Chapter 2

Popularity

One purpose of this dissertation will be to prove something that seems, at first glance, to be curiously counterintuitive: namely, that the French and English medieval hunting manuals are popular, rather than didactic, literature. Before anything else, therefore, it will be necessary to define "popular literature," both in its medieval and wider historical contexts.

First, let us consider, in an admittedly unscientific and subjective manner, the common assumptions about what popular literature is and what it does. General wisdom, at least among certain circles, is that popular literature is unsophisticated, fit only for the vulgar and uneducated. It is widely marketed and sold, so it is available to everyone. It is not particularly difficult reading, so it is readable by everyone. It is plot-driven, sensationalist, and wrenches emotions from its credulous and ingenuous reader, who is not sufficiently developed to know that he is wasting his time and anaesthetizing himself (and likely avoiding the real problems of his own life or his society as a result) by reading such stuff. It is difficult to say what the opposite of "popular literature" is – "elite literature," perhaps, or *belles lettres*, or simply (in the parlance of chain bookstores) "literature," all of which of course are simply designations that imply "quality writing, not trash" – but whatever it is called, those who wish to be recognized as cultured and worldly take care to be seen reading the latter, not the former. If they do read the former, it has to be for "research" purposes or at least done with the proper amount of detached irony.

If we are to understand popular literature, we must first dispense with the elitism and obvious disdain of the above paragraph, though some of its general observations can be allowed to stand. We might say that popular literature, broadly defined, is any literature that "demands the minimum of previous verbal experience

and special education from the reader."[1] The common assumption is that popular literature is unsophisticated: why else would it appeal to an unsophisticated readership? However this is not necessarily the case; it is more accurate to say that a reader does not have to recognize and appreciate textual subtleties (of which there may be many) in order to enjoy a popular text, and that it is potentially enjoyable by sophisticated and unsophisticated readers alike. "Popularity," as the term applies to entertainment in general and to literature in particular, has less to do with a work's widespread appeal (as we use the word in casual conversation) or the socioeconomic profile of its audience (as its etymology would seem to imply) than it does with certain distinguishing features of the relationships between creator, text, and audience.

Simply put, the creator of popular literature seeks to know and satisfy his readers and to be duly rewarded for his efforts. He tailors his work to the desires, abilities, and needs of his readers rather than following his own artistic sensibilities, which may or may not be in conflict with theirs. Readers seek out popular literature because they are looking for a pleasant way to while away the time; consequently, popular literature is designed to entertain. It may have a lesson to teach, but any instruction or moralizing is subordinated, sometimes only barely, to the narrative. It never seriously challenges or questions the beliefs and desires of its readers. In order for literature to be popular, it must, above all, be ideologically comfortable.

The easiest and most common (and perhaps the only) way to create literature that consistently satisfies the requirements for successful popular literature is through the use of literary formulae: that is, structures "of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works."[2] It should be stressed, once again, that *formulaic* does not imply *inferior*: literary formulas would not exist if they did not speak to something very basic in human nature. A little consideration should convince

[1] Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976) 26.
[2] John Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1976) 5.

the reader that almost all literature, whether medieval or modern, "highbrow" or "lowbrow," is, to some degree, formulaic. Identifiably formulaic literature even holds a certain edge over more "elite" forms because, as John Cawelti points out, it is capable of evoking a far stronger emotional response in the reader.

> The uncertainty in a mimetic work derives from the way in which it continually challenges our easy assumptions and presuppositions about life. This tends to reduce the intensity of suspense effects since, it we perceive the world of the story as an imitation of the ambiguous, uncertain, and limited world of reality we are emotionally prepared for difficulties to remain unresolved or for resolutions to be themselves the source of further uncertainties. But if we are encouraged to perceive the story world in terms of a well-known formula, the suspense effect will be more emotionally powerful because we are so sure that it must work out.[3]

The success or failure of any given formulaic text does not depend on the underlying formula itself, but on the skill of its execution. A bad writer will follow a formula too closely and thereby leave his audience feeling bored and dissatisfied; or he may create a narrative that does not conform to the reader's expectations in certain key ways (in the case of the romance, with the death of the hero or the indifference of the love object, for example), thus making the reader feel unsettled and frustrated. A good writer, in contrast, subtly alters certain elements and plays off of others while always being careful not to deviate too far from the formula as a whole.

Formulaic writers are faced with the task of creating a "world" which is fraught with uncertainties yet in which everything turns out all right in the end. On the one hand, this invented world must be sufficiently close to our own that we can relate to the goings-on therein; on the other hand, it must be positioned at a far enough remove so that we do not carry the uncomfortable feelings that are evoked by reading (uncertainty, fear, discomfort, repulsion) back into the "real world" with us. Similarly,

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[3] Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, p. 17.)

although the protagonists must be enough like us that we care about them and worry for them, they must be different enough that we care to follow their adventures, and they must be in some way "better" than us so that we have the opportunity to indulge in an idealized self-image.[4]

The easily identifiable formulas of a popular text ensure that a significant number of people are likely to find it sufficiently escapist, but escapism is not a feature that can be "built into" a text: whether or not a given reader finds reading a certain text to be an escapist experience is a function of his own attitudes, predispositions, abilities, constraints, and motivations. In order to find a text entertaining, the reader must be able to use it as a basis for fantasy and thereby "involve" himself in it; in order for him to be easily able to do this, the contents of the text must be relatively familiar to him, a unique (but not too unique) version of something that he has already experienced and enjoyed.[5] A corollary to these observations is the fact that repetition is key to popular romance: the reader must repeat his experience of reading texts in a certain genre (so that he can become familiar with its conventions) and the genre itself must contain a number of repeated, easily identified elements. The importance and effects of repetition will be explored at length in the next chapter.

Furthermore, in order for a text to be escapist, the reader must be able to differentiate it from reality so that a fantasy remains viable and attractive without making him feel threatened or bored in "real life."[6] Of course, the ability of a reader

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[4] For a compelling, concise, and very readable discussion of formula literature, see Chapter 1, "The Study of Literary Formulas,"in Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance 5-36.

[5] Gary Alan Fine, speaking about fantasy role-playing games (which we might think of as popular literature brought to life), observes: "Referees and players attempt to create an aesthetically pleasing, engrossing, and exciting story; this story derives from the story formulas that participants have previously been exposed to – in school, on television, and in reading for pleasure (e. g., science fiction and fantasy)" (Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 240). See also Robert Warshow, "The Legacy of the 30's," The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 33-48.

[6] See Roger B. Rollin, "Against Evaluation: The Role of the Critic of Popular Culture," The Study of Popular Fiction: A Source Book (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989) 19.

to separate “fantasy” from “reality” depends largely on that individual's previous experiences of both life and literature, his or her degree of sympathetic or detached relations to the particular experience the work offers, and, at the most basic level, his or her mental sophistication (or competency). Thus a pleasurable read for one person may be a dull, uncomfortable, or unpleasantly terrifying read for another.

The escapist value of a work depends not only on the reader’s predispositions and abilities but also on the reasons why he is reading in the first place. The casual reader who has picked up a book because it looks “interesting,” the critical reader who is reading for “research,” and the compelled reader who is reading for “information” or otherwise working under duress (e. g. a student in a literature class) will all view the same text very differently. The person who has only just begun learning about a subject or is not sure about how he feels about it yet will probably read for information, not for pleasure. An enthusiast, on the other hand, often enjoys learning about all aspects of his chosen subject; the more enthusiastic he is, the more far afield his reading may lead him. For the enthusiast, re-reading information that is already familiar may be entertaining and deeply satisfying. But even the categories of “enthusiast,” “novice,” “researcher,” and so on are fluid ones: a reader may play different roles at different times or simultaneously. The scholar of popular literature may very well get pleasure out of what she is reading for “research purposes,” but once her research is behind schedule or not progressing as she feels it should, the material quickly ceases to be entertaining.

The statement “popular literature is primarily escapist, not didactic” is a useful guideline, but it has its limitations. A work cannot be securely labeled “escapist” or “didactic” in the same way that it can be branded as either “poetry” or “prose.” Again, into which camp a work falls is a function of the audience, the context, and the mode of reading, not of the literature itself. If a reader learns something during the course of reading, the acquired knowledge only adds to the pleasure of the experience; but if

everything is new to him, then the experience of reading may become suspiciously like work. What is didacticism or gibberish to the nonspecialist may be highly entertaining to the specialist. Nor are the two camps mutually exclusive: most works (one might argue, *all* works) have both didactic and escapist components; sometimes one component is a vehicle for the other, and sometimes they exist side-by-side.

Popular medieval literature is like popular literature in any age, insofar as the hoped-for relationship between creator and potential audience remains the same. However, critics do not entirely agree on what genres fell under the category of "medieval popular literature." Everyone agrees that chivalric romances are popular literature, but some critics seem to consider romances to be the *only* type of medieval popular literature.[7] Others cast the net more widely, including saints' biographies and chivalric or military treatises.[8] It seems reasonable to assume that most fables and fabliaux also fit into this category. There must have been a robust oral tradition of popular literature, including songs and folktales, but this literature has disappeared without a trace and we can only guess at what it must have been like by extrapolating backwards from later popular texts such as the printed ballads.

I

Popular literature

Romance as popular literature.

Most critics have broadly defined romances as narratives that emphasize and idealize chivalry, and sometimes love as well.[9] While the definition is useful, it does

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[7] E. g. Lee Ramsey, whose title says it all: Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1983).

[8] E. g. Janet Coleman, Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400 (New York: Columbia UP, 1981) 42.

[9] E. g. Helaine Newstead, "Romances: General," A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500, ed. J. Burke Severs, vol. 1, Romances (New Haven, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) 11; Albert C. Baugh, "The Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation, and Preservation," Speculum 42 (1967): 1-2; John Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance," Part I, Chaucer Review 15.1 (1980): 55.

not distinguish romances from other works that accomplish the same ends, such as biographies of fighting men (the Chandos Herald's The Life of the Black Prince, for example), chronicles, certain arms manuals, or amatory writings. In fact, the genre of medieval romance is so vast and varied that a firm, all-inclusive definition is hard to come by; it seems easier to describe what romances *are not*, rather than what they *are*.

Romances, it seems safe to say, are formulaic narratives written primarily for the entertainment of their readers; they are almost always secular, though they may contain religious (or anti-religious) sentiments; they are not political, though they may contain guarded political references or criticisms. Some romances claim to be telling a "true story" ("þis is no fantum ne no fabull," swears the narrator of The Avowing of King Arthur (l. 17));[10] some describe quasi-historic events and personages (e. g. the Charlemagne romances, the Crusade romances). Still others have a distinctly didactic or moralistic flavor (e. g. Sir Amadace, Sir Gowther, Sir Cleges, Sir Isumbras, The Anturs of Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne), an aspect that tends to have a detrimental effect on the whole. But no romance would claim to be a lesson in history, behavior, or religion. Even John Metham, the dreadfully earnest author of Amoryus and Cleopes, a romance so pedantic that its value as escapist literature is severely strained, makes it clear that his intent was to provide a pleasant but noncorrupting way for "folk" to pass the time:

> And thei that my sympyl wrytyng schal rede
> Of storyis of elde tyme, yf thei lyste, of ther godenes,
> Qwere thei Jon Metham in bokes fynde, pray for hym to spede
> In vertuys; for he of rymyng toke the bysynes
> To comforte them that schuld falle in hevynes
> For tyme onocupyid, qwan folke have lytyl to do,
> On haly dayis to rede, me thynk yt best so. (2206-2212)[11]

[10] The Avowing of King Arthur, ed. Roger Dahood (New York and London: Garland, 1984).
[11] John Metham, Amoryus and Cleopes, ed. Stephen F. Page (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan U, 1999).

> [And they who will read my simple writing about stories of olden times: if those people wish to do so, out of their own goodness, where they find the name of Jon Metham in books, [let them] pray for his success; for he took up the business of rhyming in order to comfort those who fall into dullness because of unoccupied time. When folk have little to do, as is the case on holy days, I think it is best to read.]

Northrop Frye puts “romance” (which he associates with folktales and *märchen*) on the opposite end of the spectrum as “realism”: “The realistic tendency moves in the direction of the representational and the displaced, the romantic tendency in the opposite direction, concentrating on the formulaic units of myth and metaphor.”[12] Popular romance is assembled from a set of predetermined “formulaic units” which range from those on the level of plot (the growth and development of the hero, the quest and return), to theme (the triumph of the noble character, the punishment and humiliation of dissenters), to characterization (the capable and masculine hero, the passionate but passive heroine), to description (the hair and eye color of the heroine or the appearance of the garden in which the lovers meet), to location (the court, the fairy castle, the wasteland). The trajectory of the romance follows certain predictable paths: for example, anyone, male or female, who enters a forest will encounter adventures that may or may not be supernatural in character but which are always life-altering. If someone in a romance were to enter the forest without consequence, then the reader would either have to deduce that the author did not understand the rules of the genre within which he was working, or else that the author intended to shock or surprise the reader (or, at the very least, to call attention to the reader’s expectations) by deliberately flouting convention.

Beyond these general and admittedly imprecise guidelines, the form and content of romances is almost unlimited: they can be masterfully or badly written, in prose or verse (rhyming, alliterative, or both), very long or very short, self-important or self-mocking, and concerned with the doings of peasants and the bourgeoisie as

[12] Frye, The Secular Scripture 37.

well as those of the aristocracy or nobility. Romances do generally concern themselves with the institution of knighthood and depict it in a favorable light, but on occasion they criticize it (as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight) or even satirize it (as in The Tournament of Tottenham); in fact, a few tell the stories of knights who perform no deeds of knightly prowess at all (e. g. Sir Orfeo). Most are concerned with men, but a few focus on the adventures of women (e. g. Emare, Lai le Freine). Although as a general rule they make clear distinctions between "good" and "evil," "right" and "wrong," a few of the more sophisticated do not (e. g. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Le Morte Darthur). They almost always end happily (for the hero, at least, though oftentimes for no one else), but a small minority end ambiguously (e. g. Valentine and Orson, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight). Romances dealing with the life and death of King Arthur (Le Morte Darthur, the alliterative Morte Arthur, the stanzaic Morte Arthure) are a special case, as they end with treachery and the downfall of a kingdom perforce. Nevertheless, these romances still follow the general pattern: chivalry is exalted, evil is punished (the traitor Mordred dies), wrongs are rectified (the adulterous Launcelot and Guinevere agree to abandon their affair), and the ending is still "happy" insofar as Arthur is taken to Avalon to be cured (or buried at Glastonbury with honors), perhaps to rise again.

Most romance writers succeed, to a greater or lesser extent, in creating successful works of escapist fiction for the simple reason that they are no more innovative than they have to be. They take pains to adhere to a certain predetermined narrative and ideological framework, often using characters and narratives which are already familiar to the audiences. Even innovative authors, such as the Pearl-poet, do not try to disturb their readers with too much novelty: Gawain may falter a little in courtesy but he cannot have his head chopped off, because the death of the hero would violate every rule of the romance. So long as they do not put in anything too surprising, authors are free to create whatever variations they wish.

As a general rule, composers, performers, and publishers of medieval popular romances worked for profit (generally monetary reward, but not always) and so sought to keep their audience's attention by any means possible. Romances drew their audiences from many sectors of society, and sometimes from several sectors at once, but the tactics for creating interest were generally consistent. Violence and erotic intrigue (and their hybrid, sexual violence) were sure draws, then as now; some romances – and some of the most successful, at that – consist of very little more than serial, graphic, and relatively offhand violence. Romances are, for the most part, unapologetic about their function as an escape hatch from the dullness and predictability of the "real" world.

Medieval popular romance, like popular literature in any age, created desires in its readers and went a long way (though not, we might expect, the whole way) toward fulfilling those desires. With few exceptions, the romance allowed its audience to experience life through the eyes of people who were blessed with exceptional beauty, wealth, strength, nobility, or luck, and often all of these things at once. Such characters were guaranteed to be attractive, regardless of the socioeconomic position of the audience: if the audience were non-aristocratic, the romance would have allowed them to vicariously enjoy the lives of their social betters, or at least vicariously enjoy what they imagined those lives to be like; if the audience were aristocratic, the romance flattered them by showing them idealized portraits of themselves and their own lives. Naturally, romances, like popular culture in general, only created desires in its audience that were socially acceptable and nonthreatening. Thus the heroine is always beautiful and chaste but she is never independent; the hero works for the common good and to uphold the tenets of chivalry, not for personal advancement (or, if he does work toward personal goals, as is often the case, those goals are perfectly in line with the best interests of society at large). By creating "acceptable" desires and then satisfying them entirely within textual boundaries – that

is, by keeping the experience of reading inwardly, rather than outwardly, directed – the romance served as a psychological stopcock, releasing tensions and fulfilling desires before they could build to hazardous levels.

Manuals as popular literature.

Although the intended audiences of the hunting manuals were not always identical to the (very various) intended audiences of the romance, they were written for the same reasons, create and fulfill the same desires, and reinforce the same ideologies. Both Gaston Phébus' Livre de chasse and Edward of Norwich's Master of Game were written for profit, albeit not the monetary profit that most romance writers sought. Using arguments that were already well established by earlier writers of hunting manuals, Gaston makes the grand if rather spurious claim that he has undertaken to write Livre de chasse "que chascuns saichent qui cest livre verront ou orront que de chasce je ose bien dire qu'il peut venir biau coup de bien" [so that everyone who sees or hears this book should know that much good can come from hunting, I dare say] (LC Prologue: 12-13). Edward claims, among other things, that he writes lest the huntsmen of Henry IV and V should be "vnknow in the parfytenesse of this artee" (MG 1: 81-82) and thus deprive the royal family of their wonted pleasures.

Despite their professed humanitarian intentions, however, our authors had little interest in philanthropy or friendly gestures. Gaston wrote Livre de chasse as a self-promotion stunt, for the same reasons that modern celebrities often write books about their particular fields of knowledge: not because they wish to further the education of the common man or ensure that their knowledge does not die with them, but because they wish to capitalize on, and thereby extend, their own fame. (The epilogue of the text seems to indicate that Gaston felt some remorse for a lifetime of spectacular sins, but there is little internal or external evidence to suggest that he envisioned writing the

book as an act of contrition.) Depending on which theory one chooses to believe, Edward's situation may have been appreciably more dire and his reasons for writing even more self-serving. If he wrote Master of Game while imprisoned for treason in 1405, then the manual must have been a plea for royal pardon and release. If he wrote it after that date, which seems more likely, then he was surely asking for recognition of his indispensability as Master of Game in the king's court and reminding his readers how detrimental it would be for royal sport if he were to be imprisoned a second time.[13]

As this dissertation will show, the hunting manuals depended on readers who read primarily for pleasure, and only secondarily (if at all) for information. Consequently, although they are framed as didactic literature and have a number of didactic elements, they are primarily works of popular literature, intended to provide escapist reading for their audiences. They do not tell their readers anything that they do not already know, and certainly do not tell them anything that they do not want to know.

We might think of the archetypal medieval hunting manual as something like William Twici's Le Art de Vénerie (c. 1323). This text is rhetorically simple and generally non-narrative, relying on formats (such as lists and series of questions and answers) that deliver the most information in the least amount of space. Interestingly, Twici's work adheres much more closely to the "modern" conception of a manual than does its successors. Livre de chasse and Master of Game take this simple prototype

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[13] William A. and F. Baillie-Grohman (*The Master of Game* by Edward, Second Duke of York: The Oldest English Book on Hunting (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909)) unhelpfully suggest that Edward wrote Master of Game while imprisoned (first in the Tower of London and later in Pevensey Castle) from February to November 1405 (xii-xiii) *and* that he wrote it at some point after his release from prison (xi).

James McNelis, on the other hand, estimates the date of authorship of Master of Game to be between 1406 (the year in which Edward became the king's Master of Game) and 1413 (the year in which Henry of Monmouth ascended to the throne). He suggests that Edward wrote the manual for Henry V for reasons of "patronage and gratitude," as well as the simple fact that the young prince was as avid of a reader as he was a hunter ("The Uncollated Manuscripts of *The Master of Game*: Towards a New Edition," diss., U of Washington, 1996, 9-12).

and infuse it with the narrative conventions of romance: romance-like characters operating in romance-like physical environments according to patterns based on romance narratives (as well as narratives typical to other genres). Like certain parasitic organisms, the hunting manuals intertwine themselves with the romances, feeding off of their structure and vitality, until it is impossible to say where the romance ends and the manual begins. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will prove that the opposite is also true: the romances in turn borrow the conventions of the hunting manuals and, in the most sophisticated cases, play off of their audiences' previous experiences with both hunting and manual-reading.

The manuals, like the romances, create socially sanctioned desires, then work to satisfy them. Both Livre de chasse and Master of Game encourage in their readers the desire for certain personal qualities and conditions (rather than desires for material objects, social status, or economic conditions, all of which are desires typically created by the romance, especially later romances intended for consumption by the bourgeoisie): skill; prowess; knowledge; courtesy; clean, "masculine" living. Uncoincidentally, these are the same traits that the typical romance hero possesses. All of these qualities, at least according to the fictions propagated by the manuals themselves, are theoretically attainable by any physically able, reasonably dedicated aristocratic male who follows the instructions contained within.[14] Of course, no one would have considered learning the art of venery from a book; the hunting manual is best thought of as a tangible symbol of aristocratic cynegetical skills – and, by extension, of the real possibility of romance-hero-status, if only in one's own imagination – not as the means by which one might attain those skills. Later readers, divorced from the original context of production and seizing on unprecedented

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[14] Tellingly, the two most famous American hunters of the twentieth century – the hunter-statesman Theodore Roosevelt and the hunter-author Ernest Hemingway – also patterned their behavior on this romance-hero model.

opportunity, *would* use the manuals as how-to books, as will be discussed in the Conclusion.

At first glance, the manuals seem inherently subversive: after all, they have the potential to put highly classified information into the wrong hands. It is therefore surprising that Gaston himself encourages this use of his book, urging "tout homme" (LC 60: 9) to learn to hunt, apparently regardless of caste or economic status. Yet the manuals ultimately reinforce, rather than overturn, social, economic, and natural hierarchies. Different kinds of hunts are appropriate for different kinds of hunters; animals, both wild and domestic, are categorized by their relative *noblesces*. The hunt party itself is a microcosm of the hierarchical world that the manuals describe: hunters are strictly organized according to age, experience, and function (which is itself determined by a combination of age, experience, and socioeconomic status). The manuals do not encourage any sort of transgression, including creativity (which is the transgression of intellectual and ideological boundaries): they prescribe how the "proper" things are "properly" done, and although there is a little leeway for interpretation of these rules, there is not much.

In the romance, our desires are centered on the hero and are satisfied passively, as we vicariously experience his successes and failures. Likewise, in the hunting manuals, we experience vicarious pleasure, and sometimes a little bit of pain, without ever once having to step out of doors ourselves. However, although the manuals have characters, they do not have "heroes" or even necessarily aristocratic protagonists; furthermore, they have narratives, but they do not have plots (I use the word "plot" in the sense of "overarching narrative"). The manual is, in a sense, *centerless*: it is not designed to be an independent work of art, only a filter and a template for our own memories, experiences, fantasies, and projections. It hangs suspended from the structural and ideological conventions of the romance on the one hand and from the imaginations and real-life activities of its readers on the other; if it loses either prop, it

loses all meaning. Thus the manuals are frankly tedious for the reader who does not have either the experience of reading medieval romances or of hunting medievally – or, even worse, of hunting at all.

The manual has no heroes of its own because *we* are the heroes of the manual-romance: we choose the roles we wish to play out of the many that are offered, and all of the other characters instantly become extras, aiding and abetting our own stardom. We are encouraged to "write ourselves into romance" in this way on two levels: on the level of the text, and on the level of personal experience.

In the first place, we are urged, almost forced, to cast ourselves as various characters in the manuals. The characters are attractive (robust, fearless, adventuresome, skillful; subordinate characters are obedient, as fits their station, but still admirable) yet nonspecific (they have no names, no distinct appearances, no histories, no thoughts), thus allowing us to easily imagine ourselves in their places. The *bon veneur* of the manual is, in fact, largely defined by, and commended for, his silence and anonymity:

> … 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)
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> … 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: 2191-2193).

He is generic enough of a fellow that we are not distracted by details of his person or character, but his actions are familiar enough that no reader, regardless of gender or experience in the field, would find it impossible to see aspects of his or her life in that of the *bon veneur*. In addition to hunting rare and marvelous beasts, he does all of the things that anyone does: he bathes, he sleeps at night, he snacks on "molés de gelines ou un pasté" ["cooked eggs or pâté"] (LC 44: 47). He gets hot, tired, dirty, and

hungry; he may be momentarily confused or unsure. However, he is never angry or despairing, and things generally turn out well for him. Mechanically, he is no different than we are; in terms of skill, emotional stability, moral rectitude, and divine favor, he is far superior.

Furthermore, the physical world of the manuals is close enough to our own world that we can easily imagine ourselves, as characters, operating within it. It has geological formations, weather patterns, and ecosystems that are indistinguishable from our own; the same physical laws apply over there as they do here. At the same time, the world of the manuals is in certain ways a looking-glass land, with idiosyncrasies and unexpected elements that only serve to make it more attractive than our own. There, time, space, and nature always conspire to make the hunter's job easier and more pleasant. Chance works in generally agreeable ways. Although certain unpleasant events (death, war, famine) do take place, as they do in our world, they always happen far away or in another time (in the past) or alternate reality (in the subjunctive, in a possible future), never right here and right now.

We are also invited to "inhabit" the lives of characters that we would never choose to play in real life. The manuals act as periscopes, allowing us to vicariously probe the experiences of others and share in the excitement of their adventures without directly involving us in anything dirty, dangerous, or demeaning. Thus we see the hunt not only from the perspective of the attendant lord or the Master of Game but also from that of the *lymerer* (the hunter who goes out to search for the game), the archer hidden behind a tree, the poacher setting traps in the night, and the kennel boy sleeping and eating with the dogs. The narrative camera even allows us to experience the lives of animals.

Of course, most types of literature, including the romance itself, allow us to vicariously experience the lives of their characters to a greater or lesser extent. The manuals are unusual in that they not only encourage us to write ourselves into their

romance-narratives but also actively invite us to imagine our own lives as romances, and ourselves as the heroines and heroes of them.

The typical romance hero's career is composed of physical combat, lovemaking, and hunting, all in varying quantities. The typical romance heroine's life is spent as a rallying point and an impetus for brave deeds (even those heroines, such as Bevis' Josian, who have adventures of their own): she is the object of the hero's love, the point of his fighting, and the alternative to his hunting, which is frequently itself a metaphor for his pursuit of her. Medieval aristocratic men consciously imitated the heroes of romance and antiquity; women did the same, though to a lesser extent. Yet not every one of the aristocratic pursuits was equally conducive to successful role-playing. Combat had to be formally scheduled (by way of a war or tournament) and often ended unhappily. Love could be imagined at any time, but unreciprocated romantic play-acting is fundamentally unsatisfactory; and, in any case, things often end unhappily in this department, as well. All things considered, hunting was the most readily available source for a rewarding fantasy.

If one had the resources, one could hunt – and thereby enact a romance – every day. Furthermore, because the entire household participated in the hunt, either directly or indirectly, anyone with sufficient social standing could imagine his or her life as a romance. The able-bodied men[15] hunted and killed the animal, but others were present at the symbolic banquets during and after the hunt, and often as spectators of the event itself. Thus every time a relatively common and mundane event occurred, ordinary gestures and objects took on a special glamour: the house was transformed into

[15] A few cynegetical writers refer to women hunters, as will be discussed in Chapter 7. However, it would seem that women were probably not regular participants in the medieval hunt, though it is also likely that authors were less interested in describing female hunters than they were in describing male hunters.

Caerleon, the park or woods into Broceliande, the huntsman's customary report on the state of the game into the sighting of a white hart on Pentecost.[16]

The manuals encourage able-bodied men to remember, anticipate, or imagine themselves in heroic roles. Unfit men can imagine themselves able-bodied. Even women, who barely receive mention in the manuals, are still written into the manual-romance by implication. In the romance, women are passive but often the centers around which narratives revolve, as men perform physical feats for their defense or approval. Thus, with a little imagination, a dead deer – in actuality, the quite incidental product of a day of outdoorsy masculine fun – is easily transformed into a humble offering by a romance hero to his beloved, tangible proof of his virility and of her desirability. (We should of course not discount the possibility that some women may also have used the manuals subversively, as a way of inconspicuously observing a sector of life that was otherwise barred to them.) By following the models set forth in the manuals, the reader can be as chaste as Galahad, as brave as Bevis, as adroit and knowledgeable as Tristram, as universally beloved as Lancelot – or, on the other hand, as sought-after as Iseult. There is no possibility of being a Kay or a Guinevere.

At the same time that the manual imports fantasy into real life, it also demystifies the way that the fantasy works. After all, the aristocratic huntsman participated in no more than ten or fifteen percent of the hunt. Most of the real work was done behind the scenes, and a good deal of the suspense and danger was experienced back there, too: consequently, the inside of the hunt, like the inside of the forest in which it took place, normally remained hidden to even the most privileged

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[16] John Cummins makes a similar point, suggesting that "in the minds of the more imaginative an awareness of the literary may have strongly conditioned the delight in the practical" (The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting (New York: St. Martin's, 1988) 9).

Robert Warshow makes a strikingly similar point regarding the impact that the mass culture of the 1930s had on its consumers' consciousnesses: "… the chief function of mass culture is to relieve one of the necessity of experiencing one's life directly…. Mass culture … seeks only to make things easier. It can do this either by moving away from reality and thus offering an 'escape,' or by moving so close to reality as to destroy the detachment of art and make it possible for one to see one's own life as a form of art" ("The Legacy of the 30's," 38-39).

aristocratic male. But from our god-like perspective as readers of the manuals, we are able to both see the workings of the hunt spread before us in miniature and dart in and out of the lives of subordinate characters, all without ever once having to sully our hands.

Knowing how the game works does not make the experience of playing it any less magical: it merely makes it more complex, as well as infinitely replicable. The romance *is* popular culture; the manual invites its readers to continually *create and re-create* popular culture. We might even say that the manual is the vehicle for the creation of an ephemeral mass culture, manufactured and consumed by the people themselves.[17]

II

The ideology of popular literature

Popular chivalric romances, like all popular literature, are extremely conservative: they always uphold the audience's hopes and beliefs (which differ slightly from audience to audience) and resolve themselves with happy endings, though the "happiness" of some of the endings is debatable. Their narratives involve all sorts of social upheaval – Saracen invasions, princes kidnapped by pirates, princesses forced to marry pagan kings or evil barons – but in the end, the disruptions

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[17] The phrase "mass culture" is a admittedly an anachronistic one. When T. W. Adorno initially coined the phrase, he was referring to the products of a mechanized "culture industry" that imposes its standardized products on the populace, thereby creating in them a desire for ever more standardized products and a distaste for all products that do not conform to their pre-conditioned desires. The phrase is clearly pejorative and the products of "mass culture" are assumed to be inferior ("Culture Industry Reconsidered," The Study of Popular Fiction: A Source Book (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989) 52-59).

However, with some important alterations, Adorno's general idea is applicable to the relationship between the medieval aristocracy (and their enviers and imitators) and medieval popular literature. First, medieval readers did not look for original ideas and presentations so much as pleasing re-workings of well-known material, so it would be incorrect to denigrate the medieval "culture industry" for its inevitable "lack of originality." Second, the medieval "masses" were more exclusive than inclusive. Finally, the "industry" that produced the culture and dictated the tastes of the medieval aristocracy and bourgeoisie was an entirely self-contained system, fostered by and replicated within those classes who consumed it, not imposed on them from above.

are always smoothed over and the society reintegrates itself, usually exactly the way it was before. The instigators are easily identifiable and usually unambiguously bad. There is hardly ever any exploration of criminal psychology, rarely any interest in contingencies or circumstances: wrongdoers are simply evil and must be must be cast out, killed, or (on occasion) brought to reason. Ironically enough, the process of bringing society back to order usually creates far more havoc, and claims far more lives, often well into the tens of thousands, than did the original transgression. At the beginning of Bevis of Hamptoun, Bevis' mother kills her husband and remarries the evil emperor of Almanye, who deprives Bevis of his patrimony and tries to do away with him. All of the astounding violence that follows, including the deaths of the offending parties and of at least 32,000 innocent Londoners, is in the interest of peace, justice, and the greater good.

The threats to order in the romance usually come from outside of society. Saracens and other pagans menace the protagonist and must be exterminated; the king from the next kingdom who wishes to marry the heroine against her will must also be exterminated, or at least disabled. When the trouble comes from inside the society or family, the instigators are always far outside of conventional morality, a societal cancer that must be removed at any, and usually at great, cost. In all cases, the sources of trouble are localized and unmysterious: hostile armies, uncooperative individuals, or, occasionally, monsters or monstrous animals. They are never overly complex (political or economic problems), ambiguous (internal dissension), or beyond the ability of the hero to rectify (acts of God). The ease with which problems are identified, in popular romance as in all popular literature, accounts for a large part of the appeal of the genre. It is only in fiction that life loses its uncomfortable ambiguities.

It is important to note that, in the context of the popular romance, "right" and "wrong" are not moral judgments *per se*. After all, the romance hero himself is often

a distressingly and unnecessarily violent person with few social skills and little compassion, yet no one thinks to question the implicit "rightness" of the bloodbaths that he tends to leave in his wake. Conversely, although Saracens and pagans are always "wrong," this wrongness is not so much due to their incorrect religious beliefs (which are rarely alluded to except in the most general terms) or moral shortcomings as it is to their hostile behavior toward the "right" side. It is probably most helpful to think of "right" and "wrong" as indicators of personal and political alignment (with or against the hero) and, by extension, of success or failure. The hero's enemies are "wrong" because they oppose him; his friends are "right" for the sole reason that they are his friends. No matter what the hero chooses to do – to use force or diplomacy, to fight or to surrender, to keep loyalty or to betray – he will succeed; on those rare occasions when he fails, his failures are minor or at least temporary. Success, in these terms, is not a matter of choosing the correct course of action: even if the "wrong" characters do exactly the same things that the hero does, they always fail spectacularly. To put it another way, the hero succeeds for the simple reason that he is the hero and this is his romance.

Romances always work toward the reintegration of society as it was before, or toward the establishment of a new society that only differs from the old insofar as it rectifies specific problems inherent in the original; they never endorse a complete overhaul. Though a romance protagonist may step temporarily outside of the system in order to fight against its evil elements, he never works to overturn the system and always re-enters it once he is finished. When Sir John steals Gamelyn's inheritance, Gamelyn is forced to live on the fringes of society, poaching deer and generally creating headaches for his usurping older brother. But Gamelyn does not *want* to live in the woods as an outlaw; he has no choice in the matter. While he is an outcast from society, he does not urge oppressed peasants to collectivize, nor does he campaign for democracy: rather, he focuses all of his energies on getting back what he had before

and punishing those who took it away from him. Gamelyn's outward resemblance to others who have been wronged and dispossessed is only superficial and temporary.

Usually, the only change that needs to take place in the society is a change in leadership, from an illegitimate (and therefore bad) leader to a legitimate (and therefore good) leader. If there are any other necessary changes to be made, they are guaranteed to come off smoothly. At the end of Amoryus and Cleopes, all of Persia suddenly decides to discard its necromantic heathendom for Christianity, a conversion quite unrelated to the rest of the narrative. This radical shift in religious orientation is purely mechanical, devoid of political or social ramifications, and uninteresting to both author and audience. It is both vitally important and utterly mundane, merely the last necessary step before everyone can live happily ever after.

The theme of most romances is chivalry, and the aim of most romances is to glorify it.[18] However, so far as the romances go, chivalry is often not so much a definable code of behavior to which knights are expected to adhere as it is an automatic possession of the knight, like a sword or a steed. Knights are knightly for the simple reason that they are knights, and apparently regardless of how they behave. The knights of popular romance, after all, do not always behave well. Bevis kills tens of thousands of his own countrymen, even though they have only attacked him because they are told that he is Bevis' murderer. In The Jeaste of Sir Gawain, Gawain has sexual relations with a woman; when her male relatives protest, he fights and wounds all of them. After creating so much havoc, he slips away on a lame pretext and the woman is subsequently beaten and abandoned by her family. The End. The author of the Jeaste seems incapable of conceiving that these multifarious demonstrations of masculinity could be anything other than praiseworthy.

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[18] Interestingly enough, the romance as a genre touts chivalry as an ideal long after chivalry was a practical proposition; strikingly, it is often the later romances (e. g. The Lyfe of Ipomydon, early 15th c.) which praise chivalry the most and draw the most detailed pictures of the "good knight."

A number of romances deal with the theme of social climbing, a theme that would seem to violate the rule stated above, that the romances never advocate a fundamental change in the fabric of society. Generally, however, the "climbing" is illusory: the protagonist may be a nobleman who has been deprived of his patrimony and must regain it (e. g. Bevis), or an aristocrat raised as a peasant who must rediscover his own innate nobility (e. g. Perceval). Some later romances do describe the advancement of a lowly man (e. g. The Squyr of Low Degre, Rauf Coillyear), but even then, the protagonist has no dangerous socioeconomic aspirations: he merely acts according to his inner promptings and is astonished and grateful when he is rewarded by those higher up. For example, the Squire of Low Degree is in love with the daughter of the King of Hungary, whose father heartily approves of the match:

> For I have sene that many a page
> Have become men by mariage;
> Than it is semely that squier
> To have my doughter by this manere,
> And eche man in his degree
> Become a lorde of ryaltye,
> By fortune and by other grace (The Squyr of Low Degre, 373-380)[19]
>
> [I have seen many a page become an [aristocratic, noble] man by marriage. Therefore, it is seemly for my squire to have my daughter in this manner, and for every man, regardless of rank, to become a lord of royalty, by means of good luck and the grace of God.]

This is unmistakably the querulous voice of bourgeois aspiration speaking, but the sentiment is sanctioned, and its potential disruptiveness defused, by being put (unbelievably enough) in the King's mouth, not the Squire's. The Squire has nothing on his mind except love, and when he becomes the king's heir at the end, he is the only one who is surprised.

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[19] In Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Donald B. Sands (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

The world of the romances rests on some basic assumptions: the oldest son (no matter how young or apparently incompetent) has the right to inherit his father's estate, unless another son is the hero of the romance, in which case *he* has the right to inherit his father's estate; inner nobility deserves to be matched with an appropriate social status; the heroine both wishes and deserves to marry the hero; chivalry is the greatest ideal to which one can aspire; society, if disrupted, must be rebuilt exactly as it was before; Christians are good and all others (regardless of the fact that they may walk, talk, and act exactly like Christians) are not; those who deny any of the aforementioned assumptions must be brought to reason in any way possible, even if many bystanders have to be taken down with them. Although the audiences of popular romances would probably not have agreed with all of these assumptions as far as they applied to their own lives and societies, they expected to see them played out in literature.

The point of the hunt, like the point of the romance, is to subdue the chaos of the "outside": in the former case, "outside" means "outside the social order"; in the latter case, it means "outside the walls of the castle or house." Inside, all is harmonious and courtly: superiors are always just, subordinates are always completely and contentedly subordinate, and no one has any serious quarrels with anyone else. Outside, all is more or less chaotic. There are areas of human cultivation, but these are regularly overrun by animals and absorbed back into the primeval forest. The threats to society always come from the outside, and the enemies are always clearly defined: the bear is eating the livestock; the wolf is eating the shepherds; the fox is eating the rabbits; the otter is eating the fish from the fishpond; the boar is eating nothing of particular value but is a nasty animal anyway. The menace is always completely known and supremely manageable. Each of these animals can be hunted down and killed, in any one of the clean, efficient, and generally agreeable ways that are clearly outlined in the manuals. Men and dogs can be killed in the course of the hunt, of

course, but when they are, it is because they were foolhardy or unlucky – and, anyway, they were never anyone you really knew. Of course, although the threats to livestock and peasants are real, the threats to aristocratic hunters are contrived and orchestrated by themselves. A boar is undoubtedly a very dangerous animal, but no one asked them to make it angry and then stand in front of it. Ultimately, the dangers of the aristocratic hunt are managed and temporary; they can be called up at any time, dealt with at leisure, and pleasurably dispatched with. In the world of the manuals, there are no dilemmas that cannot be solved by the manuals themselves, none of those quotidian annoyances of the real world: peasant revolts, plagues, famines, wars. Life becomes as neatly self-contained as a good story.

Romances begin when an outside threat overturns the social order; [20] the hero must venture into the heart of the chaos and untangle the resulting snarls one by one, a process that often causes secondary and tertiary problems to arise and be dealt with in their own turn. Similarly, the hunt begins with an outside threat (whether real, imagined, or contrived) that draws huntsmen into the chaos of the natural world; the hunt that follows is likewise a process of disentanglement. A viable trail must be picked out of the palimpsest of the forest, then a single animal must be culled out of the herd and flushed out of hiding. In the process of the search, other difficulties may arise which must then be dealt with: trails may disappear, dogs may be lost, the weather or terrain may become unfavorable. Once the animal is killed, its barbaric guts and body parts must be cut apart "properly" and re-assembled in a "civilized" way – head carefully removed and put to one side, various organs threaded on sticks – until the animal is nothing but a pleasing collage of cutlets. The hunters use every part

[20] An interesting point of comparison between the narratives of the hunt and the folktale is suggested by Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: U of Texas P, 1968). Propp notes that a folktale always begins with a *villainy* or a *lack*. The hunt is likewise always actuated by one or both of these motivations. In the case of the hunts of the *bestes noires* (carnivores), the motivation is generally a *villainy* committed by the animals; in the case of the hunts of the *bestes rousses* (herbivores), the motivation is a *lack* – a lack of food because animals have been pillaging the fields, or a lack of excitement on the part of the hunter.

of the animal, though not all of the uses are strictly utilitarian. Various parts of the carcass are parceled out to dogs and hunters as a reward; meat is sent to local gentry and clergy as gifts of goodwill; the head is used as a dog-training device; the hide becomes the receptacle out of which the dogs are fed; the corbie's fee is thrown to the corbie. The choicest meats are brought back inside, where they are cooked and consumed with all of the ceremony that the household can muster. Danger has been fabricated, faced, and defeated, and order has once again been restored, all in less than a day's time.

As I have suggested above, the manual serves the same ideological functions as does the romance. Regardless of its outward appearance, it is conservative rather than subversive. Manuals were written for audiences who had a great deal of interest in preserving the status quo. Even the nonaristocratic audiences of later printed manuals had no desire to overthrow the caste system: they merely wanted to move themselves up its ranks. The manuals describe a system of social climbing, but, as in the romances, aspirations are always controlled and hierarchies are never threatened. Although both authors voice bourgeois sentiments in their opening statements, they promptly proceed to either ignore or mock them. The poor and disadvantaged do not try to muscle in on aristocratic privilege; they stay comfortably in the background, peacefully tilling the fields and occasionally getting carried off by wolves.

The boy of Livre de chasse 22-60 climbs through the ranks of the huntsmen, from *page* (at the age of seven) to *valet* (at the age of fourteen) to *aide* (at the age of twenty) and finally to *veneur* (presumably when his superior dies or becomes disabled). However, his advancement is a consequence of the inexorable movement of time and, until the final step, the permission of his superior (who is authorized to beat him energetically when he does not obey), not of his own demands. The young huntsman has no ambitions or grievances: he seems to be content to sleep in the kennels, work for free, and subordinate his personal life to the exigencies of his

profession. When he achieves the status of *veneur*, he is content. He never wishes to become the *maistre veneur* – an aspiration that would, incidentally, overturn the manuals from the inside, as *maistre veneur*, or master of game, is the title held by the narrators themselves. The aristocratic hunt is a large-scale bureaucracy, with all of the redundancies and inefficiencies that one expects of such a system. If this bureaucracy is to be successful, everyone must be content to remain in his own place and do his own job; discontent is disruptive and aspiration is deadly.

Like humans, the nobler animals also move through their own ranks in a controlled and predictable way. The first year (in the English system), the male red deer is a *calfet*; the second year, a *bullok*; the third year, a *broket*; the fourth year, a *stagard*; the fifth year, a *stag*; the sixth year and following, a *hert of x*. He only becomes proper quarry, and an entirely noble adversary for the huntsman, in his sixth year; before this, he is *rascaile* or *folie*. The boar moves through a similar progression. But, as with the incremental promotions of the young huntsman, these transitions are not so much instances of vertical "climbing" as they are lateral movements along a timeline. Nor is the hierarchy of species ever disrupted: an underage or female red deer may be *rascaile*, but it is always more noble than a rascally badger or fox.

III

Frame stories and imagined communities

In the process of entertaining without causing its audience ideological discomfort, popular literature performs another function, less obvious but ultimately far more important: it binds the fabric of a particular sector of society together, reinforcing the status quo and subtly bringing dissenters into line. By speaking to a certain pre-fabricated version of "the people" (who may or may not be the *vulgus* and are very often quite sophisticated), popular literature forces readers to fictionalize

themselves accordingly. If we wish to participate in the experience of reading, we must temporarily become who the author wants us to be. Therefore, at the same time that the author of popular literature seeks to know and address the beliefs and desires of his audience, he also seeks to *re-create* his readers, however slightly.

It is often possible to identify two different intended audiences for popular literature: the people to whom the author or narrator most loudly addresses him- or herself (a group that I will call the *primary audience* or *readership*) and the people who are actually invited, expected, or hoped to read and/or listen (the *secondary audience*). The primary audience, who may or may not actually exist, is often composed of superior sorts: nobles or aristocrats, the well-informed, the well-traveled, the ultra-fashionable, the kind of people whom the author wants to read his work and the kind of people whom the audience themselves want to be. Members of the secondary audience, who are often humbler and less knowledgeable, have a real interest in (and sometimes a desire to emulate) the lifestyles of the idealized rich and famous.

The most common way that romance authors indicate the identities of their primary audiences is by positioning their narratives within a fictional situational framework; this framework may be more or less elaborate, but it is always at least implicitly present. Often, we are asked to imagine that we are in the same physical space as the narrator as he “sings” or “talks” his story; in order to make this fiction more convincing (and perhaps as a relic from the time when oral tags were necessary components of a storyteller’s performance), narrators often interrupt their stories to tell their audiences to pass the ale, pass the hat, or hold their tongues. Sometimes the romance narrator casts himself as not a performer but a writer (often translating out of a “French book”) and the audience as readers or listeners of his tale. The implied primary audience may be a more or less heterogeneous group of commoners:

> Lytyll and mykyll, olde and yonge,
> Lystenyth now to my talkynge (Octavian, 1-2)[21]
>
> [Little and great, old and young, now listen to my talking]
>
> Herkneth to me, gode men,
> Wives, maidnes, and alle men,
> Of a tale that ich you wile telle,
> Who-so it wile here and ther-to dwelle. (Havelok the Dane, 1-4)[22]
>
> [Hearken to me, good men, wives, maidens, and all men. Listen to a tale that I will tell you, whoever wishes to stay to hear it.]

Such addresses suggest that the reader is to imagine himself in a crowd in a public gathering-place, perhaps a marketplace or a tavern, where people are continually coming and going and are apt to be noisy and inattentive. Sometimes the primary audience is a more elite group and the implied circumstances far more formal:

> Lystonnyth, lordyngus, a lyttyll stonde
> Of on that was sekor and sounde
> And doughty in his dede. (Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle, 1-3)[23]
>
> [Listen, lords, for a little while, to the story of a man who was sure and true and brave in his deeds.]

Occasionally a clever writer will use these conventions for comic effect, inviting a secondary audience of clearly low-class readers or listeners to adopt an aristocratic primary audience persona. In the rollicking romance describing the adventures of Gamelyn – who, though the youngest son of a wealthy knight, is incongruously adept at wrestling, poaching, and brawling, presumably the very sorts of pastimes enjoyed by the author's "real-life" secondary audience – the listeners are addressed with the usual patrician titles in an unmistakably ironic manner:

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[21] In Six Middle English Romances, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London: J. M. Dent; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973).
[22] In Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Sands.
[23] In Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan U, 1995).

Litheth and lestneth and holdeth youre tonge
And ye shull heere gamen of Gamelyn the yonge.
Herkneth, lordinges, and lestneth aright,
Whan alle gestes were goon how Gamelyn was dight. (Gamelyn, 341-344)[24]

[Hearken and listen and hold your tongue, and you shall hear about the (sporting, games) of Gamelyn the young. Hearken, lords, and listen closely, to how Gamelyn was treated when all the guests were gone.]

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in particular, makes a running joke of these shopworn primary-audience conventions. Despite the fact that the party of pilgrims is a rather disreputable lot and includes only two members of the first estate, the storytellers use the conventional, and laughably inappropriate, addresses at the beginnings and ends of their tales: "lordings" (e. g. Summoner's Tale 1668, 1709; Franklin's Tale 1621; Pardoner's Prologue 329, 456), "sirs" (e. g. Reeve's Prologue 3909; Franklin's Prologue 716), and the Man of Law's fulsome "O riche marchauntz, ful of wele been yee,/ O noble, o prudent folk" (Man of Law's Prologue, 122-123).[25] Chaucer, of course, gives himself the best lines of all. He addresses his deliberately awful chivalric romance to an audience of dissolute religious figures, petty businessmen, and scam artists using just the right tone of deferential irreverence:

Now holde youre mouth, *par charitee*,
Bothe knyght and lady free,
And herkneth to my spelle; (Sir Thopas, 2081-2083)[26]

[Now, hold your mouths, by God's grace, both knight and noble lady, and listen to my story]

There are a number of possible permutations of the situational fiction, but certain aspects remain constant: the narrator is always an "I" who is always addressing a (plural) "you." Furthermore, both the narrator and the primary audience share, if not

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[24] In Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Sands.
[25] The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
[26] The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Benson.

always the same physical space or socioeconomic bracket, at least a common culture and a common history. When the romances refer to the audience as "lordings" or "nobles," it is often difficult to tell whether they are indeed addressing assemblages of aristocrats (which must have been true sometimes, especially with the earlier romances), or whether they merely intend to flatter or amuse their audiences. However, whether or not we are *really* "lordings," and whether or not addresses of that kind are meant to be respectful or ironic are, for the most part, irrelevant concerns. What is important is that we have, by the act of reading or listening, implicitly agreed to fictionalize ourselves as members of a group, with all of the preconceived notions and assumptions that the author dictates we are to have: lords, townsfolk, or townsfolk who are witty enough to share in the joke when they are called "lords." As a result, and without our explicit permission or notice, the romances induct us into real or imagined communities of listeners or readers.

It is helpful to think of this narrator-audience fiction as a quickly sketched "frame story." This narratorial conceit generally appears at the beginning and (usually cursorily) the end, and, if it is divided into distinct sections ("fitts"), sometimes at narrative junctures throughout the romance (e. g. Gamelyn). Often, however, the authors treat the narrator's address to his audience as an opening formula with the force of "Whilom," "Once upon a time": that is, a stock phrase that, while not particularly meaningful in itself, acts as a symbolic portal into the world of fantasy. Regardless of what form it takes, the frame, like the physical object after which it is named, both contains and supports the narrative within. It is impossible for any single story to adapt itself to every possible audience, so the frame adapts every audience to its story. It imposes on its hearers and listeners an identity that benefits the author (it makes us into an audience that the author might have in the future, an ideally receptive or appreciative audience) and/or his hearers and listeners (it transforms us into superior or ideal men and women). By providing a plausible reason for the recital of

the romance and a ready-to-wear identity for both narrator and audience members, the frame story transforms the narrative into a self-contained entertainment kit.

Romances addressed themselves to ideal audiences of attentive (or inattentive but easily silenceable) listeners or readers, often creating fictional aristocratic primary audiences into whose shoes a non-aristocratic secondary audience could slip. Although the audience fictions of the hunting manuals follow the same general principles, they are appreciably more complex. In the first place, the primary audiences for the manuals were very specific. Gaston dedicates his book to Philippe de France, Edward addresses Master of Game to Prince Hal. Both works could be reasonably expected to find limited secondary audiences within their respective royal circles. Yet the authors found that the specificity and knowability of their audiences complicated, rather than solved, the problem of address. How could they justify projects that were, for all intents and purposes, useless? How could they impart (or show off) information that their readers obviously already knew?

Their answer was to set the information within "frames" which, much like the situational frames of romance, automatically create a body of readers who are receptive to, and in need of, the texts: namely, men who are ignorant of the cynegetical arts. Gaston claims that he wrote Livre de chasse in order to better the physical, psychological, and spiritual health of his fellow man by teaching the craft of venery to all those who need instruction: "je a parler pour aprandre moult de gens qui veulent chascier, qui ne le scevent mie fere einsi comme ont par aventure la voulenté" ["I speak of this in order to teach many men who wish to hunt, who don't know how to do it, and who have, perhaps, the desire (to do it)"] (LC Prologue: 8). According to this framing fiction, Gaston offers Livre de chasse as a course in home study for a readership composed of uneducated yet earnest men. The note of urgency with which Gaston infuses his project abstract ("s'il n'est bon veneur, il n'entrera ja en paradis"

["if he is not a good hunter, he will never enter into paradise"] (LC 60: 10-11)) adds further legitimation to his endeavor.

Edward's frame is less grandiose: he claims that he wrote Master of Game in order to educate the royal huntsmen so that his patrons might never be without their royal amusement: "And for y ne wolde þat his [Henry IV's] hunters ne 3ourys [Henry V's] that now be, or shulle come heraftyre, were vnknow in the parfytenesse of this artee, for the shalle y leue þis simpill memoriall" (MG 80-82). He seems to imply that his text should be given to young *gromes*, and that a spare copy should be left in the break room of the kennel for huntsmen to peruse in their off-hours. In both cases, the frame stories do more than validate the projects: they make them absolutely indispensable to continued success of the royal leisure hours (in the latter case) and to life on earth (in the former).

Like those of most romances, the frame stories of the manuals are only detectable at the textual "seams." Gaston makes reference to his desire to impart cynegetical instruction twice, once at the beginning of the description of the "noble hunts" (LC Prologue) and once, less benevolently and more ironically, at the beginning of the description of the *petites chasses*, trapping, bowhunting, and so on (LC 60). He closes Livre de chasse with a prayer, not for his readers but for himself, since he needs it more. Edward mentions his desire to teach the royal huntsmen only once, at the beginning of the first chapter of Master of Game, and seems to forget about it thereafter. The frames, especially that of Livre de chasse, are clearly identifiable *as frames*: their impersonal and formulaic style is strangely out of place when contrasted with the chatty and familiar manuals themselves. Thus, whereas the romance tends to create attractive aristocratic identities for more plebeian secondary audiences to adopt, the hunting manual invites its well-born readers to temporarily adopt the personae of ordinary huntsmen.

Gaston and Edward would probably be surprised to know that their frame stories are so convincing that modern readers have accepted them without question. The critics may be fooled, but the original medieval audiences certainly would have understood the frame stories as authorial conceits, not descriptions of reality. After all, a noble or aristocratic boy began his lessons in venery at age seven, probably before he could read with any facility. Likewise, a non-noble boy destined to be a huntsman would have been sent to sleep in the kennel by age seven, in order to learn the trade from the bottom up. It is extremely unlikely that a non-noble huntsman would have been allowed access to the manuals, even if he were able to read, and extremely unlikely that the manuals could have added anything to the knowledge of an experienced huntsman of any class. It is absolutely unthinkable that Gaston might have had any desire to impart his precious knowledge to nonaristocrats who were not in his direct employ. Both authors would be turning over in their graves if they could have known how later generations would put mass-produced copies of their words into the filthy hands of the common people; but that is a subject for a much later chapter.