: “... qu'il soient humbles entre leurs amis, fiers et hardiz contre leurs ennemis, piteux et misericors sur celuz qui le requierent par amandement, cruelz vengeur sur ses ennemis, cointes, aimables et de bonne compaignie avecques touz fors avecques ses ennemis” [“should be humble among their friends, proud and bold against their foes, tender and merciful toward those who need assistance, cruel avengers against their enemies, pleasant and amiable with all others”] (*The Book of Chivalry*, 128-129/ 23: 2-6). See also Sally North, “The Ideal Knight as Presented in Some French Narrative Poems, c. 1090 – c. 1240: An Outline Sketch,” *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood: Papers from the First and Second Strawberry Hill Conferences*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1986) 128-129.

antler conformation, and condition of the fewmets of the various deer in his neck of the woods, in the same way that a herald must be able to know which knights are present on a tournament or battlefield by looking at the decorations on their armor. In addition, the hunter also imitates the herald insofar as he must be able to report the characteristics of the animals' identifying "coats of arms" to his lord using the proper terminology (LC 1: 37-51; MG 487-516, 523-533). We might even say that, like a herald in wartime, the hunter is in some sense a mediator between animals and men (both the men of his hunting party and man as a species), though of course he favors the latter.¹⁸

Some of the words which are used to describe the activities of a knight or hunter are also used to describe the behavior of animals. As we have seen, both the romance knight who searches for adventure and the cynegetical knight (whether man or dog) who searches for game in the forest are "questing" (OF *quester* or *querir*). But wild animals quest as well, though not always for the same things as do their human and canine counterparts. Wolves are restless wanderers: at the age of one year, they leave home and go in search of nameless adventures of their own, though never (like Perceval) at the expense of filial piety:

... laissent ilz leur pere et leur mere et vont querir leurs aventures, mais,
pour quant qu'ilz aillent loing, ne demeurent longuement l'un sanz
l'autre. Pour ce n'est pas que, s'ilz rencontrent leur pere ou leur mere
qui les ont norriz, qu'ilz ne leur facent feste et reverence touz jours.
(LC 10: 15-16)

[... they leave their father and their mother and go seek their fortune,
but, no matter how far they go, they do not remain away from each
other for long. For this reason, if they meet their father or their mother
who raised them, they do not fail to caress them and reverence them.]

¹⁸ Despite the intriguing similarities between hunters and heralds, Edward warns severely that "ane hunter shuld not be ane haraude of his craft" (MG 25: 2192-2193).

Most animal questing, however, is undertaken for baser and less mysterious ends. The phrases *querir (querre) sa vie* (e. g. LC 10: 38) and *querir ses mengues* (e. g. LC 59: 10) mean, roughly, “to forage.” And a vixen in heat will anxiously *querir son compaignon* (LC 11: 14), a phrase that needs no translation.

Gaston uses the word *compaignon* to denote one’s fellow human hunters (e. g. LC 26: 5-6). But dogs in a pack are also *compaignons* (LC 44: 42), as are wild animals which have thrown in their lots with each other (e. g. LC 1: 24 (stag), 55: 94 (wolf)). Furthermore, any group, whether of human hunters (e. g. LC 45: 175), hunting dogs (LC 45: 258), or wild beasts (LC 4: 18 (ibex), 1: 19 (red deer), 3: 25 (fallow deer)) is termed a *compaignie*. At the same time that the hunters and their dogs are eating the pre-hunt meal of the *metyng*, the animals are doing the same thing at their own *metyngs*, or pasturings (e. g. MG 3: 610). A hunter will *baille* certain responsibilities to the *valets* under his charge (LC 45: 50), but a stag will also *baille* other deer to the dogs in order to make its own escape (LC 1: 62; 39: 43; 45: 165).

The general word for perfection in the art of venery is *maistrise*; the general word for the category of hunting expedients that encompasses traps, snares, pitfalls, and the like is *engin*, *gynne*, or the more evocative term *subtilité* (LC 85: 11).¹⁹ But the animals have their own *maistrises*, *engins*, *gynnes*, and *subtilitez*, and these can be more than a match for human ingenuity:

... for þer is non so good hunter in þe worlde whiche may þinke the grete malice and gynnes þat a hert can don, ne þer is non so good hunter, ne so good houndes, þat many tymes ne faileth to sle þe hert, and þat is bi his witte, and by his malice, and bi his gynnes. (MG 3: 613-615)

¹⁹ We might also note here that the word *engin*, as it is used in romance, describes “how the [romance] protagonists use their intelligence and ingenuity to manipulate and control situations for their own advantage” (Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1977) 105). In this context, the word implies wit, shrewdness, manipulation, and deceit, and it is a trait that can be used to effect either good or evil.

Et le querir est tres belle chose, et la course des levriers belle chose, et le prendre a force belle chose, quar c'est grant mestrise pour les subtilitez et malice que elle fait. (LC 6: 15)

[And the quest is a very beautiful thing, and the running of the greyhounds a beautiful thing, and the taking by force a beautiful thing, for they take great mastery (on the part of the hunter) due to the subtleties and trickery of the hare.]

Fortunately, the playing field is reasonably level because good men and hounds also have the same tricks up their sleeves: as Gaston notes, “grant plaisance ... veoir les biaux recouvriers et les maistrises et subtilitez que bons chienz font” [it is a great pleasure to see the beautiful rescues and the masterful deeds and the subtleties that good dogs do] (LC 19: 61-62). And again: “Et en toutes guises doit avoir plus grant engin en chascier et rechascier le chevreul qu'il ne doit avoir en nulle autre beste” [And in all ways he [the hunter] must have greater cunning [*engin*] in chasing and rechasing the roe deer than he he must have for any other beast] (LC 49: 60).

Depending on the situation and the species in question, wild animals could evince certain chivalric qualities, primarily prowess (in, for example, running or fighting), hardiness, courage, and, occasionally, loyalty (to a master (LC 1: 62), a spouse (LC 5: 4-10; 10: 17-18), kin (LC 10: 15-16), or companions (LC 55: 94)).²⁰ An admirable quality of many animals is that they accept death stoically, something which not even dogs will do.

Pour quant que on le fiere ne blesce, il ne se plaint ne crie point, mais, quant il vient courre sus as hommes, il menace fort en groinhant, mais, tant comme il se peut deffendre, il se deffent sanz plaindre. Et, quant il ne se peut plus deffendre, pou de sanglers sont qui ne se plainhent et

²⁰ But even these qualities could be perverted: a wolf's *courage*, for example, was no more than lust (LC 10: 5).

crient quant ce vient sus le mourir. (LC 9: 40-41; see also LC 10: 69; 11: 16)

[For all that one strikes or wounds it [the boar], it never complains or cries out, but, when it comes to attack men, it menaces them strongly, grunting. When it can defend itself, it defends itself without complaint. And, when it can no longer defend itself, there are few boars which complain and cry out when they are on the point of death.]

However, for the most part, the finest virtue that a wild animal could have – that is, the quality that made it the noblest and most worthy adversary – was deceptiveness. The noblest animals were the most wary, the most self-preserving, the fleetest of foot, and the most deceitful, all qualities which were quite antithetical to chivalric *franchise* but which came very close to (although on the negative side of) the cynegetical virtue of *subtilité*. A hunter's *sagesce* comprised, among other things, his knowledge of woodcraft and animal behavior; an animal's *sagesce*, on the other hand, lay in both its physical capacities and its ability to elude capture.

Cerf est plus saiges en deux choses que n'est homme du monde ne beste. L'une si est en gouster ... L'autre, il a plus de saigesses et de malices en garentir sa vie que nulle autre beste ne homme, quar il n'i a nul si bon veneur ou monde qui peüst penser les malices et subtilitez que un cerf scet fere, ne n'est nul si bon veneur ne si bons chienz qui moult de foiz ne faillent bien a prendre le cerf a force, et ce est par son sen et par sa malice et par sa subtilité. (LC 1: 86-88)

þe hert is more wis in two þinges þan any man or any oþer beste. þat on is in tasting of herbes ... þat other is þat he hath more witte and malice to saue himsilf þan any oþer beste or man; for þer is non so good hunter in þe worlde whiche may þinke þe grete malice and gynnes þat a hert can don, ne þer is non so good hunter, ne so good houndes, þat many tymes ne faileth to sle þe hert, and þat is bi his witte, and by his malice, and bi his gynnes. (MG 3: 607-615)

Animals that were *sage* and *subtil* were also invariably *malicieux* and *faux*: any maneuver that they used to preserve their own lives was interpreted as treacherous duplicity. *Engin* or *gynne*, as we have seen, the general term for animal maneuvers,

regardless of their motivation. *Reïse* or *ruse* is the term for the circlings and doublings-back made by a hunted animal in order to throw its pursuers off his track. A fleeing roe deer will *crossse* and *treson* the hounds.²¹ Animal virtue, it would seem, is primarily deft charlatanism, but the hunter liked nothing better than the intellectual challenge of confronting a cunning enemy. The aristocratic chase was called the hunt *wyth strengthe* but could more appropriately have been named the hunt *by gyle*.²²

Animal *malice* could range from the craftiness necessary to raid the henhouse or warren undetected, to clever and even commendable deception in the name of self-preservation (LC 10: 21, 68), to – in its most common avatar – the ability to lead the hunter on a wild, fast, tortuous chase. In fact, Gaston’s highest praise of an animal is that it possesses “malice and subtlety,” or some variant on the phrase. The wolf is a naturally evil animal that does great harm in the sheep pen and the henhouse, yet our authors speak of its cunning with frank awe and something approaching respect: “It is a wonder gynnous best, and connyng, and fals, more þan any oþer beste, for to take al his auauntages” (MG 7: 992-994). If animal *malice* is indeed evil, then it is a glorious, delicious evil in which both hunter and quarry could delight.

Deceit in wild animals was commendable, but in human hunters it was considered shameful and unmanly. Granted, there was a thin line separating *subtilité* from *vilainie*, but there was no question as to where that line was. A man could catch beasts with *engins* or *gynnes*, but although Gaston’s stated project obligates him to provide how-to information on this point, he feels distinctly uneasy about doing so:

²¹ [Juliana Berners (Julians Barnes)], *Boke of Huntynge*, ed. and trans. Gunnar Tilander, *Cynegetica* 11 (Karlshamn: Johansson, 1964) 28: 78.

²² There were at least as many different types of animal *engins* as there were of man-made contrivances. The terminology describing these species-specific behaviors was vast and complicated. An undoubtedly partial list of the various types of maneuvers that a hart could effect during the *chasse a force* should suffice to give some idea of just how devious animals could be: *ruse* (e. g. *faire une ruse*), *tour* (e. g. *prendre son tour*), *retour*, *destourner*, *esteurse*, *change* (e. g. *prendre le change*), *battre l’eau*, *refuir* – and these are only the French terms. Unfortunately, as neither Gaston nor Edward systematically explain the usage of these words, it is difficult to separate one *reïse* from another.

... mes de ce parle je mal volentiers, quar je ne devroye enseigner a prendre les bestes si n'est par noblesce et gentillesce et par avoir biaux deduiz, affin qu'il y eüst plus de bestes et qu'on ne les tuast pas faussement mes en trovast on touz jours assez a chascier ... (LC 60: 3-5)

[... but of this I speak reluctantly, for I should not teach [men] to take beasts if not with nobility and gentility and for beautiful pleasures; for there would be more beasts if they did not kill them falsely but always found as many as necessary by chasing them ...]

He gives two reasons for his decision to speak (however perfunctorily) about the *petites chasses*: he does not wish to send men to hell for not being hunters, and he does not wish to make them unhappy during their lifetimes because they are deprived of the pleasures of hunting (even though, he must emphasize, the *chasse par engins* is not true hunting). Such “small” hunts are only the pleasure of the small man, “d’omme gras ou d’omme vieill ou d’un prelat ou d’omme qui ne veult travaillier” [“a fat man or an old man or a prelate or a man who does not wish to work”]. A man who insists on hunting in this way does so “a court deduit et vilainement” [“with shortened pleasure and villainously”] (LC 60: 18). The real man hunted in person and during the day (one might say *franchement*), and although he used dogs, horses, and human assistants, he always relied on his own *prouesse* instead of supplying the defects in his technique with the use of mechanical expedients or other types of deception.

It is interesting to note that some of the very sins which would send a man to hell were, when manifested in wild animals, the very characteristics which added to the interest of their chases and therefore their own nobility. The rutting stag is dangerous because of its overwhelming and indiscriminate wrath (LC 1: 4-9), which was, in bestiaries, linked with concupiscence.²³ The boar is a perilous foe because of

²³ E. g. T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts* (New York: Dover, 1984) 39.

its overweening pride (*ourgueill, fierté*), and an old boar will be killed sooner than a young one “quar il est ourguilleux et pesant et ne peut ne deigne fuir” [“for it is proud and heavy and cannot deign to flee”] (LC 9: 34).²⁴ The bear can be killed by two men working together because its blind wrath and desire for revenge mean that it will always turn to attack the man who struck it last (LC 8: 34-36). One of the few ways of capturing a wolf is by exploiting its gluttony, allowing it to stuff itself on a carcass until it can no longer run swiftly (LC 55: 47-48). Of course, it works the other way, too: the badger, for example, is a dull target because its sloth and gluttony make for a slow and brief chase. On the other hand, the proverbial lust of the wolf, stag, and hare²⁵ neither affects their hunts nor provides a reason why they should (or should not) be killed. However, it would be a mistake to interpret the animals of the hunting manuals as incarnations of the vices, or to assume that medieval hunters or hunting theoreticians thought of the day’s chase as a real-life Pilgrim’s Progress. Hunting, its writers asserted, suppressed vices in the hunter himself; no one claimed that it provided an occasion for him to confront and defeat his own sins in a sylvan psychomachia.

The drama of the *chasse a force* replicated the (idealized) drama of male aristocratic life as a whole, a masque whose script was in turn based on the conventions of the chivalric romance. All of the players on this stage – human hunters (of any station), dogs, and wild animals – were aristocrats and cynegetical “knights” who roamed through the wild and desert spaces in search of opportunities to demonstrate their prowess by fighting against each other in combats *à l’outrance*, to

²⁴ It is interesting to note that it was apparently not uncommon for men to be killed by boars if, driven by the desire to win honor, they were proud and foolish [*fol*] enough to confront the animal on foot and without adequate backup.

²⁵ George Ewart Evans and David Thomson, *The Leaping Hare* (London: Faber, 1974) 133.

the death. By the very act of hunting, the huntsman affirmed his worth as a man and a warrior and confirmed his status as a romance hero.