

Introduction

Sir Simon Burley, sometime tutor to both Richard of Bordeaux (later King Richard II) and Henry of Bolingbroke, was executed in 1388 by order of the Merciless Parliament. At his death, twenty-one books on various subjects were in his possession.¹ Besides at least four books on religious subjects, one on good government, and one on philosophy, there are also at least eight romances. There are some other, more curious items, as well: a copy of the Prophecies of Merlin, what appears to be a dictionary or phrasebook (“oue diuerses paroles de diurse langages” [“with divers words of divers languages”]), and “I liure de englys del forster & del sengler” [“one book in English of the forester and the boar”]²

This book list, which is by far the largest and most detailed of those extant for the non-aristocratic courtiers of Richard II, tells us a few things about the man to whom it belonged. Sir Simon was clearly a man of great learning and wide-ranging interests. On the other hand, he did not appear to object to more frivolous pursuits, either: over one-third of his books were romances, the medieval popular literature *par excellence*, reflecting a partiality that seems to have been characteristic of the court of Richard II as a whole. Furthermore, they are apparently French romances, not English ones, suggesting that Sir Simon, unsurprisingly enough, had patrician tastes in light entertainment. Additionally, some of these books appear to have been quite expensive, as befitted a royal favorite and a known dandy: three of the romances were

¹ For some reason, V. J. Scattergood mentions that there are twenty-two books in his article “Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II” although he clearly lists only twenty-one in his earlier article “Two Medieval Book Lists” (see references below).

² See V. J. Scattergood, “Two Medieval Book Lists,” *The Library* 23.3 (1968): 236-239; “Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II,” *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1983) 35-36.

evidently lavishly enough illustrated to warrant the descriptor “oue ymagery” [“with imagery”] or some variation thereof.

The most intriguing item in this collection, however, is the “liure de englys.” Immediately striking for the language in which it is written, it is apparently the only book in English that Sir Simon’s executors deemed worthy of mention, the rest being in Latin or French. It is notable that the record keeper describes or names the text, though he need not have done so as its language already marks it as singular. (In comparison, he sees fit to describe a Latin book simply as “I liure de latyne couere de noir” [“one book in Latin, covered in black”], presumably because it is one of only two Latin books on the list, and he has already noted the opening lines of the other.) The cataloguer in all probability got his information about the “English book” from the text’s incipit, which likely read something along the lines of, “Heere begynneth the booke of the forster and the bor.” It may or may not be significant that the book is rather curiously registered as a “*liure de englys del forster & del sengler*” [“book in English of the forester and the boar”] rather than the more obviously logical “*liure del forster & del sengler de englys*” [“book of the forester and the boar in English”]; it is, however, anyone’s guess as to what the potential significance might be. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that the emphasis on the “Englishness” of this particular text might indicate that it is an English translation of an originally French work.

Despite these tantalizing hints, it is impossible to determine what, exactly, this unnamed book might have been. Several critics, on apparently no evidence, have assumed that it is a romance, something called the Romance of the Forester and the Wild Boar,³ although no such romance is now extant. This argument is greatly weakened by the fact that in every other instance, the compiler of the book list has

³ Maude Violet Clarke, Fourteenth Century Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1937) 120; R. M. Wilson, Lost Literature of Medieval England (London: London, Methuen, 1952) 129; Janet Coleman, Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400 (New York: Columbia UP, 1981) 18.

specifically referred to a romance *as a romance*: that is, as “Romans du Roy Arthur,” “Romans de Meiser,” and so on. (It is, of course, still possible that the incipit, if there was one, did not identify the work as a romance and that the recorder was not familiar with the work.) A no less serious flaw of this claim is the fact that it would be highly unusual, though perhaps not wholly out of the question, for a forester to be the hero of an English romance. Scattergood suggests that it is “probably a book on hunting,” which is undoubtedly a correct statement – there are few other reasons why a forester would come in contact with a boar – but one which nevertheless offers us very little insight into what the book may have contained. It seems likely that this vagueness of identification is acceptable to scholars because hunting is not a subject that has received much attention in scholarship. Sir Simon’s “liure de englys” might have been a book of hunting instruction, a hunt narrative or memoir,⁴ a moralistic or amatory text that uses a hunt as a metaphor for something else, a fabliau or other humorous tale, or, perhaps, as the critics assume, a romance revolving around a hunt.⁵ Whatever this mysterious English book may have been, it was interesting enough to Sir Simon to take its place in an eclectic and elite library, and it was apparently significant enough to warrant mention by his executors.

The combined interest in hunting and romance that is suggested by Sir Simon Burley’s book list was quite typical of late medieval aristocrats and those who wished to emulate them. Hunting, courtly love, and feats of arms were distinctly patrician pastimes, only available to those who had the time, money, and specialized know-how

⁴ There are, admittedly, no extant medieval hunt memoirs in English or French, which simply means that the text was as likely to be a hunt memoir as a romance about a forester.

⁵ It should be noted that the subject matter of the text is quite unusual. The fact that it treats a *boar* hunt already puts it in a class of its own: stag and hart hunts are overwhelmingly more popular subjects for medieval texts. In support of the romance hypothesis, it is true that the boar hunt is most often found in romances; for the heroic connotations of boar hunts, see chapter 8. However, it is also true that a “forster” is unlikely to be the hero of a chivalric romance. It seems remotely possible, therefore, that the work might have been a burlesque quasi-romance like The Tournament of Tottenham or Rauf the Collyer, though such a text would have been very much out of place in an otherwise elite library.

to practice them *comme il faut*. Burley himself was a knight and a powerful courtier, but he was not an aristocrat and never would be one, though not for lack of trying;⁶ it is therefore likely that he had a keen interest in appearing to be knowledgeable about this triad of activities even if he did not necessarily care to take part in them himself. Burley and his fellow social climbers were not alone: even those with no hope of aristocratic privilege loved to read about the amusements of the rich and famous, amusements which were described in lavish and usually fantastic detail by the chivalric romance.

This dissertation offers an inquiry into the importance of hunting to late-medieval culture and literature, as well as the relationships between hunting and the chivalric romance, by way of an almost entirely unexamined medieval literary genre, the hunting manual. I will argue in the following chapters that the hunting manuals (as well as their close relations, the amatory and military manuals) were, despite appearances, works of popular literature into which some amount of moral or helpful practical instruction might be incorporated, rather than didactic texts providing resources for the aspiring hunter. In much the same way, romances were intended to be read for entertainment, not for lessons in military technique or chivalric behavior, though they might indeed provide such instruction incidentally.

The chivalric romance usually privileges the topic of arms over love and hunting, though it very often addresses all three. The typical romance hero fights and hunts his way through life, in the process winning the love of, or at least the right to marry, the lady of his choosing. The hunting manual, on the other hand, privileges the topic of hunting over those of love and arms, though it, too, typically addresses all

⁶ Burley was widely perceived as a ruthless and greedy social climber, and much disliked for it. According to one account, Richard II at one point conferred upon him the title of earl of Huntingdon; it was a promotion that was never confirmed, perhaps because the parliamentary commons refused to accept such a bold affront to the social hierarchy. See Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1997) 112-117.

three, if only by implication. The authors of certain manuals seem conscious of the literary love-hunt and sometimes use amatory language in ways that are always incongruous and often ironic. A manual might depict the forest as an erotically charged *locus amoenus*, though the hunter will never have any romantic adventures there and is purportedly immune to sexual temptation, anyway; or it might compare the hunter to a lover and the timid or deadly quarry to his beloved. Furthermore, the manual refers repeatedly to military practices, though the “soldiers” are huntsmen and the weapons are wielded against animals rather than men. The authors of hunting manuals themselves seem to have considered their texts as places where romance and reality overlapped: they place their hunts in romance settings and refer to great contemporary sportsmen in one breath and Sir Tristram in the next, as if they did not see any difference between them. Sometimes, as with the author of the anonymous Boke of Huntynge, they even pretend that the heroes of romance have popped their heads out of their books in order to give advice to the reader:

Wheresoevere ye fare by fryth or by fell,
My dere chylde, take hede how Tristram dooth you tell⁷

Furthermore, both of these genres attracted similar audiences, and these audiences evolved over time in similar ways. Initially, both the romances and the hunting manuals were strictly aristocratic genres, produced by aristocrats or the favored employees of aristocrats for aristocratic audiences. French romances were the most popular leisure reading for the upper classes on both sides of the Channel until the fourteenth century, at which point their production died out in France even as it sprang up in earnest in England. The English romances adapted the aristocratic French model to a new upwardly mobile and at least nominally pious urban middle

⁷ Julians Barnes, Boke of Huntynge, ed. and trans. Gunnar Tilander (Karlshamn: Johansson, 1964) 22:1-2

class;⁸ as Sir Simon Burley's book list shows, however, the English romances – which were generally written in poetry of widely variable levels of quality and sophistication – did not usually find much favor with those who considered themselves literary connoisseurs. The demand for romances was so great that commercial scriptoria found it a lucrative business to copy them; after the introduction of printing, publishers such as William Caxton turned out prose romances for a still-robust market.

A very similar evolution took place in the audienceship of the hunting manuals. The manuals of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were written for noblemen, often by aristocrats themselves, and intended for consumption in royal (or, at the very least, aristocratic) circles. For the most part, these elite texts were hidden from nonaristocratic view until the end of the fifteenth century, though there is evidence that there were some in popular circulation before that time.⁹ With the advent of printing, however, the hunting manuals became far more widespread among the new bourgeoisie than they probably ever had been among the upper classes. Authors and publishers, aware of the attraction of the subject for their readers, were able to turn profits on these texts for close to three hundred years.

An even more striking similarity between romances and hunting manuals is the fact that both genres have the tendency to address their works to a phantom readership made up of people who are fundamentally different from the readers they expect or hope to have. Romances, regardless of their mode of production or the socioeconomic level of their intended audiences, usually address themselves to aristocrats or "lords."

⁸ Coleman, Medieval Readers and Writers 41-42. For overviews of the change in the social structure of late-medieval England, see Christopher Dyer, Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1500 (Cambridge, Eng; New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) esp. ch. 2, "Aristocratic incomes" and ch. 3, "The aristocracy as consumers."

⁹ For example, Cambridge University Library Ff.4-15 is an incomplete copy of Master of Game which must have been made fairly soon after the text had been composed. It is written in a poor hand, on paper, with occasional rubrications and no illustrations – a text of indifferent quality that may very well have been produced in a commercial scriptorium.

Similarly, manuals regularly claim that they are intended for precisely those people who were *not* likely to read them. Medieval manuals pretend to speak to common huntsmen and those without aristocratic educations; later printed manuals, on the other hand, are addressed to “gentlemen” and “noblemen.”

Romances and medieval manuals (of all sorts) served the same, very diverse functions for their often very diverse readerships. As stated above, their main purpose was to serve as sources of pleasurable and diverting reading. However, as with much medieval popular literature (saints’ lives are an obvious example) the manuals might also provide moral, social, and practical instruction in a variety of subjects. They remind the readers of things that they have done, or might have done; they provide loose guidelines, and sometimes explicit instructions, for how those things might be achieved in the future. Their simultaneous mimesis of ordinary life (the protagonists eat, sleep, and are rejected in love like anyone else) and their pleasing distance from it (the protagonists are continually engaged in superlative adventures from which they always escape unscathed) encourage their readers not only to imagine what it might be like to be exceptional human beings (or their love interests, who by definition are also exceptional human beings) but also to see their own lives as reminiscent of popular literature, with themselves as the principal players in those narratives. Furthermore, some of them also allowed readers to vicariously experience not only the adventures of people who were superior to them in terms of ability and privilege but also those who were social peers or inferiors.

An overview of the state of hunting scholarship.

The study of hunting is still in an early stage. A number of books examining hunting as a cultural and literary phenomenon have appeared in the last twenty years.¹⁰ Much less numerous are studies of the medieval hunt¹¹ and of the role of the hunt in medieval literature.¹² There have also been a few recent studies of the medieval hunting manual.¹³ Hawking, a related sport that is beyond the scope of the present study, has received even less critical attention.¹⁴

It is difficult to explain why such an important aspect of medieval aristocratic life has been so neglected by modern critics. Much of the lack of interest in the medieval hunt may be attributable to the fact that very little canonical literature deals with the hunt to any great extent. However, although sustained treatment of cynegetical themes is a relatively rare phenomenon, the hunt is actually a very common topic or trope in all types of medieval literature – regardless of whether that literature is secular or sacred, “elite” or popular – though its appearance is usually incidental enough to escape casual notice. Most mentions of hunting in literature are brief and allusive, no more than a line or two intended to set a scene or a mood or

¹⁰ John M. MacKenzie, The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); Matt Cartmill, A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993); Mary Zeiss Stange, Woman the Hunter (Boston: Beacon, 1997). In truth, there are too many titles to list here, and the above list does not give an adequate picture of the wide range of research being done in this comparatively new field.

¹¹ John Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

¹² See Marcelle Thiébaux, The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1974); Anne Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1993); Nadine Bordessoule, De proies et d'ombres: écritures de la chasse dans la littérature française du XIVe siècle (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

¹³ James I. McNelis, “The Uncollated Manuscripts of The Master of Game: Towards a New Edition,” Ph. D. diss., U of Washington, 1996; Armand Strubel and Chantal de Saulnier, La poétique de la chasse au Moyen Âge: Les livres de chasse du XIVe siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994); Rachel Hands, English Hawking and Hunting in the *Boke of St. Albans*: a facsimile edition of sigs. a2-f8 of the *Boke of St. Albans* (1486) (London: Oxford UP, 1975); Kent H. Smith, “Villain or Victim? Edward of Norwich Revealed in his Master of Game,” M. A. thesis, U of South Florida, 1993.

¹⁴ Baudouin van den Abeele, La fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises du XIIe au XIVe siècle (Louvain, Belgium: Leuven UP, 1990). Also, ch. 14-20 of Cummins' The Hound and the Hawk are devoted to various aspects of falconry.

remove a character from the stage, and usually formulaic enough not to attract any notice at all. Even in the very few cases in which a canonical text uses the hunt as a central motif, there seems to be little to say about it. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Book of the Duchess are perfectly comprehensible regardless of whether or not the reader has an in-depth understanding of the medieval hunt; and since the hunts are presumably only metaphors for the *real* action and the *real* meaning of the poems (the most common critical interpretations read the former's hunts as paralleling the erotic pursuit of Gawain by Lady Bertilak and the latter as a hart hunt which becomes a "heart hunt" for a dead wife), there is no need for the reader to get himself caught up in unnecessary technical details. No one needs to be familiar with medieval weaponry in order to understand a fight scene, either.

The obscurity of medieval hunting is not helped by the fact that the forms and customs of the medieval hunt are not very well documented. A picture of the medieval hunt can only be gathered piecemeal, from books of household accounts, royal decrees, oblique mentions in literary texts, warnings in sermons, papal injunctions, tapestries, ornament carvings, and the like; and even then, any conclusions must be held together with a lot of conjecture. The hunt, unlike military or political endeavors, unlike the activities of colleges or court poets or dissatisfied peasants, leaves very little trace of its passing. It produces hardly anything that is tangible, it consumes almost nothing except for money and time (both of which are already ephemeral), and it is so commonplace that it rarely receives any attention at all from its contemporaries, unless they wish to denigrate it or excommunicate its practitioners.

These reasons go part of the way toward explaining the critical apathy toward medieval cynegetical practices. However, all of the observations above – that the hunt is scantily documented, that it is difficult to see in literature and art and all but invisible in history – are just as applicable to medieval women, or medieval peasants,

or any one of a number of other marginalized subjects. And yet a great deal of energy has been spent in teasing out the details of the lives of, say, medieval English villagers (a subject much less well documented than that of the medieval English hunt *a force*), and no one would call those studies anything but valuable.

I suspect that the main reason why the hunt has not received much modern critical attention is because the subject seems too trivial, and perhaps too elitist. The hunt did not do much of anything to influence the course of history either for good or for ill, and no one would claim that it did. It was a leisure activity of aristocratic males, a mostly frivolous and vastly wasteful pastime that was indulged in to the detriment of the non-aristocratic population, to say nothing of the outlying agricultural areas and the environment. The medieval hunt does not even tell us very much about aristocratic males that we did not already know, because hunting was, as we will see, very much like the other, better-documented aristocratic sports: it was practiced by the same privileged group of people, used the same language and metaphors, and achieved the same ends.

Even worse, hunting sounds suspiciously like jousting or farriery or ale-brewing or round dancing: that is, perfectly fine for what it is, but a craft, not an art; worthy of casual interest, perhaps, but not dense enough, or important enough, to warrant serious study. Once one has figured out the finer technical points of the chase, what more is there to know?

These sorts of biases show up whenever hunting is mentioned in the critical literature, which is not often. For example, critics of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight have gone out of their way to prove that the hunts of the deer, boar, and fox are not “just” hunts, as if an unsymbolic, non-allegorical hunt were somehow beneath the Gawain-poet. “Non-literary” medieval hunting literature is almost impossible to find outside of aging critical editions, most of them coming from Sweden, and a few

translations or transcriptions in obscure journal articles; needless to say, these texts have attracted very, very few critics. In the rare places that hunting literature is given more attention, editors seem to assume that its primary value is its unquantifiable “charm.”¹⁵

Even the critics who engage themselves with these texts seem to be affected by the popular consensus that hunting literature does not deserve as careful and imaginative of a reading as do other sorts of texts. Most studies, even the most thorough and sensitive, tend to be descriptive, rather than analytical. They recount the stages of the medieval hunt, catalogue the contexts in which hunt descriptions appear in literature and the narrative or thematic functions that they serve, and identify the literary sources for hunting tropes, but they rarely attempt any sort of textual analysis. Studies of hunting manuals especially suffer from a lack of formal and cultural analysis, perhaps forgivably so: the medieval hunting manual seems to be a perfectly straightforward text, until one looks at it very closely. Critics carefully describe the hunting manuals and compare them with each other and, on occasion, point out

¹⁵ For example, in the introduction to his critical edition of *Master of Game*, William A. Baillie-Grohman – who clearly has great affection and respect for the work – speaks of “the charm and interest of the original” which would be lost if the text were modernized too much (*The Master of Game by Edward, Second Duke of York: The Oldest English Book on Hunting*, ed. William A. and F. Baillie-Grohman (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909) xiii).

A more recent example is Chapter 9, “The Nature of Things: Science and Instruction” of *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). This chapter includes a number of extracts from hunting and fishing treatises: part of the “Companyns of Beestys and Fowlys,” from *The Boke of St. Albans*, three selections which he entitles “The Joy of the Hunter,” “The Boar,” “The End of the Hunt,” from *Master of Game*, and several extracts (“Angler’s Notes,” “The Treatyse of Fysshing wyth an Angle,” “In Wat Place is Best Angleing,” “Bayt for the Samonde,” “The Chevyn”) from various angling treatises. It is not clear why the extracts were chosen, but it would appear that their “charm and interest,” to quote Mr. Baillie-Grohman, are paramount. They *are* both charming and interesting, of course, but they are not necessarily the best representations of either “science writing” or “instructive writing” that occur in the manuals. The first extract is delightful but strangely out of place, being nothing but a few of the more unusual “company terms” for animals and people (“A mustre of pecockys,” “A noon paciens of wyves”), a very long list of which was included by the printer of the *Boke of St. Albans* (1486) in order to fill up extra folios. Furthermore, it seems strange that the editor would include excerpts from fishing treatises but neglect the far more popular and influential falconry treatises (fishing was not considered an aristocratic sport during the Middle Ages); but this is again easily explained by the fact that the former are indeed more charming than the latter.

literary elements or literary influences in them; but no one has yet tried to claim that the manuals *are* literature, or that they are at least worthy of the same kind of attentive and sensitive reading. It seems to me that the real problem lies in the fact that the critical community has been influenced, for the most part negatively, by the generic title of “manual” that has been assigned to these works.

What the hunting manual is and what it isn’t.

The most common term used to describe medieval texts like Gaston Phébus’ Livre de chasse (1387) and Edward of Norwich’s Master of Game (ca. 1406-1413) is “hunting manuals.” On the surface, the decision to use this term seems perfectly self-evident: the texts *look* like modern manuals, in terms of their apparently didactic intent, practical content, and straightforward presentation of material. At any rate, we can say with a fair amount of certainty that they resemble modern manuals more than they resemble any other modern literary or nonliterary genre.

Assigning a generic title to these works makes them more accessible to modern audiences and gives critics a starting point from which to begin to talk about them; but the label “manual” is, if not an outright misnomer, then at least a misleading designation. It is certainly not what the authors or their readers would have called them. Moreover, and more seriously, the term implies that these texts are, at base, medieval versions of modern manuals, and that is something that they most emphatically are not. Even those critics who are the most engaged with the genre never move very far from modern pre-assumptions about what functions these texts might have served for their readers, and how they might have served those functions. Critics may argue about the contexts in which the texts were written, or question the practicality of the manuals as instructional texts, but they never go so far as to

question the underlying assumption that the manuals are intended to be practical and that they were written for the instruction of their readers.¹⁶

In order to more clearly see the problems inherent to assigning a modern name to a medieval genre, it will be helpful to begin by carefully examining the assumptions underlying our use of the word “manual.” We tend to think of the manual as an “unliterary” text that is minimalist, practical, and prescriptive, designed to guide its reader step by step through a wholly or partially unfamiliar task. We assume that the reader reads a manual solely because he wishes to learn this unfamiliar task, and that once he has absorbed the information contained therein, he will not care to look at it any longer, unless he wishes to refresh his memory. Our assumptions show in the names we have assigned to such texts: manual, handbook, instruction book, how-to book, guidebook, primer, *vade-mecum*. These terms emphasize certain physical, linguistic, and thematic features that we assume are inherent to texts of this sort: smallness or brevity (literally, “handiness”), practicality, concentration on a single topic or group of closely related topics, rhetorical simplicity. The modern manual is a

¹⁶ At least one early critic, C. F. G. R. Schwerdt, assumed that the hunting manuals were used as handbooks in the field, to be consulted at difficult points in the day’s sports (see citation in McNelis, Master of Game 7). However, most critics, when they consider the question at all, assume that the manuals were to be read in quieter circumstances, in one’s own spare time (see McNelis, Master of Game 8; Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature 19).

Rachel Hands differentiates between Master of Game as a “‘library’ piece” and William Twici’s Le art de vénerie as a “working manual” (English Hawking and Hunting xxxviii); she also notes that the early printed manual Boke of St. Albans “became something of a standard handbook,” though it “must, with its many inconsistencies and errors, have been inadequate as a practical handbook”; however, Hands never explores the possibility that it might *not* have been a practical handbook (English Hawking and Hunting xiii, xiv).

Although Pierre Tucoo-Chala does not express an opinion about whether the Livre de chasse would have been read on horseback or in the library, he nevertheless suggests that its primary function was as a teaching tool for the beginner, for it is “un traité technique, clair et précis, dans lequel le jeune veneur apprendrait sans vaines phrases l’art cynégetique” [“a technical treatise, clear and precise, in which the young hunter would learn, without empty phrases, the cynegetical arts”] (Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d’Occident au XIV^e siècle (Pau: Marrimpouey, 1976) 166). Similarly, Marcelle Thiébaux suggests that “The purpose of these books appears to be purely instructive” (The Stag of Love 26). Strubel and de Saulnier write, “Quel que soit le public visé, les livres de chasse ont une finalité commune, qui passe toutes les autres: l’acquisition de la compétence cynégetique” [“Whoever the intended audience might have been, the hunting books have a common goal which surpasses all others: the acquisition of cynegetical competence”] (La poésie de la chasse au Moyen Âge 63).

laconic but readily accessible and hopefully omniscient director (a “guide”) to the reader in some very particular subject; its directives either supplement or supplant those provided by a human instructor or furnished by the reader’s own personal experience.

In terms of the reader’s experience, the modern manual is likely to be on the opposite end of the spectrum from “literary” prose.¹⁷ I think it fair to say that most successful modern literary prose, excluding certain experimental forms, is what I will call, using a distinction suggested by John Cawelti,¹⁸ primarily “inwardly directed.” It may not always be pleasurable to read, but it provides a more or less escapist experience for the reader. Tensions (narrative, psychological, linguistic, or otherwise) are created and resolved entirely within the boundaries of the text, and the reader, in principle, has little to do except follow along. Unsuccessful narrative prose is usually unsuccessful precisely because it is not inwardly directed enough and therefore does not provide a satisfactorily escapist experience; this, in turn, creates tensions and desires that must be fulfilled outside of the text – which usually means that the reader feels compelled to discard the book or hurry through it without interest. In contrast, the modern manual is entirely “outwardly directed,” merely a tool that enables the

¹⁷ I myself admittedly cannot clearly draw the line between “literary” and “unliterary” or “non-literary” texts. Northrop Frye rather tautologically defines the latter as “verbal structures in which the literary or hypothetical intention is not the primary one” (Anatomy of Criticism (1957; Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000) 326). Steven Knapp more precisely defines the “literary” as “any linguistically embodied representation that tends to attract a certain kind of interest to itself; that does so by particularizing the emotive and other values of its referents; and that does *that* by inserting its referents into new ‘scenarios’ inseparable from the particular linguistic and narrative structures of the representation itself” (Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993) 3). These definitions, however, only serve to underscore the fact that medieval manuals are neither literary nor non-literary: they present “scenarios” (to use Knapp’s term) which, crucially, are both separable from and intrinsic to the works themselves.

¹⁸ “Thus while the experience of escape requires the sort of intense interest and excitement that can be briefly generated in a receptive audience by pornography, the weakness of pornography is that it arouses an excitation so intense and uncontrolled that it tends to force immediate gratification outside itself. Then frustration and boredom set in until nature takes its course and the physiological cycle begins anew” (Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1976) 14-15).

reader to find gratification and satisfaction in his own life. No attempt is made to make modern manuals escapist or even particularly interesting because they do not need to be: all the necessary interest is pre-existing in the reader (the desire to learn a new task or technique) and the manual is designed to satisfy, rather than create, this interest. A modern handbook that is so inwardly directed as to be classifiable as “escapist” would not be of much use as a handbook.

Furthermore, in competent literary prose, the reader’s reaction to the text is manipulated by strategic use of language. In the modern manual, language and format are purposely unobtrusive, designed to minimize the reader’s emotional response to the subject, especially if that subject is anything more potentially inflammatory than VCR programming. As a result, the text itself becomes almost invisible, merely a template against which reality can be measured. Well-wrought literary prose encourages reflection and re-reading, but the less time that the reader has to spend with a modern manual, the more effective it is considered to be. To this end, textual embellishments in a manual are spare and few; any illustrations serve an informative, rather than a decorative, function.

If we are to understand and appreciate the medieval hunting manual, we have to discard our preconceived notions, because very few of them apply here. The medieval hunting manual is quite often long, diffuse, and rhetorically (and sometimes visually) elaborate. Like modern manuals, the manual is interested in quantifying and categorizing its information wherever possible, but this is not its sole, or even its major, aim. It is concerned with didacticism (or at least the appearance thereof), but this is not its real goal, either. All potential readers of the medieval hunting manual either already knew how to hunt or (in the case of women, very young children, and the permanently infirm) had seen it practiced, or at least heard about its practice, all of

their lives; everyone probably had a good understanding of what hunting was and a general idea of how it worked, though not everyone would have experienced it for him- or herself. On the other hand, potential readers of the printed hunting manual did not know how to hunt and would never need to know how; consequently, these manuals took pains to satisfy their readers' desire to get the inside line on an aristocratic sport without ever teaching them anything of practical value.

All of the medieval manuals organize themselves around a complex network of three kinds of narratives: indicative narratives (which describe what *is happening* or *has happened* or, conceivably, what *will happen*) subjunctive narratives (which describe what *could* or *should* or *hopefully will not* happen), and imperative narratives (which directly request or demand that the reader “act out” the narrative, either physically or psychologically). Thus the reader is invited to watch and vicariously (or actually) participate in exciting stories of things that could have happened or might happen or should not happen, as well as things that did and do happen. Every inch of metaphorical narrative ground in the manuals is covered with a vast network of subjunctive narratives, and each node or “narrative crossroads”¹⁹ of that network fans out into an infinite number of possibilities. Any given indicative narrative is therefore a path traced quite at random through an impenetrably thick web of possible stories.

The hunting manual is, by its very nature, a liminal text. It is not demonstrably “literary”; nor can it be considered “unliterary,” either. It is in equal measure internally referential (the success of some narratives depends on the success of previous ones; the instructions given to the reader in one chapter are often only comprehensible when read in relation to instructions given in the preceding chapters)

¹⁹ My definition of the “narrative crossroads” is something akin to Roland Barthes’ “cardinal function” (“nucleus”) (*Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 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 there is no one “story,” only a number of possible stories.

and externally referential (it describes real practices and explains, to a greater or lesser extent, how they should or could be carried out). It cannot be read exclusively as either diverting literature nor solely as an impartial record of actual or ideal practice: it is both. It is dependent on the reader's interest in both real-life events and fictional narratives, and, furthermore, it gives readers the tools with which to act out those fictional narratives in real life. The hunting manual thus occupied a unique place in the medieval imagination as a mediator between the real and the fictional, the world of the text and the world at large.

To return to the point raised above, I will not make the claim that the medieval hunting manuals *are* literature; I will only make the claim that they deserve our open-minded attention as least as much as those works that we normally consider to be literature.

There still remains the problem of terminology, however. If Livre de chasse is not a "hunting manual," exactly, then what is it, and what should we call it? If we asked the medievals for their opinion, we would find that what we would call medieval "manuals" or "treatises" – that is, works of apparently primarily didactic intent, with a more or less practical bent – were not usually awarded any particular generic distinction in either Middle English or Old French. They were generally simply called "books," with descriptors that most often indicated their subject matter (Livre de chasse, Libre que es de l'ordre de cavalleria, The boke of curtasye, A Noble Boke off Cookry), but might also specify their principal readerships or beneficiaries (The Babees Book, Stans puer ad mensam) or the status of their authors ("the boke ...callyd "Maistere of Game," "the booke which the knyght of the toure made" [Caxton's translation of Le livre de chevalier de la Tour Landry]). On the other hand, their authors occasionally gave them fanciful or grandiose names that did little to

indicate the nature of the content and which were sometimes intentionally evocative of more “literary” genres (Roman des eles, L’arbre des batailles).

The Middle English term *manuel(e)* seems to have been used in a very narrow sense: the Middle English Dictionary defines it as “(a) a service book for use by the priest in administering the sacraments; (b) the title of a treatise by Reginald Pecock on praying with the Pater Noster.” The Old French word *manuel* has the even narrower definition of a book containing the services for baptism and the administration of extreme unction, leaving out those for confession, communion, confirmation, holy matrimony, and holy orders. William of Waddington’s Manuel des Peschiez was loosely translated into English in 1303 by Robert Mannyng of Brunne as Handlyng Synne, a title that punned on the Latin root of the word *manuel*. These two texts – which contain a series of stories that illustrate the Commandments, the seven deadly sins, the sin bof sacrilege, and the Sacraments – are not “manuals” in either the medieval or the modern sense, insofar as they do not even pretend to offer direct instruction. In his work Donet, Pecock mentions a “manual” that he wrote: “... þou maist go into þe book y-callid my ‘manuel’ or ellis myn ‘encheridion’, wherynne it is deuisid þe rialist foorme of preiyng with pater noster þat euer, as I trowe, was deuisid ...”²⁰ But this work is now lost, and it is impossible to tell precisely what it may have contained. The Donet itself contains explicit guidelines regarding prayer, but these directives comprise only a tiny fraction of the text, most of which is taken up by a rambling discussion of such things as the various moral and Cardinal virtues and the Ten Commandments; at any rate, Pecock himself apparently did not refer to the Donet as a *manuel*.

²⁰ The Donet by Reginald Pecock, D. D., ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, E. E. T. S. 156 (London: Oxford UP, 1921) 204: 36-205: 2.

Medieval authors would never call a seemingly practical handbook on a secular subject a “manual,” but they might conceivably call it a “treatise.” The word shows up in such diverse works as Chaucer’s Treatise on the Astrolabe and the first English translation of Vegetius’ De re militari, whose incipit begins, “Here bygynnyth a schort treys þe whiche Vegecius, þat was þe worschepful Erl Renate sone, wroot to þe Emperour of Rome, þe whiche tretys techiþ holliche of kni3thod and of chiualrye.”²¹ The Old French word “traicte” or “traité” is attested to, but it appears not to have been particularly common, or used with any regularity.²² Furthermore, the label “treatise” could be used for texts that did not offer practical instruction (or even the illusion of it) in a subject: John Manwood’s Tretyse of the Lawes of the Forest is one such text.

There are, then, admittedly serious difficulties with using either the term “manual” or “treatise” in conjunction with any medieval text that seems to be of didactic or pseudo-didactic intent. The medievals did not themselves use these terms with any precision or regularity; furthermore, the modern definitions of these terms do not adequately reflect the purposes or methods of a book like Livre de chasse. While fully acknowledging these problems, I will nevertheless continue to refer to any overtly didactic work dealing with a practical subject as a *manual*, partly because the word has become firmly lodged in critical literature and partly because the alternatives seem even more inadequate and inaccurate.

To call texts such as Livre de chasse “hunting books,” as Armand Strubel and Chantal de Saulnier sensibly and non-committally do in the subtitle to their

²¹ [Rhenatus, Flavius Vegetius], The Earliest English Translation of Vegetius’ De re militari, ed. from Oxford MS Bodl. Douce 291, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1988).

²² See 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. 10 T-Z, s. v. *traicte*; see also in the same volume the section titled “Liste des principaux ouvrages cités” 23.

collaborative work (La poétique de la chasse au Moyen Âge: Les livres de chasse du XIV^e siècle) conserves the authors' words and hints at the encyclopedic nature of their texts, but simultaneously obscures their content and the purpose for their writing. The unidentifiable English book in Sir Simon Burley's library was doubtless also a "hunting book," but that knowledge does not tell us anything about its contents or its methods. Strubel and de Saulnier also refer to these books as *littérature cynégétique* ["cynegetical literature"], as well as simply *traités* ["treatises"], yet neither of those terms is unproblematic, either. Almost anything, so long as it contains sufficient mention of the hunt (and what "sufficient" might mean is of course debatable), could be deemed "cynegetical literature." Even some of the very texts examined by Strubel and de Saulnier only qualify as "cynegetical literature" if one ignores their (sometimes very large) non-cynegetical sections. Parlement of the Thre Ages could, by that measure, also be considered "cynegetical literature," though I do not think that anyone would label it a "treatise of hunting." Furthermore, the word "treatise" merely implies that the work will provide an exposition on the principles of a subject, without implying that it will attempt to instruct the reader in the practicalities of that subject. John Manwood's Tretyse of the Lawes of the Forest, mentioned above, is, in a sense, "cynegetical literature" (it deals at length with legal questions of the forest and its animals), and it is at least nominally a "treatise" – but does not even pretend to practical instruction and thus has little in common with the texts which this study will occupy itself. The words "exposition," "tract," and "redaction," all of which have approximately the same valence as "treatise," are no improvement. Marcelle Thiébaux (The Stag of Love) uses the word "handbook," a term that, although it is better than some of the alternatives, puts too much emphasis on the "handiness" of the text as a practical tool; as we will see, these works were not "handy" – that is, useful in a practical sense – at all.

“Manual,” on the other hand, inaccurate as it is in many ways, accurately conveys the sense that the text in question is indeed a text from which one intends to learn something. However, as we will see, the real lessons that the reader learns are not at all those that the book pretends to teach.

The manuals.

The earliest extant hunting manual is Xenophon’s Cynegeticus (fourth century B. C.), whose structure and basic premises determined those of its successors. Xenophon assures his readers that hunters remain in good health, avoid old age, are doughty and knowledgeable on the battlefield, and are more manly and better citizens in general – all of the same justifications that the medieval writers would use two thousand years later. Arrian’s Cynegeticus (mid-second century A. D.) was intended to be a supplement to Xenophon’s work; it describes the use of Celtic hounds, which were not known in Xenophon’s day. Pseudo-Oppian’s poem Cynegetica (second century A. D.), inferior in style to the previous two, was possibly intended to be a supplement to Oppian’s Halieutica, a poem on fishing.²³

Despite these Classical precedents, most of the first medieval sporting manuals which begin to appear in the thirteenth century were on falconry rather than hunting. This shift in subject matter may have been due to the fact that the early manuals were strongly influenced by Persian treatises. Guicennas, a German knight, wrote De arte bersandi, a Latin treatise on hunting red or fallow deer with a bow and arrow; it was translated into French by the end of the thirteenth century but seems not to have been very influential. It was soon followed by Daniel Deloc of Cremona’s Moamin and Ghatrif (a Franco-Italian translation of the Latin version of two manuals of hunting

²³ For an overview of hunting in the ancient world, see Denison Bingham Hull, Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1964); Judith M. Barringer, The Hunt in Ancient Greece (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2001).

and hawking, one Persian and one Arabic). The most significant hunting manual of the century, however, was the anonymous poem La chasse dou cerf. In addition, medieval allegories of the hunt that were coming into vogue, such as the anonymous Li dis dou cerf amoreus, contained a good deal of information about the hunt but did not explicitly profess any didactic intent.

The work that started the tradition of cynegetical writing in England was the Anglo-Norman treatise Le Art de Venerie (c. 1323) written by William Twici (or Twiti), huntsman to Edward II. A translation of this treatise became the first hunting manual in the English language, The Art of Venery (14th c.). (This English-language version appears in slightly different form as the anonymous fifteenth-century The Crafte of Venery; some critics consider the two Middle English treatises to be different works, and some do not.) Twici's work, spare and relatively uninformative as it is, is very different from the complex and often very long hunting manuals of the following century, and it has decidedly limited utility as either a source of information or a source of escapist reading. Nevertheless, probably because of its easily duplicated layout and content, it was to be a major influence on English hunting manuals until at least the seventeenth century. In particular, it was a source of inspiration and sometimes direct imitation for many of the later printed manuals, which were often produced by professional writers for non-specialist audiences.

Manuals were produced here and there in many parts of Europe, but the genre only came into its own in mid-fourteenth-century France. Jean le Bon asked his chaplain, Gace de la Buigne (Gaces de la Bugne, Gaces de la Bigne, Gasto de Vineis, Gace de Labigne), to write a treatise on hunting, so that his fourth son, Philippe, future duke of Burgundy, would love the art; the Roman des déduits et des oyseaulx (1359-1377) was the result, an immensely long poem (12,210 octosyllabic lines) which is, in the words of Pierre Tucoo-Chala, "littéralement noyée dans un fatras allégorique"

["literally swamped by an allegorical tangle"].²⁴ Henri de Ferrières wrote the mostly prose Le Livre du Roy Modus et de la Reine Ratio (1354-76) another immensely long work, in order to urge the world, recently ravaged by successive waves of plague and chaos, to return to measure (*Modus*) and reason (*Ratio*). This work consists of four parts: a verse panegyric by Modus and Ratio on free will; three prose treatises on bows, traps, and falconry; a 1044-line poem entitled Le jugement de chiens et d'oiseaux, in which two women discuss the question of whether hunting or hawking is superior; and, as Tucoo-Chala irritably adds, "Henri de Ferrières jugea indispensable d'ajouter à cet ensemble déjà pesant un interminable Songe de Pestilence" ["Henri de Ferrières deemed it absolutely necessary to add to this already heavy ensemble an interminable Dream of Pestilence [a psychomachia]."]²⁵ As for Ferrières' didactic intentions, "malheureusement elles aussi sont encore noyées dans un fatras allégorique fort indigeste" ["unfortunately, they are also equally swamped by an extremely unpalatable allegorical tangle"].²⁶

Although it was derived in part from Gace's and Henri's texts, Gaston Phébus' Livre de chasse (begun May 1, 1387) was an entirely different sort of work from those of his predecessors. Despite some overly grandiose and quite transparent claims in the Prologue, it was not written for humanitarian or overtly didactic reasons. It depicts the hunt as a hunt, and the forest as a forest, without ever once reverting to allegory or obvious symbolism. For the first time in the history of the genre, a hunting manual had captured the sights, sounds, and physical sensations of the medieval chase.

Gaston III, count of Foix and later lord of Béarn, was one of the most influential figures of his time. He was an experienced traveler, a formidable soldier, a tireless lover, a dedicated hunter, a bad husband, a worse father, a noted patron of the

²⁴ Tucoo-Chala, Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d'occident 165

²⁵ Tucoo-Chala, Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d'occident 165-66.

²⁶ Tucoo-Chala, Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d'occident 165.

arts, and a writer whose works reflected all aspects of his knowledge and experience. Gaston was popularly surnamed “Phébus” because of his golden hair and good looks. Like any demi-god, he was feared and revered in equal measure, to the extent that many suspected he was served by a spirit familiar who brought him news of the world.²⁷ There is little mention of Gaston in English-language scholarship and none of his works have been translated into modern English. He is, however, the darling of older French scholars, who have tended to characterize him as the greatest man of his age, one of the greatest of all time: “un des derniers troubadors” [“one of the last troubadors”];²⁸ “le seul prince écrivain, au plein sens de ce terme, de son époque” [“the only writer-prince, in the full sense of the term, of his epoch”].²⁹

Gaston’s native tongue was Gascon (*langue d’oc*), but, as Froissart tells us, he spoke excellent French (*langue d’oïl*); he wrote in Gascon, French, and Latin. The earliest work attributed to him is a love song composed for his fiancée, Agnès de Navarre, which was still sung in Béarn as of 1971.³⁰ Before the end of 1380, presumably in atonement for killing his only legitimate son and heir for attempting to murder him,³¹ Gaston wrote a series of thirty-six prayers, the first two in Latin and the

²⁷ One of Gaston’s admirers was the chronicler Jean Froissart, and it is from Froissart’s *Chroniques* that we glean much of what we know about the count of Foix. For the story of the spirit familiar, see Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (New York: Penguin, 1978) 295-302.

²⁸ Jean duSault, *La Vie Aventureuse de Gaston Phébus* (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1958) 173.

²⁹ Tucoo-Chala, *Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d’occident* 188. Two early studies of the life of Gaston are H. Gaucheraud, *Histoire des comtes de Foix de la première race* (Paris: A. Levasseur, 1834) and J.-M. Madaune, *Gaston-Phébus, comte de Foix et souverain de Béarn* (Pau: E. Vignancour, 1864). The enthusiasm of both of these authors for Gaston is clearly tempered by the fact that they consider him a poor model of behavior. Later studies tend to be much more wildly celebratory: duSault, *La vie aventureuse de Gaston Phébus* (1958); Tucoo-Chala, *Gaston Fébus et la vicomté de Béarn (1343-1391)* (Bordeaux: Bière, 1959) and *Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d’occident*. A compact but serviceable summary of Gaston’s life that takes all of the above sources into account is found in Gunnar Tilander’s edition of *Livre de chasse* (Karlshamn: E.G. Johansson, 1971).

³⁰ According to Tilander, *Livre de chasse* 6. I suspect that this information may be a bit outdated by this point.

³¹ Although it seems likely that Gaston’s hostile brother-in-law Charles le Mauvais de Navarre was trying to slip him some poisonous powder by way of his son, Gaston IV (at least according to chroniclers and critics) apparently did not understand that he was carrying poison, nor did he have any wish to assassinate his father. His uncle had told him that the powder was a love potion that would bring his estranged mother and father back together.

rest in French; the group is now known as the Livre des oraisons and is occasionally found with Livre de chasse in medieval manuscripts.³²

Edward of Norwich (Earl of Rutland, Duke of Albemarle, later the second Duke of York, and the villain of Shakespeare's Richard II) translated Gaston's text into English and adapted it for an English audience as Master of Game some time before 1413. Edward was only a slightly less colorful and untrustworthy character than his Gascon counterpart. In 1399, Henry of Lancaster overthrew Richard II and became King of England. Edward of Norwich, a cousin to both men, supported Richard until the King's capture, but took no action when Henry claimed the crown in 1399. Within six months of his surrender (or defection), Edward plotted the restoration of King Richard and subsequently took part in three conspiracies against Henry IV. Edward seems to have written Master of Game, which is addressed to the young prince Hal, as a gesture of reconciliation and a plea for pardon, one of many that he would make throughout his stormy political career.

The discussion that follows will focus primarily on Gaston Phébus' Livre de chasse (abbreviated as LC in citations) and Edward of Norwich's Master of Game (abbreviated as MG in citations), two of the most influential texts in the history of French and English hunting literature.

Thirteen ways of looking at a hunt.

To most modern readers, the medieval hunt appears to be a pleasant pastime without much real consequence except environmental damage. Although it was not an uninflected topic for the medievals – the peasants must have hated it, the bourgeoisie certainly envied it, the Church loudly condemned it while silently profiting from it –

³² Only two MSS of the Livre de chasse include the Livre des oraisons. Consequently, some scholars challenge the authenticity of the Oraisons. For a defense of their authenticity, see Pierre Tucoo-Chala, Gaston Fébus et la vicomté de Béarn 19-20.

we have no reason to think that they considered it to be anything more than another diversion of the wealthy, either. Yet despite its apparent transience, the medieval hunt was a multilayered and multifariously significant ritual. It was an integral part and indispensable tool of the medieval social economy, as well as a mirror of, and a commentary on, that economy. It was as much of an imaginative and social exercise as it was a physical one, and it is possible to distinguish at least thirteen important functions that it served in medieval life.

1. The hunt as ritualized warfare. Every hunt was a battle in the ongoing war between humans and beasts, civilization and wild nature. Men trained for war, and kept in fighting mettle between wars, by hunting; they used the same weapons and some of the same techniques against animals as they would against human combatants. In this sense, the hunting manual was a practical book of arms that described the battle tactics of tested soldiers, as well as an imaginative work designed to spur “soldiers” to “battle” (or remind them of previous “battles” they had fought).

2. The hunt as religious ritual. When a man hunted, he carried out the instructions that God gave to Adam and Eve: he demonstrated his dominion over, and his superiority in the food web to, all other creatures. The act of hunting was, in some sense, a communal worship, a demonstration of man’s faith in the immutable order of the universe and a ritualized celebration of his stewardship over the natural world. Even the post-hunt rituals had quasi-religious (though not necessarily Christian) overtones. The hunter’s work was thus divine, and, if he was careful not to forget his religious obligations, the manual writers assure him that he will automatically go to heaven.³³

³³ Compare Geoffroi de Charny’s very similar statements about the spiritual value of fighting: “But when in the profession of arms, in which one can and should win these high honors, one can indeed make one’s personal career honorably and valiantly and save one’s soul, as for example in the practice of arms in wars which have been begun in the proper manner and in due form and in the battles which ensue. This is the case when lords have wars, and their men can and should fight for them and move

However, men tended to attend to their hunting skills far more assiduously than they attended to the condition of their own souls. We have only to look at some of the more high-end hunting manuals, as beautifully decorated (and surely as expensive) as the finest Books of Hours, to realize that hunting *was* a sort of “religion” and that the manuals were “religious texts.” From this angle, the hunt was a set of rituals that exalted and celebrated the supremacy of its own devotees. The participants in a hunt were, in the baldest way, worshipping *themselves*: the strength of their bodies, the cunning of their minds. The successful hunter, like a god (to say nothing of *the* God), could defeat death over and over.³⁴ This may have been one reason why the manual writers declare the hunter to be naturally immune to Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery, but say nothing about the sin of Pride.

3. *The hunt as crusade.* The medieval battle against nature, tinged as it was with Christian symbolism, could be understood as a kind of crusade in which the object was not to recapture Jerusalem but to regain the original relationship between man and nature that had existed at the beginning of the world. In Eden, Adam and Eve had dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moved on the earth, and plants willingly gave up their fruit and seed to them;³⁵ it was a supremacy that was forever lost through the Fall. To reclaim control over wild animals and wild spaces – even if the only possible form of control was complete

confidently and bravely into battle for such causes, for if one performs there, one is honored in life, and if one dies there, one’s soul is saved, if other sins do not stand in the way of this” (Richard Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context, and Translation* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996) 165: 191-199).

³⁴ Compare Hemingway’s observation on the Spanish bullfight: “Killing cleanly and in a way which gives you aesthetic pleasure and pride has always been one of the greatest enjoyments of a part of the human race. Because the other part, which does not enjoy killing, has always been the more articulate and has furnished most of the good writers we have had a very few statements of the true enjoyment of killing. ... Once you accept the rule of death thou shalt not kill is an easily and a naturally obeyed commandment. But when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes; that of giving it” (*Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner, 1999) 184).

³⁵ Genesis 1: 28-29.

destruction – was therefore, perversely, to reclaim some part of Eden and recover some part of God’s original plan for the human race. Every field carved from forest or waste, every hunt, was another battle in the holy war against the hostile forces of the postlapsarian world.³⁶

4. *The hunt as judicial duel.* The judicial duel or battle (*duellum*) was a contest fought between two men in order to settle a question that could not be settled in any other way: God, so the theory went, would support the man He favored – regardless of the fact that the favored man might or might not be the man who supported the just cause. The confrontation between man and beast was a similar kind of judicial duel: in the final moment, a hunter could only trust in his own strength and in God’s grace to decide the matter. (However, the manual writers tend to take the utilitarian and not entirely reverent view that the aid of other hunters is as good as that of God, so long as it accomplishes the same end.)

5. *The hunt as a way to salvation.* Hunting is not only a symbolic war waged by man against the chaos of the natural world; it is also, as the manual writers explain, a key weapon in the continual war between man and his own baser nature, a way to rout the Enemy from the body and thereby regain the sovereign territory of the soul. Our manual authors explain that the surest way for a man to avoid the seven deadly sins is through hunting, because a keen hunter is too busy during the day and too tired at night to get into much mischief.

Premierement hon en *fuit* touz les sept pechiez mortelz, secondement
hon en est mielz chevauchant et plus viste et plus entendant et plus

³⁶ Ramón Llull, the author of an influential treatise on chivalry, makes explicit the implied connection between the human enemy and the natural enemy by comparing the knight’s destruction of evildoers with the axe’s destruction of the “evil trees”: “Thoffyce of a knyght is also to enserche for theues / robbours and other wykked folke / For to make them to be punysshed / For in lyke wyse as the axe is made for to hewe and destroye the euyllle trees / in lyke wyse is thoffyce of a knyght establysshid for to punyssh the trespassers and delynquaunts” (*The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*, trans. William Caxton, ed. A. T. P. Byles, E. E. T. S. 168 (London: Oxford UP, 1926) I.3/ 42: 8-13).

apert et plus aisié et plus entreprenent et mieulx cognoissent touz pays et touz passages. Et, brief et court, toutes bonnes coustumes et muers en viennent et la salvation de l'arme, quar, qui *fuit* les sept pechiez mortelz, selon nostre foy il devroit estra sauvé. (LC Prologue: 13-14, emphasis mine)

[First, a man flees all seven of the mortal sins. Secondly a man is a better rider and quicker and wiser and more candid and more at ease and more agile and more at ease and hardier and more familiar with all the countryside and all the paths. And, to put it briefly, all good customs and manners come from it, as well as the salvation of the soul, for, according to our faith, whoever flees the seven deadly sins must be saved.]

The repeated use of the word *fuit*, “flees,” is striking; it implies that the mounted hunter must elude the pursuing Devil in the same way that game animals attempt to elude the hunter. Therefore, at least insofar as our authors explain it, so long as the hunter continues to ride after his quarry, he also eludes temptation, or at least gives it a good run for its money. The Hunt, as conceived by the manuals, is at once physical and metaphysical: in its fully articulated form, it is a continual round of pursuit, a perpetual Wild Hunt, with sin chasing the hunter and the hunter avoiding sin at the same time that he runs after his animal quarry.³⁷ Clearly, however, just as a hunter’s conduct is worth more than the final outcome of his endeavor, it is his active avoidance of sin – and not his ultimate escape – that is all-important. We might extrapolate that the man who gives it the old college try in attempting to avoid sin (lechery, murder, treason, and otherwise; cf. our authors’ own lives) has already done his part: it is not his fault if, in the final analysis, he falls into the snares of the Devil anyway.

The authors’ peculiar insistence on this point is a direct rejoinder to the common medieval depiction of hunters as sinful men, a stereotype that presumably

³⁷ This image is reminiscent of the widespread literary and folkloric motif of the devil (or an unspecified fiend) as a hunter of men; see Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature 24-42.

originated with the Biblical characters of Nimrod and Esau,³⁸ and perhaps Cain as well.

6. *The hunt as homosocial ritual.* The medieval hunt was the equivalent of the modern-day golf game (or, perhaps, the modern-day hunting trip, depending on which demographic is under consideration): a way for men of the ruling class to establish, strengthen, and renew social connections with each other, as well as to affirm the group's collective identity, all within a purely masculine setting. Inviting a man to hunt or giving him game taken from one's own lands was an act of friendship; accepting an invitation to hunt was an act of trust because the sport provided the perfect conditions for a quiet and untraceable assassination.³⁹ The poaching of deer or the destruction of a park by a fellow aristocrat were considered grievous breaches of trust and irrevocable insults; they were crimes worthy of harsh retribution, at least in literature (e. g. *Sir Degrevant*, *Gamelyn*).

7. *The hunt as a form of social control.* Unoccupied men with weapons at the ready are a dangerous liability for everyone, and may even form seditious factions if they are idle for too long. Between wars, hunting not only kept their skills honed but also gave such men something at least marginally constructive to do.

Because the opposition was made up of wild animals instead of other men, the hunt naturally redirected hostilities outside of human relationships and bonded men in a common cause of indisputable necessity and validity. Men must have naturally

³⁸ Nimrod, a king of Babylon, "was outstanding as a mighty hunter – as the saying goes, 'like Nimrod, outstanding as a mighty hunter'" (Genesis 10: 9). Jacob, by means of a ruse, obtains his father Isaac's blessing while his elder brother Esau is out hunting; Jacob goes on to found Bethlehem, while Esau is damned to live "far from the richness of the earth,/ far from the dew of heaven above" (Genesis 27: 39) (*The Oxford Study Bible*, ed. M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller (New York: Oxford UP, 1992)). See Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* 39-42.

³⁹ For an examination of hunt-related assassinations or accidents of various members of the Anglo-Norman nobility, see Josiah C. Russell, "Death Along the Deer Trails" *Mediaevalia* 1.2 (1977): 89-95. Agreeing to hunt with a friend or enemy in the later Middle Ages seems to have been something like the modern practice of shaking hands upon meeting a stranger, a ritual originally intended to show that neither person's right hand held a weapon.

wished to gain the respect and admiration of their peers for their performance in the field, but self-aggrandizement was frowned upon. The success of a hunt was heavily dependent on the strict maintenance of the hierarchies of command, so hunting tended to encourage teamwork and discourage glory-grabbing, rivalry, and insubordination. Thus the manuals emphasize the cooperative process of the chase but greatly downplay (and sometimes even discount) the importance of the final confrontation with the animal, a feat usually accomplished by a single huntsman. At any rate, perhaps because so much of his work was solitary, the manuals make it clear that a hunter should take pride in his own work and comfort in the certain knowledge that God is looking on him favorably.

Furthermore, the formal rituals of the hunt were designed to defuse any tensions that might arise during the day's activities. Elaborate rules stipulated which hunters could claim "fees" from the animals they had killed or helped to kill, as well as what form those fees were allowed to take. If men disagreed over their share of the royal bowhunt, there were official procedures for redressing these grievances. Our authors also make clear that any personal conflicts should be informally addressed and resolved while drinking with one's companions in front of the fire after dinner.

8. *The hunt as symbol of dominance.* The hunt was the perfect forum for the display of aristocratic skill, influence, and, most of all, wealth and privilege. In order to hunt, a man had to own the lands on which it could be done, or at least enjoy the favor of some powerful personage, and he had to be able to afford to keep a good stable and kennel and support a large payroll of experienced huntsmen and foresters. The hunt was a public display of dominance over the countryside and its peasant population: if the hares or deer happened to run into the fields or villages, the huntsmen thought nothing of trampling the crops or evacuating the villages in order to flush them out. The hunt was sometimes also an unmistakably rude gesture directed

toward the clergy, who fulminated against the sport but were powerless to stop it. The forest itself was a permanent symbol of aristocratic dominance: depending on local laws, non-aristocrats might be prohibited from doing any damage to the boundaries of the forest (an area that often included non-wooded areas) or its flora and fauna, or even of bringing bows or unmutilated dogs inside of it.

9. The hunt as aesthetic form. The hunt was not only celebrated in, and was the inspiration for, all imaginable art forms from poetry to tapestry-weaving; it was also itself a kind of art. The stage for the hunt was set carefully, the terrain scouted out well in advance and all of the actors given explicit instructions for the roles that they were to play. After the quarry was dead, the last moments of the hunt were theatrically re-enacted: huntsmen held up the head of the animal and encouraged the dogs to bay it, and the pack was sometimes encouraged to savage the carcass. The cynegetical aesthete took sensual delight in the whole performance, enjoying everything from the beauty of the surrounding forest to the baying of the hounds (which were chosen for the pack on the basis of how well their voices blended with each other) to the intricate kinesthetic pleasures of watching a masterful carver at work.

10. The hunt as metaphor. The hunt was used as a common metaphor for many aspects of medieval life, both sacred and secular, and despite the fact that its various uses sometimes contradicted each other. Christ's apostles were "hunters of men" (Jeremiah 16:16) but the Devil was also a hunter of men's souls; in still another use of religious hunting imagery, Henry of Lancaster (not the future Henry IV), in his Livre des seyntes medecines, compares the confession of sins to the task of smoking a fox out of its den. A lover might be depicted as a huntsman, chasing down his beloved with dogs and arrows that represent his various stratagems; or, alternately, he himself might be a hunted animal, and the dogs and weapons the wounding glances and

gestures of his lady. A chaste and proper lady was a greyhound, a slatternly one was a cur. A good lover might be described as a tercel whereas a bad one was a vulture. A routed enemy might be compared to fleeing wild animals and their pursuers to hunters.

11. The hunt as apotropaic ritual. The hunt eradicated wildlife by brute force, but it was also a kind of sympathetic magic aimed at encouraging the natural world to submit to mankind. The cynegetical ritual was carefully rigged so that man was almost, though not entirely, certain to win. If men were guaranteed the upper hand by the use of traps or snares, then the hunt was nothing but a *petite chasce*, a “small hunt,” petty and ignoble. If, on the other hand, the animals were given too much of a chance to defeat their human enemies, well, that was just foolhardy and no one could be expected to shed a tear for such stupid or inept huntsmen. The art lay in creating the illusion of danger and uncertainty for participants and spectators alike, without ever placing the more important players in any more real danger than they could reasonably handle.

12. The hunt as a game. The hunt was a game played between two opposing “teams”: the hunters and their animal assistants (dogs and horses) on one side, and the wild animal(s) on the other. Though individual “players” and “teams” are replaceable and interchangeable, every game can only follow a limited number of known narrative trajectories: one side, human or nature, must “win,” though that victory can take many possible forms.

The game took place on a “playing field” whose nature was determined by that of the quarry: chamois in the mountains, otters in the rivers and fishponds, hares almost anywhere. The playing field might be delineated by man-made structures, some of them already part of the landscape and some of them erected specifically for the contest: fields, hedges, nets, walls of wattle or stone. The game could take many forms: a game of chance (bagging rabbits), a simple test of hand-eye coordination

(spearing otters), a camping trip (preparing to hunt chamois or ibex), a test of endurance (following a hare or deer from sunup to sundown), and, in the most noble hunts (of the red deer and boar), a hand-to-hand contest between a single man and a single beast in which either was quite capable of killing the other. Furthermore, and not incidentally, the hunt provided amusement and vicarious excitement for its spectators.

The hunt was a game, but it was not a “sport” in the usual sense of the word: as explained above, it was never intended to be a fair fight between man and beast, and the deck was stacked in the man’s favor every time.⁴⁰ John MacKenzie makes the distinction between “sport” and “ritual”: sport is designed to increase the difficulty for its participants; ritual, on the other hand, is designed to minimize it.⁴¹ To use MacKenzie’s terminology, the medieval aristocratic hunt was a game that masqueraded as sport but was, in fact, ritual.

13. The hunt as a source of consumable goods. Finally, and fairly incidentally, the medieval aristocratic hunt was a source of meat, hides, furs, and other animal products. Most of the carcasses gathered from an aristocratic hunt were given away to valued employees and non-hunting allies. Any remaining meat was immediately consumed in a banquet that was intended to simultaneously provide closure for the day’s activities, reward the huntsmen who participated in the hunt, and publicly display the power and influence of the resident lord.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hemingway’s assessment of the bullfight: “The bullfight is not a sport in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word, that is, it is not an equal contest or an attempt at an equal contest between a bull and a man. Rather it is a tragedy; the death of the bull, which is played, more or less well, by the bull and the man involved and in which there is danger for the man but certain death for the animal” (Death in the Afternoon 22).

⁴¹ MacKenzie, The Empire of Nature 10

Men who hunted for the pot were considered an inferior breed. Edward speaks disdainfully of the “bicchonters” who hunt the plebeian rabbit not for sport but for fur (MG 11: 1191-1193).

The above list should convince the reader that the medieval hunt, though ostensibly the most frivolous of activities, was far from trivial. It was the central hub of an immensely complicated web of cultural and social interactions and significances. On the literal and most easily apprehensible level, the hunt was a pleasurable form of recreation, an aesthetic and kinesthetic experience that was either directly experienced or observed, or indirectly experienced by way of oral or written accounts; it was also a social institution that provided a number of benefits (some of them spurious, some of them quite real) to its practitioners and kept the social hierarchies in place. Then, too, it was an activity that provided a template for creative imagination and self-fashioning. Men were encouraged to imagine that they were romance heroes and women that they were romance heroines, and that their lives were more interesting or privileged than they really were. At the most basic level, however, the hunt was important not for what it accomplished or purported to accomplish for its practitioners or their beneficiaries in this world or the next, but for its significance as ritual, symbol, and metaphor.

For the hunt is, at base, “deep play,” in the sense that Clifford Geertz has defined the term: that is, it is an activity whose cultural centrality cannot be fully accounted for by the sum of the physical and social benefits that it provides (as a source of food, recreation, physical exercise, martial training, or prestige). The true importance of deep play, whether it takes the form of a Balinese cockfight or a medieval hunt *a force*, is that it transforms the actual and physical into symbols for the

cultural and metaphysical; the play, in other words, becomes a powerful metaphor for life itself, as conceived by the people for whom the play has meaning.

The very *deepness* of the medieval hunt is evidenced by the energy with which its detractors argue against it and its apologists attempt to prove its utility – nay, its indispensability – to mankind. Neither side ever makes any headway (and, despite their bluster, both sides recognize the fact that they make no headway) because the hunt neither saves men nor damns them; it does not do much of anything, in fact, except very occasionally kill them. Its importance lies in the fact that it is an art form that “renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived.”⁴²

The hunt neatly embodies many of the important aspects of late medieval society, as they have been identified by critics like Johan Huizinga (*The Waning of the Middle Ages*) and D. W. Robertson (*A Preface to Chaucer*):⁴³ an insistence on the creation and maintenance of hierarchies, moral and otherwise; a delight in spectacle; a tendency toward flamboyance on the one hand and formality, ritual, and stylized expression on the other; strong religious feeling that nevertheless does not interfere with the secular activities of most people; a belief that anything that is immediately apprehensible, whether it be a landscape or the words of a text, is only the outer form

⁴² Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play,” *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991) 262.

⁴³ D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1962); Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, trans. F. Hopman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954).

Admittedly, the arguments of Huizinga and Robertson have fallen out of favor in recent years. Nevertheless, I allude to them precisely because they make the kind of broad assertions about broad cultural trends that scholars no longer feel comfortable making. Their arguments need not be flawless for their general ideas to be useful to us.

that symbolizes the real truth within; and, all the while, the acute consciousness that death might be around every corner.

The medieval hunt was in many ways a reflection and a product of the culture that produced it. It was vastly expensive and attended by all of the pomp and strictly unnecessary circumstance that its practitioners could afford. It was highly ritualized: it had its own hierarchies, its formal vocabulary, its special costumes, its forms that could not be violated. Everyone worked to ensure that its progress was as predictable as anything involving a terrified or enraged wild animal could be. Its progression from beginning to end was as inexorable, and as quick to swing between elation and tragedy, as a man's life on the Wheel of Fortune, or the steady march of history from Genesis to Armageddon. It was a completely secular activity about which everyone had strong religious opinions.

None of these parallels between the medieval hunt and the medieval world are particularly surprising. However, the hunt also serves to articulate a key aspect of medieval culture that probably was not even recognized by the medievals themselves: that is, the tendency to deal with disaster by aestheticizing it. Violence and suffering were so commonplace in medieval society that they went practically unnoticed; Gaston himself speaks casually of the annoying animal control problems that can arise when bodies are hung too low from the gibbets. Some bemoaned the chaos and disaster, but there were few attempts to address its root causes, and indeed some of these causes were probably not possible to remedy. The medieval answer to these problems was to celebrate turmoil, and thereby to contain it as much as possible, in the form of such things as tournaments, set-piece battles, duels, public executions, and religious artwork. If there was no way to make death either beautiful or orderly, then the only sensible thing to do was to remove oneself to a more agreeable place until the

unpleasantness had passed; and this is just what Boccaccio's party of young people do when the plague comes to Florence.

The chase imbued brutality and death with precisely the sort of tidiness and ceremony that was not always available in real life. It did nothing to disguise the bloodiness of the process or the suffering of the animal (though, strictly speaking, the medievals did not think much about animals' feelings at all), or even the human fatalities that sometimes occurred. Rather, its aim was to present the horrific as an object of beauty and a source of pleasure, to transform the agonistic and tragic into the ludic and aesthetic. William Somerville, writing in the eighteenth century, expressed his era's feelings about the immorality of war (and the jolliness of field sports, which had tamed considerably by his day) when he described the chase as "The image of war without its guilt." A medieval hunter might have put it slightly differently: "The image of war without its unsightliness."

In the chapters that follow, I will examine the hunt from most of the angles listed above. The first three chapters are devoted to the hunt as it appears in late medieval literature. In particular, these chapters explore the relationships, in terms of shared narratives, tropes, themes, and intended audiences, between the hunting manual and the chivalric romance. Chapters 4 and 5 expand on the idea of "deep play," demonstrating the ways in which the hunt and its literary representations both participated in and mirrored the hierarchies and exchanges of the medieval world as a whole. Chapters 6 and 7 take a wider view of the medieval manual as a genre, examining the techniques and motivations of arms and love manuals alongside those of the hunt manuals. Chapter 8 turns the original premise – that the hunting manual models itself on the romance – on its head and shows that romance writers were aware of, and sometimes borrowed, the conventions of the manuals. The Conclusion follows

the development of the hunting manual to the seventeenth century and the concomitant disappearance of the western European forests.