Noble Venery: Hunting and the Aristocratic Imagination in Late Medieval English Literature

Dissertation

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By

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As Johan Huizinga and, more recently, Pierre Bourdieu have argued, what we do and the games we play influence how we act and think. Similarly, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have concluded, the metaphors that we use display our conceptual structures. Taking these two points as a basis, this thesis examines hunting, the major leisure pursuit of the aristocracy, in medieval English literature. Many have concluded that hunting was just a general courtly pastime of no particular interest, especially for literary scholars, while others have struggled to analyze it because it was so prevalent and so wide-ranging, and thus presents an immense body of literature. In response, this dissertation defines the concept of "venery" and then argues that venery was, along with chivalry and love, one of the three major foci of aristocratic culture, and that medieval authors played extensively upon it rhetorically. Through an often dialectical consideration of a wide range of late medieval Anglo-French literature, this thesis first argues that venery both arose from and fundamentally influenced the aristocratic habitus and imagination, in large part because hunting was a central component of the aristocratic education. Then, it analyzes how the courtly par-force hunt particularly embodied this process and shifted over time to respond to various social changes. The dissertation then turns to a consideration of how Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the anonymous author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* employ veneric themes rhetorically in attempts to influence their aristocratic audiences' perceptions of love and of chivalry. In the process, they reveal the fundamental importance of venery on the aristocratic comprehension of chivalry and love and more broadly on the aristocratic imagination. An understanding of venery is thus essential to an appreciation of medieval courtly literature and an understanding of the cultural assumptions of the medieval nobility.
Dedication

To my parents and grandparents.

Nani gigantum humeris insidentes.
Acknowledgements

I owe many debts to The Ohio State University and to her faculty that I hope one day to repay. First among them are those to my advisor and mentors. Richard Firth Green directed my work with good-humored grace, unflagging support, and insightful commentary. As both my dissertation advisor and as my supervisor at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies from 2007 to 2009, he has taught me more than perhaps he knows. Lisa J. Kiser first encouraged me to pursue medieval hunting as a topic when I stumbled across it in 2006, and her continuing support and vigorous critiques have been essential. Ethan Knapp's lucid advice first guided me during my Master's program and has continued to penetrate to the heart of matters. I am grateful to have had them as my thesis committee. Lister Matheson, my undergraduate advisor at Michigan State University, first introduced me to the pleasure and vibrancy of medieval literature. Though he may be gone, I will always hear Chaucer with the ghost of a Scots burr.

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Any mistakes that I have made lie entirely on my own shoulders.
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Introduction: Hunting, Habitus, and Conceptual Metaphor

“Je Gaston, par la grace de Dieu, surnommé Febus, comte de Foys, seigneur de Bearn, qui tout mon temps me suis delité par espicial en trois choses, l'une est en armes, l'autre est en amours, and l'autre si est en chasce.”¹ (I am Gaston, by the grace of God, surnamed Febus, count of Foix, lord of Bearn, who for my entire life have delighted in particular in three things: one is in arms, another is in love, and the other is in the hunt.)

The Count of Foix summarizes his three major passions with this biographical statement that opens Livre de Chasse, the famous hunting manual he finished in 1389, and which Edward of Norwich, the second Duke of York, adapted into English twenty years later as Master of Game.² The two versions remain the best known of any of the late-medieval hunting books. Gaston leaves the first two pursuits (arms and love) to more learned masters, but declares that no one surpasses his knowledge of hunting, and he presents a rousing argument in support of it, outlining its various forms and facets and stating that hunters live more joyfully than any other men. He even goes so far as to say that hunters commit no sins (since they are never idle) and so they go “tout droit en paradis” (straight

to heaven) when they die.\(^3\) This opening statement will inevitably strike a modern audience as rather unusual. No one would deny that chivalry and love were two pillars of aristocratic culture, but one might suppose that Gaston was being somewhat biased by ranking hunting with two more important topics.

A more thorough consideration of aristocratic pursuits, however, negates such an impression, which arises more from modern critical prejudice than from medieval reality.\(^4\) Going back to at least the twelfth century and up through at least the fifteenth, a vast amount of evidence shows that the aristocracy valued chivalry, love, and, indeed, hunting as a triad of ideal pursuits. From the beginning of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, hunting ability was a defining characteristic. William the Conqueror, the Petersborough Chronicle declares in anger at his policies, loved the harts “swilce he wære heora fæder” (as if he were their father).\(^5\) In Wace's Brut, the author describes the legendary, courtly hero Bran:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
Brennes parlout corteisement
Si ert de grant afaitement;
De bois saveit e de riviere
E deduz de mainte maniere,
Gent cors aveit e bel visage;
Bien semblout home de parage.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

\(^3\) Livre de Chasse, 54.

\(^4\) The critical literature on chivalry and courtly love is extensive and is treated in the following chapters. For the most important treatments, however, see Maurice Keen, Chivalry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Nigel Saul, Chivalry in Medieval England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), who comments that even the cultural aspects of chivalry have been little studied, 4; and C. Stephen Jaeger, Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). For hunting, see below.


\(^6\) Brut, ll. 2659-64. Cited in David Burnley, Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England (New York: Longman, 1998), 25. My translation. “Woods and rivers” is a typical description of hunting and hawking, respectively (one chases deer in the woods and flies falcons at ducks on the river), a point reinforced by “delights” in the following line, which is a common term for those two pursuits as well as for courtly activities more generally.
Bran spoke courteously and was very well put together; of the woods he knew and of the river, and delights of all different kinds. He had a noble body and a beautiful face; he seemed indeed to be a man of rank.

Bran's beauty and his abilities in fine speech, in hunting, and in hawking, are what particularly brand him as a man of rank. This association was typical. From Bran in the *Brut* to Malory's version of Tristan, hunting was a prime distinguishing feature of the aristocrat.

That these three are the defining expressions of nobility should come as no real surprise, for each is a playful refiguration of one of the essentials of life. Boiled down to their base elements, chivalry, love, and hunting are just about fighting, reproducing, and eating. As expressions of its own ethical and aesthetic values and as a sign of its rank, the medieval nobility took the basic elements of survival and reshaped them into fantastic dreams it shared with the world.\(^7\) Thus, chivalry, love, and hunting share as a final referent the set of aristocratic ideals – honor, prowess, generosity, frankness, loyalty, etc. – and their performance was part of aristocratic self-fashioning. Whereas chivalry reshaped violence and courtly love revised the erotic into performances of the aristocratic ideal, hunting was a basic training ground of the aristocratic self.\(^8\)

Despite hunting's essential focus on capturing food, the late medieval nobility worried very little about finding sustenance (and in fact employed professional hunters for those purposes), and so unlike chivalry and love, which retained some elements of

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8 This self was largely a public one, though hunting fundamentally influenced patterns of thought as well as behavior. See below. For more on “performing the self,” see Susan Crane, *The Performance of the Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
their basic drives, hunting was an open semantic space that came to be about nothing other than nobility itself. Its meaning is as complex and as fluid as the meaning of nobility, and it provides a touchstone for understanding the dynamics of aristocratic literature. Among its more important aspects, hunting was particularly a site for learning and expressing noble virtues, for enacting an aesthetic ideal, for idealizing and interacting with the social order, and for internalizing aristocratic conceptual structures based on hunting. Hunting composed a major part of the aristocratic education; as Le Chace dou cerf has it, “L’en i puut mout de bien prendre” (one can take much of benefit from it). Before ever the aristocrat thought of chivalry or love, he was a hunter, and this fact had indelibly impressed itself upon his mind by the time he played those other games later in life. Of the three primary aristocratic concerns, hunting was the most fundamental and the most expansive, and of the three, perhaps because it seems the most self-explanatory, it is the least understood today. To better grasp it, one must plumb the aristocratic imagination.

When one considers the scope of hunting as the primary leisure pursuit of the aristocracy during the Middle Ages, together with its many regional and national differences, the work done so far on hunting appears somewhat limited, especially on the literary side. While the critical conversation among literary scholars has long recognized the importance of chivalry and love for aristocratic culture and has investigated them in

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9 All the possible terms (“nobility”, “gentility”, “courtliness”) that one might use to discuss this concept are potentially unclear. By “nobility,” I refer not just to inherited rank, but to the idealizations associated with that rank. Many of these associations are synonymous with “courtliness,” but I avoid that term here because while hunting was certainly a central courtly activity, it was not restricted solely to the “court,” whether that be the royal court or some theoretical general “court.” “Gentility” is an accurate term for these habits as well, but it has an unfortunate association with the gentry, whom I do not discuss here in much detail.

depth, it has generally only nodded at hunting, taking the connection at face value and
going no futher.\textsuperscript{11} Some have given hunting very little credit as a literary topic at all,
including, suprisingly, one of hunting's major scholars.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, hunting as a topic offers
the attraction of engaging in a still-developing scholarly discussion.

The earliest English book that treated hunting in its literary manifestations was
Marcelle Thiébaux's work on hunting and love, \textit{The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval
Literature} (1974).\textsuperscript{13} Finding a strong Ovidian influence on notions of love in the Middle
Ages (rather in the tradition of the study of courtly love), Thiébaux examined how love
and hunting overlapped in the theme of the “love hunt,” where the male lover chases
down his female counterpart and conquers her in a bloody metaphor of the kill. Though
Thiébaux found ample evidence for the love hunt in Continental literature, her attempt to
extend it to England, by searching for it in the \textit{Book of the Duchess} and other texts,
falterered.\textsuperscript{14} The English, as Anne Rooney illustrated briefly some twenty years later, never
cared for the love hunt.\textsuperscript{15} Thiébaux's work was the only literary monograph on the topic

\textsuperscript{11} Burnley, in the common vein, treats it as just one of the accomplishments of a courtier. Despite the
emphasis on hunting that Burnley notes in his own source texts, he sees it as an utilitarian skill that is
not of the same caliber as more polite accomplishments. \textit{Courtliness and Literature}, 56. Burnley's
review (“Hunting in Middle English Literature,” \textit{The Review of English Studies} 46.184 (1995): 551) of
Anne Rooney's monograph, declares, “It [hunting] is simply a peripheral activity which occurs with
great frequency in literature whose essential interests lie elsewhere.” In these views, he was following
Rooney's own take on hunting, \textit{Hunting in Middle English Literature} (D.S. Brewer, 1993), e.g. 100-01.
Historians have been much better about recognizing the importance of hunting, and several recent
monographs have provided much-needed investigations. See below for both points.

\textsuperscript{12} Rooney concludes her monograph with: “The hunt is an important element or motif in a wide range of
literature, yet often it takes a peripheral place, cedes its place to another interest rapidly, or stands only
to be renounced or put in its place. This non-central position explains why the hunt has attracted so little
critical attention in the past. Perhaps it also explains one other gap in the corpus of medieval literature.
At the end of the \textit{Monk's Tale}, the listeners object to his tales of woe and tragedy, hoping for something
less miserable instead. The Host asks him to 'sey somewhat of huntyng', but he will not be drawn to tell
another tale; perhaps there simply are no tales of hunting to tell,” \textit{Hunting in Middle English Literature},
199. It was Rooney's approach, not her texts, that led her to this conclusion. See the Conclusion for a
discussion of Rooney's closing comment.

\textsuperscript{13} Marcelle Thiébaux, \textit{The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature} (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974).

\textsuperscript{14} Discussed in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{15} Anne Rooney, \textit{Hunting in Middle English Literature}, 46.
in English until Rooney's *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (1993), which takes a broad view of literary hunting themes in Middle English and presents a synopsis of the major ones (i.e., the hunter as Christ, the hunter as the Devil, etc.). Rooney attempted to capture the essence of hunting as a literary phenomenon in order to provide an interpretive pattern for scholars, and while this goal remained somewhat elusive, she does offer a useful catalogue of major themes. Among non-English accounts, Baudouin van den Abeele notably had published the useful *La fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises du XIIe au XIVe siècles* a few years earlier (1990).\(^{16}\) William Marvin’s *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (2006) attempted to read 700 years of hunting as a clash between social classes and argued that shifts in hunting laws precipitated shifts in literary treatments of the hunt.\(^ {17}\) His work caps off the literary monographs on hunting.

On the boundary line between literary and historical accounts, Matt Cartmill's *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History* (1993),\(^ {18}\) published in the same year as Rooney's work, provided a cultural history of Western Europeans' relationship to nature through hunting from the classical period to the modern one. His account historicized current views on hunting as evolving from post-WWII pessimism and linked changing views of hunting to contemporary views of human nature in general. Hunting has also recently seen three excellent histories *per se*: S.A. Milesen's

\(^{16}\) Baudouin van den Abeele, *La Fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises du xi\textsuperscript{e} au xiv\textsuperscript{e} siècles* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990).

\(^{17}\) William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006). He qualifies his point, however: “Hunters and foresters can have taken woodcraft only to new levels of commitment and training, but not actually changed its basic lore or character, which derived from the immemorial antiquity of tracking game through the woodlands. Woodcraft at its core, therefore, relates only tentatively to laws of the forest and their attendant culture of authority, or perhaps not at all, because woodcraft is about freedom,” 130.

illuminating study of hunting parks, *Parks in Medieval England* (2009), Emma Griffin’s *Blood Sport: Hunting in England Since 1066* (2007), which focused on the chase from the Conquest to the present, and Robin Oggins’s *The Kings and Their Hawks* (2004), which analyzed the history of falconry in England from its origins to Edward I. These histories followed up *Hunting and Hunting Reserves in Medieval Scotland* (1979), by John Gilbert, and the comprehensive and groundbreaking *The Art of Hunting: The Hound and the Hawk* (1988), by John Cummins, who included valuable chapters on symbolism and social imagery. His volume took a pan-European view of hunting, drawing particularly on English, Scottish, and Spanish sources, and described those practices as a unified topic, a tactic that both usefully correlated and sometimes obscured, though it little impairs the value of his work. Also recently, the art historian Richard Almond has published *Medieval Hunting* (2003), which argued that all classes of people hunted in the Middle Ages, and, in an extension of one chapter of that first work, *Daughters of Artemis* (2009), which took a look at female hunters in artistic accounts to argue that women participated in hunting.

There has been some recent work on the more explicitly sociocultural aspects of hunting (an arena in which also includes Cartmill's book), but it has been much more limited than the historical investigations. Susan Crane has published an essay on hunting ritual and its portrayal of aristocratic dominance (“Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force,”

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2008), while Thomas Allsen has written an ambitious work that considered royal hunting over the last two millenia, mostly focusing on Asia (*The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, 2006). In 2000, a group of French scholars published a volume of essays on a variety of sociocultural issues in the hunt (Paravicini and van den Abeele, eds. *La Chasse au Moyen Age*). A moderate clutch of mostly historical smaller works rounds out the research conducted so far. Taken as a whole, these works reveal a strong, if somewhat intermittent, interest in medieval hunting over the last fifty years and a sharp uptick lately, one partially motivated, needless to say, by modern interest in the environment and the Hunting Act 2004 that outlawed hunting with dogs in England.

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26 For a very good overview of medieval hunting, examining it with an eye toward the relationship
This thesis picks up on Rooney's effort to provide a useful synopsis of medieval hunting for literary scholars and Marvin's focus on the medieval hunt's as a dynamic practice over time. Instead of cataloguing literary themes or focusing on literary reflections of legal changes, however, it investigates technical and imaginative literature to outline the aristocratic imagination and the patterns of thought that helped to produce those themes and changes. In the process, this dissertation also offers a nuanced literary interpretation to the excellent historical investigations of late. Particularly, though, and especially with its identification and definition of “venery,” this thesis gives far more credit to hunting as an influential, indeed defining, force in aristocratic life and literature than has been allowed to date.

Two critical concepts have proven to be particularly useful for this discussion: Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of habitus and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's description of conceptual metaphor. The former of these concepts, habitus, defines in broad terms how venery could embody a dynamic, class-based, ethical and aesthetic experience and form a lasting disposition among hunters that encouraged them in associated patterns of behavior and thought:

Habitus is a mediating notion that helps us revoke the common-sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality', that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them. … “Habitus [is] understood as a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and make it possible to accomplish infinitely differentiated tasks, thanks to the analogue transfer of schemata

acquired in prior practice.”

Habitus can be traced back to Aristotle and is an exceedingly well-known concept in sociology, though it has been only occasionally discussed among medieval scholars. Notably, Bruce Holsinger has analyzed the roots of the idea in the work of the medieval scholar Edwin Panofsky on Gothic architecture and the evolution of the modern critical concept in Bourdieu's hands, while Katharine Breen's recent work has brought habitus back to light for an understanding of medieval culture.

Along with this broad understanding of how the individual and society merge within particular activities, Lakoff and Johnson's description of conceptual metaphor illustrates how detailed mental associations are made between distinct areas of human activity. This way of thinking about metaphors was illustrated in their now-classic *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and elaborated on in their 2003 afterword to that text, which revised some of their initial concepts:

Do we systematically use inference patterns from one conceptual domain to reason about another conceptual domain? The empirically established answer is “yes.” We call that phenomenon *conceptual metaphor*, and we call the systematic correspondences across such domains *metaphorical mappings*. This leads to a further empirical question: “Are those metaphorical mappings purely abstract and arbitrary?” The empirical answer is “no.” They are shaped and constrained by our bodily experiences in the world, experiences in which the two conceptual domains are correlated and consequently establish mappings from one domain to another.

The second statement here resembles, and perhaps underlies, the fashionable “body

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“theory” of the last couple of decades. That theory, it seems to me, takes the body as a starting point for an essential human experience and conceptualization based on that experience.\(^{30}\) If one pushes body theory a bit further, though, one arrives at physical experiences as metaphors as well: running, leaping, riding – hunting. Hunting as a physical experience, then, could be argued to provide a grounded domain for metaphorical conceptualizations of more abstract ideas, such as nobility. Lakoff and Johnson, citing recent work in neural mapping, also explain that neural mapping of one domain (i.e., hunting) onto another domain (i.e., nobility) results when the two events occur at once,\(^{31}\) as they would in medieval aristocratic hunting. Minds are especially likely to “conflate” (forge neural links between) two domains in formative childhood, and hunting was an educational experience for the aristocracy. Thus, it is extremely probable that the medieval aristocracy understood venery and nobility through a conflation of the two activities, a mapping of each domain onto the other, with neural links created between them.

Lakoff and Johnson refer to the investigation of the elaborate, systematic connection between two domains as “deep analysis”: “What we and other researchers found was that our most fundamental ideas – not just time, but events, causation, morality, the self, and so on – were almost entirely structured by elaborate systems of conceptual metaphor.”\(^{32}\) As an example, they discuss “Moral Accounting, in which morality prescribes a balancing of the moral books,” where morality and accounting, or


\(^{31}\) Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 254-57.

\(^{32}\) Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 249.
morality and economic value, are conflated. This same sort of connection existed for the medieval aristocracy, insofar as their thoughts are embodied in literature, which usually reveals a rhetorical process in which the writer attempts to influence the audience by appropriating its conceptual structures (i.e. what hunting done properly means), where the hunt becomes a conceptual vehicle and semiotic structure for expressing the way the aristocracy conceived of itself. In the style of Lakoff and Johnson's shorthand for metaphors, this conflated system can be referred to as Noble Venery, and literature offers us its best (and perhaps only remaining) reflection.

To explicate this understanding of medieval hunting, Chapter One defines the concept of “venery,” which includes both actual hunting and its imaginative expressions, and which, when compared to simple “hunting,” parallels the distinction between “chivalry” and “warfare,” or even “gender” and “sex.” Venery was just as important for noble culture as love and chivalry, long regarded as its two pillars. Venery was an essential part of the noble education, and taught ideal aristocratic virtues and symbolized and legitimized noble status. As a result, it defined ideal medieval nobility and provided the fundamental conceptual pattern through which the aristocracy apprehended its world, including the pursuits of chivalry and love. By defining “venery” and illustrating its expressions of the noble ideal, the first chapter provides the foundation for the following three chapters, which elaborate on how venery permeated the aristocratic imagination and how authors played upon that fact for their own rhetorical ends.

Chapter Two focuses on idealizations of courtly hunting in late-medieval manuals,

contextualizing them with more general literary treatments. This chapter argues that the medieval aristocracy conceived of hunting as a game and outlines its tenets. It also illustrates how the manual descriptions of the process of the hunt itself and the breaking of the deer metaphorically expressed an ideal courtly vision of society as a mutually obligated feudal hierarchy. During the breaking, for instance, the deer was ceremonially divided and apportioned to the hunters, to the clergy, to the poor, and to the lord himself in a microcosmic social metaphor. When the gentry started hunting extensively in the fifteenth century as a way to gain social status, however, the courtly hunt was revised into an exclusive performance of aristocracy. The second chapter thus analyzes the description of the ideal courtly hunt and illustrates how its adaptations responded dynamically to a shifting cultural milieu.

Moving to more imaginative expressions of venery, Chapter Three argues that authors played on the aristocratic understanding of venery to explain the more abstract concept of love and influence the audience's view of it. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer demonstrates how the conventional metaphors of the lover as the knightly servant, the lover as an invalid, and the lover as a hawk overpowering the female lark fail to provide an adequate paradigm for late fourteenth-century aristocratic courtship. The only amorous metaphor that he gives much credit is the male falconer caring for his demanding female falcon, which is a more realistic if still vexed portrait of courtship in his day. Chaucer's descriptions of love demonstrate ways of conceptualizing it and argue for a pattern of courtship based on venery. The complete interpenetration of the conceptual domains of love and venery demonstrated in Chaucer's text suggests that venery was one major way that the aristocracy understood love and, more broadly, the world.
In a similar vein, Chapter Four demonstrates how the author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* critiques the aristocratic view of warfare as a veneric game. He illustrates how warfare may resemble hunting structurally in the pursuit of prey and the capture of the “game” as well as emotionally or aesthetically in aristocratic attitudes and responses. Through first establishing this parallel and then illustrating how it contributes to the death of Gawain and the collapse of Arthurian Britain, the author of the text strongly criticizes the aristocratic audience's apprehension of warfare as a hunt and entertaining game. As with Chaucer's argument about love, the rhetorical aims of the author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* rely upon the fundamental place of hunting within noble culture and the aristocratic imagination.

In this sort of discussion, even the translucent boundaries between historical and literary evidence collapse. Medieval hunting was a lived activity pursued wholeheartedly by an elite segment of the population for centuries in pursuit of imaginative goals expressed best, and sometimes solely, in literature. As a result, some of the best “records” for this activity are romances or other texts that were once regarded as untrustworthy or useless by prior generations of historians, though current ones have been more willing to see these texts not as imaginative trivia with little relation to the “real world,” but as imaginative expressions of living ideas. When C. Stephen Jaeger argued that “friendship and love were social ideals of the aristocracy in the Middle Ages, lay, clerical, and monastic” and that ennobling love “is a form of aristocratic self-representation,” he resorted to Gottfried von Strassburg and Christine de Pizan for clarification. In considering love, both Maurice Keen and George Duby have asked “how seriously are

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we to take the idea of courtly love outside the narrow limits of medieval literature and literary convention, with reference to the world of actuality?” Keen “conclude[d] cautiously that it must indeed be taken seriously as a force in the real life of the European warrior class,” while Duby argued even more strongly that, “Courtly love proved an extremely effective means of strengthening the State. In fact, it was so influential that no study of the progressive rationalization of power can afford to ignore it, although at this period it is only documented in literary works, often centered on the theme of 'fine amours,' or refined love.”35 Assessing these claims, Jaeger responded, “Whereas my generation and the previous denied the 'reality' of courtly love and placed it in the realm of the fantastic, Duby makes a trenchant claim for the opposite and challenges us to understand how the fantastic, the “unreal” and the literary ideal, operated centrally and vitally in the very core of power, of politics, and of society.”36 In a similar vein, the broad goal of this work is to elaborate on the “fantasy” of hunting for the medieval aristocracy and illustrate how it itself functioned “centrally and vitally in the very core of power.”

35 Cited in Jaeger, Ennobling Love, 199-200
36 Jaeger, Ennobling Love, 200
Chapter 1: Venery in Noble Life

“The history of culture has just as much to do with dreams of beauty and the illusions of a noble life as with population figures and statistics.”

~ Johan Huizinga, 1921

On first glance, it might seem improbable that hunting, however widespread, should have any claim to being as influential as chivalry or courtly love, much less to being potentially more fundamental to the aristocratic imagination. This apparent improbability is, I think, more a result of resilient critical foci than it is an accurate reflection of medieval aristocratic culture. Some scholars also have likely shied away from leisure activities because of the association of leisure with triviality that arises from a modern division between work and play in which play is regarded as insipid. Yet leisure was the defining quality of the medieval aristocracy. As Mark’s huntsmen state admiringly about Tristan, “How could a merchant, with all his affairs to see to, ever have devoted so much leisure to him?” Play and leisure are thus of central interest for understanding the medieval nobility. Fortunately, the critical conversation has shifted to

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1 Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 103.
3 Thorstein Veblen's work on leisure illustrated its importance in the late-nineteenth century, and the concepts he coined, such as “conspicuous leisure” and “conspicuous consumption,” have as much
include many aspects of culture once shunted to the sidelines, and these fields have emerged as objects of study.4

A consideration of aristocratic advice manuals and exemplary literature written on chivalry, love, and hunting clarifies any cloudiness in the waters of current criticism on medieval culture. By and large, hunting, chivalry, and love arose together as literary topics, were intricately entangled with each other, and collectively represented a set of secular ethical ideals for the aristocracy. This chapter first analyzes that interdependence and illustrates how hunting was fundamental to the aristocratic understanding of chivalry and love, next it reconceptualizes “hunting” as the more accurate term of “venery” (a distinction comparable to that between “warfare” and “chivalry”), and then it demonstrates the formative position of venery within the noble education. Following that discussion, it examines how venery embodied courtly virtue and represented aristocratic status and legitimacy, a situation that led to the royal or courtly production of hunting manuals as both demonstrations of status and attempts to shape the meaning of venery.

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Taken all together, these points illustrate that venery provided one of the fundamental conceptual patterns through which the aristocracy apprehended its world, including the pursuits of chivalry and love, that it embodied ideal courtliness, and that it functioned as a cipher for nobility.

**Chivalry, Love, and Hunting: A Tripartite Ideal**

The very first courtly manuals written illustrate the interreliance of chivalry, courtly love, and hunting as a triad of courtly pursuits. The first manual that will come to mind for most scholars on these three topics is *De arte honeste amandi* by Andreas Capellanus, generally translated as the *Art of Courtly Love*, referencing a term that Gaston Paris popularized in the late 19th century. On first glance, this manual might seem to have little to say about venery. Andreas wrote his manual between 1184 and 1186 at the court of Countess Marie of Troyes, daughter of Eleanore of Aquitaine, and at her request, and he did so at the onset of a spate of such advice manuals. The work's setting reflects Eleanore's court in Aquitaine from 1170 to 1174, a brief but productive period that came to a close when her husband, Henry II, forcibly returned her to England. The work presents an ideal of courtship that portrays the woman as a sovereign who guides and shapes the man, compelling him to gain greater honor and recognition through deeds performed on her behalf. One can see it as a somewhat empowering work written from a quasi-feminist perspective, but such a designation can go too far. The primary focus in

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6 *The Art of Courtly Love*, 16.
this version of love is the man, and the woman assists him in his rise in prowess.7

Andreas's work did, however, argue that women played an important role in the chivalric world, from which they were generally excluded by its combative character, and that was most likely the intent of Eleanore and her court.

This formulation of chivalry and courtly love displays chivalry as the primary ideal, with love as a secondary consideration focused on increasing a knight's chivalric reputation. The metaphorical treatment of love in Andreas's work emphasizes this connection. Love is warfare, he states, and the woman the man's superior in Love's army.8

The work thus uses chivalric metaphors to explain the importance of love, rhetorically tailoring its abstract conceptions of the subject for a knightly audience. The work's emphasis on teaching a male lover how to speak to women to win their love similarly identifies the target of the work's rhetoric. The work is a justification of love's utility to knights, and it makes that argument through a metaphorical comparison to combat, which argued that it was chivalric to be in love because love was similar to warfare and useful in increasing one's ability in that field.

This connection comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with courtly love and chivalry. Yet, chivalry is not the only metaphor used to explain love to Andreas's audience nor necessarily the most successful. Andreas also uses hunting metaphors to explain, among other concepts, the relationship between lovers of different rank. In the second

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7 For a more thorough perspective on Andreas and feminism, see P.G. Walsh, “Antifeminism in the High Middle Ages,” in Satiric Advice on Women and Marriage: From Plautus to Chaucer, ed. Warren S. Smith (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 222-42.

8 Art of Courtly Love, 41. In his classic study of courtly love, C.S. Lewis presents (though does not originate) the view that this metaphor, and thus the basis of courtly love, probably arose as a result of feudal and courtly structures in southern France at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth centuries. The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1936]), 12-13.
dialogue, when a man of the middle class (i.e., the gentry) attempts to court a woman of the lower nobility, she chastizes him:

“Did a buzzard ever overcome a partridge or a pheasant by its courage? It is for falcons and hawks to capture this prey, which should not be annoyed by cowardly kites. Your folly needs to be sharply checked, because you seek a love from the upper class, although you are not worthy of her.”

The chastized lover then agrees with her that for someone to seek outside his own rank for a beloved is improper, but reframes the argument by picking up on her hawking metaphor and expanding it:

“What you said about the kite and the buzzard is no objection, since it is their bravery alone that makes hawks, falcons, and merlins valuable. At times we see hawks of the lighter kind by their courage take great pheasants and partridges, for a boar is often held by a fairly small dog. On the other hand, we see many gerfalcons and peregrine falcons terrified by the commonest sparrows and put to flight by a buzzard. So if the kite or the buzzard proves to be hardy and bold, different from his parents, he deserves to be honored with the perch of the falcon or the hawk and to be carried on a warrior's left fist. So, then, if you find that I am unlike my parents, you should not call me by the disgraceful name 'kite,' but by the honorable one 'tercel.'”

The lover's response reframes the issue from one of essential class identity to one of fluid class identity defined by character. The woman, naturally, is not convinced, and replies, “Even if a falcon should sometimes be put to flight by a buzzard, still the falcon is classed with falcons, and the buzzard with buzzards – the one being called a worthless falcon, the other a very good buzzard.” Despite the stiff response, the dialogue ends with the man still hopeful about his chances and determined to prove himself.

The meaning of the exchange itself, with its focus on character as the defining feature of nobility, is fascinating, but the manner in which the lovers, and by extension

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9 *Art of Courtly Love*, 46-47.
10 *Art of Courtly Love*, 50.
11 *Art of Courtly Love*, 52.
Andreas, phrase it is more pertinent here. Dealing with abstract issues of class identity, love, and courtship, Andreas presents a central debate on love between members of different classes in hunting terms. He uses the behavioral patterns and cultural symbolism of hunting animals to explain these hazy concepts. This example and the widespread use of hunting imagery throughout the text demonstrate that hunting comparisons are one of Andreas's central rhetorical tactics.

The treatment of hunting in the *Art of Courtly Love* weaves that topic seamlessly into the cultural structure of chivalry and love. Andreas's rhetoric implies that he was not being original in his use of hunting and hawking imagery. Instead, he was arguing for the value of love, and he used chivalric and hunting analogies to make that argument. His rhetorical approach points out that he believes his audience to be intimately familiar with chivalry and hunting, to be in fact far more accustomed to those topics than to love. From Andreas's perspective, love is the foreigner and it needs to be fully explained through familiar comparisons. Thus, one does not find here that chivalry and love are the two cords in the braided rope of aristocratic culture; instead the rope is a more complex braid of three strands, and love is the newest. Historically, of course, it is easy to see that hunting was a far earlier courtly practice than *fin amour*, and Andreas's rhetoric here illustrates that it still had priority in terms of his late twelfth-century audience's expectations.

Along with the *Art of Courtly Love*, the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries

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12 For a version of this same metaphor from a nobleman to a gentrywoman, see The *Art of Courtly Love*, 84-86, for the same relationship with the woman as a wild beast, 89-90, and for an unattainable hawk as a symbol for the love of a noble lady, 177-78.

13 See Griffin, *Blood Sport*, 11-24, for a discussion of the importance of hunting and its effect on land policies following the Norman Conquest.
produced a number of Anglo-French works that firmly establish hunting, chivalry, and love as a triad of ideal courtly pursuits, a set including Thomas of Britain's *Tristan* (c. 1150-80), Chrétien de Troyes's romances (c. 1170-90), and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (c. 1210). Andreas and Chrétien wrote for Eleanore of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie of Troyes, while Gottfried aimed his text at the German nobility, stating that he had “undertaken a labor to please the polite world and solace noble hearts.” This sort of audience was the norm for texts on hunting because treatments of the topic typically presented an ideal portrait of nobility. The earliest extant works of this set are Chrétien's romances, and *Yvain* demonstrates this triple focus neatly: Yvain fights, defeating a giant, a dragon, and human knights like Esclados, the knight of the fountain; he loves his lady Laudine, if badly at times; and when he loses his mind and runs naked through the woods, having forgotten everything else, he still hunts, taking a bow and arrow from a boy and using it to feed himself.

The next work of this kind, Thomas of Britain's *Tristan*, is mostly lost to us, but Gottfried von Strassburg's version was a fairly close adaptation that reflected Anglo-French culture. A close Norse version and some other fragments of Thomas's text also remain. Gottfried's own work ends abruptly with the marriage of Tristan and Isolde of the White Hands, but it has been completed in the manuscript with the last portion of Thomas's version. Gottfried praises Thomas's work highly, regarding it as the true account of Tristan and Isolde, and criticizes other writers who have told of Tristan, saying

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14 *Tristan*, 42.
that while they were well-intentioned, “They did not write according to the authentic version as told by Thomas of Britain, who was a master-romancer and had read the lives of all those princes in books of the Britons and made them known to us.”

In a close reflection of Anglo-French culture, Gottfried left the style of hunting in the text alone. When Mark and Tristan ride out for a hunt, the hunt described is a *par-force* hunt, which involved running a hart to exhaustion with hounds before killing it with a single blow, and which was valued as the noblest type of hunting among the Anglo-Normans. The German knight Guicennas, who was a contemporary of Frederick II and most likely a courtier as well as a knight, and who composed *De arte bersandi*, the earliest Western manual on hunting with dogs around 1250, however, claims that his text presents the noblest form of hunting. Its version of the best hunt is a drive hunt in which archers are stationed in specific areas and hounds drive the deer toward them. If Gottfried's intention were to update Thomas's text to reflect Germanic practice, and if the *De arte bersandi* accurately reflects that practice, then one would expect him to have updated the hunts in it, as well, since he puts such emphasis on them. Instead, Gottfried elevates Anglo-French practice above the Germanic one as far as the text is concerned. The hunting scenes are an essential part of the cultural prestige of Thomas's work, and Gottfried recognizes that fact.

Gottfried portrays Tristan as a paragon of courtly virtue, and his three major accomplishments and areas of interest are chivalry, love, and hunting. He is also a consummate musician, a skilled speaker, and beautiful in his appearance and bearing,

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17 Tristan, 43.
18 Chapter 2 below discusses the *par-force* hunt in detail.

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among other smaller achievements, but compared to the focus and attention given to the former three, these latter skills and qualities are minor. Throughout the tale, Tristan demonstrates exceptional competence in chivalry and love. When the Irish threaten Mark's kingdom and demand their annual tribute, which includes a number of beautiful noble children who will become slaves, no one other than Tristan dares to challenge Morold, the Irish champion, and contest the right.\textsuperscript{20} Though he defeats Morold, he is wounded by Morold's poisoned blade.\textsuperscript{21} The wound refuses to heal and he eventually travels to Ireland, where he tutors the princess, Isolde, in the harp.\textsuperscript{22} While there, he humbly and almost casually slays a dragon that had been marauding about, only revealing his success when the oily steward attempts to claim the victory as his own.\textsuperscript{23} Tristan's battle prowess is a constant aspect of his character, from his conquest over Morold to his final wound in a Continental battle.

Tristan's love for Isolde, however, is emphasized even more than his prowess. In fact, his hopeless love for her is the tragedy foreshadowed in his name. Gottfried's depiction of love is powerful and revealing. Though he tutors Isolde, he resists acting on any emotions despite her beauty, only praising her highly on his return home.\textsuperscript{24} When he agrees to escort her across the Irish Sea to Mark for their upcoming wedding, though, the two accidentally drink a love potion that Isolde's handmaiden had served them thinking it was only wine.\textsuperscript{25} The potion might seem a forced convention to a modern reader, a sort of magical irrelevance to the bonds built between two people who had been in such

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Tristan, 121-37.
\item Tristan, 133-34.
\item Tristan, 138-49.
\item Tristan, 159-72.
\item Tristan, 150-51.
\item Tristan, 194-95.
\end{enumerate}
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proximity, but it represents in the tale the inexorable nature of love and its swift and sudden onset. As in Andreas, when Love shoots the lover who cannot resist, the magic potion here cannot be denied by mortal will. Additionally, the magic of the potion removes any treasonous culpability for love from Tristan. He did not intend to betray Mark or to fall in love with his liege lady, but such is the nature of the love. Neither he nor Isolde can prevail over the potion, despite their struggles and their love for Mark and Cornwall. Love is unconquerable destiny in Tristan, and that fact sets the stage for the tragedy that plays out.

Chivalry and love are two central aspects of Tristan's character and the plot of Gottfried's work, but Tristan is also throughout the text a consummate hunter. Hunting is one of the “all manner of courtly pastimes” at which he excels. Interestingly, Gottfried does not claim that Tristan was the best of all knights or lovers, but he does state that he was the best of all hunters: “And we hear from this narrative that none (whoever he might be) ever learned to track or hunt as well as he.” Accordingly, the narrative strongly emphasizes his hunting abilities. Tristan's first meaningful act in Cornwall, for instance, is to stop some of Mark's huntsmen from cutting up a hart improperly. Gottfried dwells on Tristan's ability and his instruction of the huntsmen, and this single event propels Tristan into Mark's court, earning him the title of Chief Huntsman and a place by Mark's side. Just as Gottfried skips over discussions of jousts but pauses to dwell on Tristan's significant single combats against Morold and the dragon, so does he pause to describe in

26 Art of Courtly Love, 27.
27 Tristan, 69. See below.
28 Tristan, 69.
29 Tristan, 78-86.
30 Tristan, 86.
great detail how Tristan cuts up the hart and corrects the huntsmen.

Gottfried, like Andreas, uses hunting analogies to render these other two pursuits, and action in general, more understandable and meaningful. Tristan's sword is like a hunter tracking his quarry.\(^{31}\) Tristan and Isolde are simultaneously both caught in the snares of Love and yet are Love's own huntsmen, attempting to ensnare each other.\(^{32}\) Isolde is Love's falcon, seeking her quarry; she has “robbed many a man of his very self.”\(^{33}\) Fortune is a huntress, a coward in flight is like a hare running before the hounds, and even verbal debate resembles hunting, with the laying of verbal traps and snares, as when Mark sets a conversational snare for Isolde that she springs on him.\(^{34}\) Gottfried's metaphors, like Andreas's, imply that comparisons to hunting were one way that his audience made sense of both combat and love, as well as action or life in general.

This emphasis on the preeminence of these three pursuits as expressions of courtly culture continues into the 14\(^{th}\) and 15\(^{th}\) centuries. In 1350-52, Geoffroi de Charny, the most famous French knight of his day and twice the bearer of the oriflamme, the French king's sacred banner, wrote the *Livre de chevalerie*, a chivalric manual intended most likely as a guidebook for Jean II's new Company of the Star.\(^{35}\) In it, he criticizes hunting tellingly. He states that though the pursuit is proper to all men of rank, they ought to devote themselves instead to chivalry.\(^{36}\) His criticism illustrates the position of hunting in

\(^{31}\) Tristan, 129.
\(^{32}\) Tristan, 195-96 and 198 respectively.
\(^{34}\) Tristan, 219, 324, and 222-27 respectively.
\(^{36}\) Book of Chivalry, 19.
aristocratic society and reveals his audience's predilections: though he would prefer they focus on chivalry, they are instead off hunting. Similarly, Froissart, writing a little later about Richard II's troubles on the throne, mentions that “the Duke of Lancaster … took the opportunity to go hunting stags and deer, as the custom is in England.”

English literature similarly emphasized venery and hunting proper as major aristocratic pursuits. In the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer draws an implicit comparison between the conversation of the dreamer and the knight and Octavian's hunt for the elusive hart, suggesting that the knight and the hart are allegorically synonymous. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which emphasizes Gawain's courtly and amorous virtues, the three hunts for the deer, boar, and fox dominate the second half of the work and stand in implicit counterpoint to Gawain's interactions with Bertilak's wife. In the 15th century, Malory, whose works are filled with hunting images, from the Questing Beast to white harts that become Christ, emphasizes the connection between hunting and courtliness: Sir Tristram first began the termes of venery, “that thereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discever a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne.”

The same comparison to hunting that Andreas employed to explain love to his audience, and that Gottfried used to describe combat and life in general to his, was still current in this later period. When that same Jean II was held in captivity in England

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awaiting ransom after his defeat at the Battle of Poitier, he ordered his chaplain, Gaces de la Bugne, to write a work on hunting to educate his fourth and favorite son, Phillip, Duke of Burgundy. Gaces produced his *Roman des Deduis*, which, among other things, uses hunting analogies, particularly hawking, to demonstrate proper aristocratic behavior. A falconer must be patient, for instance, and not become angry with his hawk, lest he train it badly. Similarly, a lord must be forbearing. This discussion reinforces two points: First, though chivalry and love may seem to be the two pillars of medieval courtly culture, there were in fact three: chivalry, love, and hunting. Second, the authors who discussed these activities tended to use hunting to explain chivalry and love to their audiences metaphorically. That tactic suggests strongly that hunting was more immediately comprehensible and more culturally central to these audiences than were these other two, perhaps more abstract, pursuits.

**Defining Venery**

To call this “noble and ennobling” pursuit simply “hunting,” however, is very imprecise. The aristocracy, and indeed the other classes of society, engaged with hunting and hawking on an imaginative level on far more occasions than just when out literally hunting animals, as the preceding examples illustrate. In order to differentiate between the actual act of hunting and this more inclusive imaginative engagement with the pursuit itself, its core values, and its widespread metaphorical and symbolic existences, I prefer

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42 For instance, *Roman des Deduis*, ll. 13-25, where he lays out his aims.
43 Lewis described courtly love as “a noble and ennobling passion,” *The Allegory of Love*, 3.
to use the term “venery.” Just as “chivalry” was distinct from “combat” and “courtly love” from “courtship,” so too did “venery” differ from “hunting.” “Chivalry” in medieval terms could refer to the practice of warfare, to the knightly order, or to the ideals that surrounded noble combat.\textsuperscript{44} As an expression of an aristocratic ethic, it evoked an “aura of mystique” around combat itself.\textsuperscript{45} Similarly, “venery” can refer either to the specific act of hunting, usually with dogs, or to the noble ideals and the expansive symbolism that surrounded hunting and made it into an ethical and aesthetic game.

As with “chivalry,” the term offers a modern critical concept based on a medieval usage. Historically, “\textit{venerie}” in Anglo-Norman and Middle English referred to hunting with dogs (when used specifically in comparison to \textit{fauconnerie}, or falconry, for instance), but more generally, it often just meant “hunting” or “game.”\textsuperscript{46} The Latin root, \textit{venare}, meaning “to hunt,” denoted no particular kind of hunting. Around 1327, however, William Twiti, a royal huntsman, wrote \textit{L'Art de venerie}, the first manual of its kind by an Englishman, and his title invoked a broader context of hunting as an “art” beyond the act itself. A Middle English translation of it, \textit{The Craft of Venery}, maintained the term.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, “venery” was a fairly inclusive and widespread medieval term, and it could refer to an “art” in the same way as Andreas Capellanus's \textit{De arte honeste amandi} considered love to be an “art.” Based on medieval usage, “venery” thus provides a term for a modern critical concept that includes both the chase and falconry and their cultural superstructure.

Venery as a term is particularly useful for pinpointing the difference between, on the one side, the actual acts of hunting, hawking, chasing, and so forth, and on the other,

\textsuperscript{44} See Keen, \textit{Chivalry}, 4.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, “venerie” (n.2), and \textit{Anglo-Norman Dictionary}, “venerie.”
\textsuperscript{47} Marvin discusses the “artes venandi” of England in \textit{Hunting Law and Ritual}, 82-130.
the cultural import of these acts and the effect of these acts on the aristocratic self. Among its more important aspects, venery was particularly a site for learning and expressing noble virtues, for enacting an aristocratic aesthetic ideal, for idealizing and interacting with the social order, and for internalizing aristocratic conceptual structures based on hunting. As the examples of Andreas and Gottfried have already illustrated, and as later chapters demonstrate in more detail, medieval authors were quite familiar with the function of venery and played on it rhetorically for their own ends.

**Venery and Noble Education**

The importance of venery cannot be grasped entirely without understanding something of its place with a nobleman's education and the effects of that influence. Hunting was explicitly regarded as a training for warfare, but it also implicitly inculcated in the young aristocrat an understanding of his place in society and a set of ideal noble virtues. Edward of Norwich offers one description (c.1410) of how hunting trained the hunter for warfare and demonstrated good character:

> And þerfore, I counsele to al manere folke, of what stat or of what

48 Trevor Dodman sees *Master of Game* as a text that also inculcates masculinity through hunting, “Hunting to Teach: Class, Pedagogy, and Maleness in the *Master of Game* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Exemplaria* 17.2 (2005): 413-44. For more on internalizing masculinity as part of an educational process, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). On aristocratic education in general: Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984). Orme pinpoints the fifteenth century as the point where hunting became a more formal part of an aristocratic education and it began to be recommended in texts (196), which fits in with the broader trend of the formalization of education moving into the sixteenth century that he identifies. One product of the formalization of aristocratic education that demonstrates the position given to hunting is Thomas Elyot's *The Governour* (1531), though it delimits the activity, seeing it more in the sense of Greek physical training and specifically as a training for battle. See Donald W. Rude, ed. *A Critical Edition of Sir Thomas Elyot's The Boke named the Governour* (New York: Garland, 1992), 80.
condiocioun þat þei be, þat þei loue the houndes and huntynges and lust of bestes, on or oþer, or of haukyng; for idelnesse, and for to be idel and haue no lust, neþer in houndes neþer in haukes, is no good tokene, for, as seith in his book Phebus þe Erl of Foys, þat noble hunter, he saue neuer good man þat he ne hadde lust yn some of þis[e], were he neuer so gret and riche; for [if] he hadde nede, or werre, he ne schulde nat wite what it were, for he schulde nat be vsed ne custumed to trauaill, and so nedes moste anoþer man don þat he schulde don; for men saiden in olde sawes, so muche is a lord worth as he kan make his londes auayle, and also he saith in þe forseid [book] þat he neuer saw man þat loued trauaile and lust of houndes and of haukes þat he ne hadde many goode custumes in him, for þat cometh to him of gret noblesse and gentilnesse of herte, of what [a]stat þat þe man be of: or a gret lord or a litel, or a pore or a rich.49

Edward's comment, which he translates as usual from the Count of Foix, draws a connection between hunting and warfare both in terms of general hardiness and, presumably (as part of "what it [war] were"), in specific knowledge of the lay of the land, handiness with weaponry, acclimation to bloodshed, knowledge of tracking, familiarity with various weather conditions and woodscraft skills, and experience with a range of tactics, including placing soldiers strategically (which resembles placing relays of hounds where one expects the deer to run) and outwitting one's opponent. Edward, still translating Gaston, also emphasizes the association between hunting and virtue, stating that he has never seen a hunter who did also have “many good customs” and that this love of hunting comes to him as a result of “gret noblesse and gentilnesse of herte.” He also suggests that hunting's good character extends to religious morality. Without hunting, “al manere folke” would be idle, which was the first step toward sin.

Similarly, Gottfried's description of Tristan's upbringing provides an idealized portrait of noble education that gives a central place to hunting. His description also offers an overview of those pursuits considered proper for a young man of rank and

49 Master of Game, 146-47, emphasis added. For more examples of hunting as a training for warfare, see Chapter 4, subsection “My Foe, My Prey.”
illustrates venery's place within that courtly education:

During the time that he was engaged on these two studies of books and languages, he also spent many hours playing stringed instruments of all kinds, persevering from morning to night till he became marvellously adept at them. He was learning the whole time, today one thing, tomorrow another, this year well, next year better. In addition to all this he learned to ride nimbly with shield and lance, to spur his mount skilfully on either flank, put it to the gallop with dash, wheel, and give it free rein and urge it on with his knees, in strict accordance with the chivalric art. He often sought recreation in fencing, wrestling, running, jumping, and throwing the javelin, and he did it to the utmost of his strength and skill. And we hear from this narrative that none (whoever he might be) ever learned to track or hunt as well as he. He excelled at all manner of courtly pastimes and had many at his command. To crown all, his person was such that no young man more fortunate in his gifts was ever born of woman. Everything about him was of the rarest, both in qualities of mind and of manners.50

Gottfried's description of Tristan gives us a very complete account of his accomplishments and his virtues. He is a master of books and languages, of stringed instruments (though not the ruder horns and drums), of a variety of athletic sports, and he is the most beautiful of all men born. Gottfried emphasizes Tristan's chivalric training, which takes up a good third of the passage, and also highlights his superlative hunting ability. These two examples, from two centuries apart, illustrate a lasting idealization of noble education that gave a central place to hunting.

Hunting was such a central part of the aristocratic education that the Bel Inconnu tradition naturalized it with aristocratic status and insisted that even without specific teachers, an aristocrat would teach himself how to hunt. William of Palerne, in the romance of the same name, typifies the “innate” knowledge of hunting skills. William is the prince of Palerne, but he is stolen away from home as a child and raised by a cowherd. The specific portion of the Middle English text is lost, but the French original

50 *Tristan*, 69.
supplies it: “You have long ago heard say that the bird of gentle breed learns even by himself, without correction by another; even as you here may hear, William thus taught himself. ... He knew more of chess and tables, of hawking, of the woods, of the chase, than anyone in Lombardy, or in all the territory of Rome.”

Similar notes are heard in *King Horn*, where Horn innately understands how to hunt and hawk.

The catechismic structure of many hunting manuals brings these ideals into common practice. *The Craft of Venery* and *La Chace dou Cerf*, for instance, are structured as series of questions and answers between a master (or lord) and his pupil. The discussion of which beasts are “chased” and which “encoylid” in *The Craft of Venery* provides an example:

Syr, how many bestis buþe enchased?
III, the hert, þe hare, þe bore, þe wolfe.
Syre, how mony ben encylid?
The buk, þe do, þe fox male and female, and alle oþer vermyne.

The catechismic structure of the manuals drives home both the educational nature of the manuals and that of hunting itself. Not all of the manuals have this same structure, but they all share the desire to impress upon their audiences the proper or appropriate ways of hunting. The educational nature of hunting also extended beyond youth and became a lifelong process that was associated with general self-improvement. *La Chace dou Cerf* ends with an injunction to all nobles and hunters that they constantly seek out masters of

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hunting and learn from them, while Machaut's *Dit de l'Alerion*, an allegorical treatise on hawking and courtship, displays a similar ideal in a narrator who constantly seeks out any available master to increase his knowledge.\(^{54}\)

The educational aspects of hunting in particular lead one back to the concepts of habitus and conceptual metaphor.\(^{55}\) Habitus is, in a way, just a formalized conception of the influence of experience, practice, and social context on one's later behavior and thought, and to say that hunting deeply affected the aristocratic habitus provides a concise summary of its importance. Hunting, or more specifically venery, was for the medieval aristocracy an integral component of its habitus, deeply impacting how the nobility, as reflected in literature, imagined the world and behaved in it. Similarly, both youthful and lifelong experiences in hunting, coupled with the constant reinforcement of venery in art and literature, must have provided a rich conceptual domain from which the aristocracy could produce any manner of associations and conflations with which it could explain, enrich, and evaluate the other aspects and events of noble life.

**Venery and Courtly Virtue**

That venery taught the aristocrat how to behave, even throughout his life, is thus readily apparent. What it taught requires, however, a few more words. Tristan, the “chyeff chacer of the worlde,”\(^{56}\) continues to provide a touchstone. After Tristan finds himself


\(^{55}\) See the Introduction for definitions and explanations of these concepts.

\(^{56}\) Malory, *Works*, 416. See also Arthur's comment to Tristan in the same text, “‘Wellcom,’ seyde kynge Arthur, ‘for one of the beste knychtes and the jentyllyst of the worlde and the man of moste worship. For of all maner of huntynge thou beryste the pryce, and of all mesures of blowyng thou arte the
abandoned by his would-be captors on the Cornish coast and comes across a party of King Mark's huntsmen about to cut up a hart, he displays another characteristic illuminating why Gottfried stressed venery so heavily as part of Tristan's character. When Tristan encounters these men, he immediately shouts at them to “Stop, in God's name! What are you at? Whoever saw a hart broken up in this fashion?” The boy then goes on to demonstrate how to break the hart properly, and all the men “flock round to watch what he would do.” Tristan's injunction and his correction of the hunters emphasize that the men are violating an ethical principle in treating the hart improperly, and Tristan's correction revises the breaking, teaching them how to do it “according to the rules of the chase.” They were being rude and unmannerly, and Tristan reforms them. The men are delighted and insist that he return to the castle with them, where the chief huntsman “proceeded to tell his lord all about Tristan from beginning to end, how perfect he was in the noble art of venery, and how he had set the quarry before the hounds.” The entire scene, which is quite lengthy, provides the first evidence of Tristan's abilities and behavior on his own. The refinement of the breaking here from a practical event (cutting up a deer) to an ethical event that follows particular rules and emphasizes certain meaningful ceremonies reveals that venery signifies propriety, manners, courtliness, and ideal aristocratic behavior in general. Hunting is Tristan's superlative skill, and so Tristan particularly embodies these virtues.

A closer glance at this scene illustrates some of the ethical principles that underlie

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begynnyenge, of all the termys of huntynge and hawkyenge ye ar the begynner, of all instirmentes of musyk ye ar the beste,” 352.

57 Tristan, 81.
58 Tristan, 80.
59 Tristan, 85. Emphasis added.
Tristan's correction of the huntsmen. The focus in the breaking is, above all, on form. How the act is done matters far more than what the act is. Thus, the text emphasizes beauty and gracefulness: Tristan smooths back his hair and makes no mistakes in cutting apart the deer, making sure that the cuts of meat have “what duly belongs to them”; “everything about him was noble, his clothes rare and magnificent and his figure of perfect build.”\(^{60}\) It highlights cleanliness: Tristan “removed his cloak, tucked up his robe, and rolled up his sleeves.”\(^{61}\) It underscores attitude and an adherence to custom: Tristan is “polite” and courteous in speaking to the huntsmen; he “excoriates” the hart according to his “country's usage” and “the rules of the chase;” he states (circularly) that certain tidbits go on the fourchée (a forked stick) “since the 'fourche' is the proper place for it;” and he instructs the hunters to “take your present to court with all appropriate ceremony; this will enhance you as courtiers. You know yourselves how a hart must be presented. Present it in the approved manner.”\(^{62}\) The scene also emphasizes largess and charity: Tristan tells the huntsmen to “truss your portions separately,” implying that they each receive a share, and he instructs that part be given to the poor. “‘Here, quick!' he said to the men, 'Take this chine away! If any poor person should have a mind to it, make him a present of it or deal with it according to your own custom’.”\(^{63}\) There is a small emphasis on utility, on rewarding the hounds with the “quarry” (often “curée,” bits of blood and offal on the hide) so they will be encouraged, which ensures future success in the hunt, but it too has its proper place and form.\(^ {64}\)

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\(^{60}\) *Tristan*, 79-80.  
\(^{61}\) *Tristan*, 79.  
\(^{62}\) *Tristan*, 79-82.  
\(^{63}\) *Tristan*, 81-82.  
\(^{64}\) *Tristan*, 81. See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the breaking and curée.
These virtues correspond in large measure to the virtues emphasized in chivalry, though with some significant differences. In his study of chivalry, Maurice Keen summarizes the five chivalric virtues as *prouesse*, *loyaute*, *largesse*, *courtoisie*, and *franchise*.\(^{65}\) Prowess, as success in battle, is necessarily absent here, though there is a stress on precision with a knife and anatomical knowledge of deer. Loyalty, too, is relatively absent, since the lord himself is performing the action, but the division of meat to the hunters shows reciprocity, which might correspond to fellowship, and largess both. Frankness is evident in Tristan's politeness and willingness to do as the hunters ask. Cleanness, a courtly virtue found in the Pearl-poet's description of the fifth set of fives in Gawain's shield (“fraunchyse,” “felaȝschyp,” “clannes,” “courtayse,” and “pite”)\(^{66}\) is also present, in a secular sense of clothing and person, while pity is displayed in the gift of the chine to the poor. While in chivalry the stress falls heavily on prowess, as Geoffroi de Charny's manual illustrates,\(^{67}\) here it falls on aesthetics, especially form, beauty, and attention to custom. Thus, the virtue that the breaking most conveys is courtesy, in the broader sense of courtliness.\(^{68}\) It displays an ethical and aesthetic ideal.\(^{69}\)

Thus, *Tristan* establishes that venery invokes a particular code of behavior, one that emphasizes courtliness as central to hunting. As one might expect from this emphasis on courtliness in Gottfried's work, the later hunting manuals also stressed that hunting, or,

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\(^{65}\) Keen, *Chivalry*, 2.


\(^{67}\) See Kaeuper and Kennedy, *The Book of Chivalry*, 32.

\(^{68}\) Burnley identifies personal beauty and an attention to form and custom, among other things, as particular points of courtliness, *Courtliness and Literature*, 56-58.

more implicitly, hunting done the way the manuals indicated, required and promoted
courtliness – and virtue more broadly, too. *De arte bersandi* states in the introduction
that “qui vult scire et esse perfectus in arte ista, primo debet apponere cor et etiam
voluntatem et debet esse levis et non piger.”70 (Whoever desires to know and be perfect in
this art first ought to apply his heart and will to it and be light and not surly.)
Prerequisites for proper hunting, according to Guicennas, are dedication and the proper
attitude. This “lightness” of character is the same virtue of frankness emphasized in
Tristan, who is pleasant and congenial with everyone. *La Chace dou Cerf* also
emphasizes virtue as part of hunting, but approaches it from the opposite direction. While
it was a prerequisite in the earlier manual, the later one emphasizes that all nobles should
apply themselves to the hunt because much good can be learned from it. It ends by saying
that no one frequents the hunt who does not profit from it, if they do what they should:
“Nuns ne les aime qui n'en soit / Mieudres, se il fet ce qu'il doit.”71 Both statements see
hunting as an activity that promotes virtue. The idea is echoed constantly throughout the
manuals, though King Modus of the *Livres du Roy Modus et de la Royne Ratio* (c.1354-
77) cautions his apprentices that they are only “molt proufitables a ceulz qui en velent
user selon raison” (very profitable to those who practice them according to reason).72
These texts portray venery as a pursuit that instills virtue, particularly a class-based
virtue, at least if done in proper measure (which again implies a rabidness for hunting).

The chivalric manuals help to contextualize further this stress on virtue,

70 *De arte bersandi*, 1.a.
71 *La Chace dou Cerf*, ll. 521-22.
illustrating that chivalry and venery generally overlapped in reflecting an aristocratic ethos, though again with a telling difference. Keen states that “chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together” (16), and that “the 'school and study of arms' did not just mean practice in the use of weapons, in other words; it meant an introduction to a whole scale of values” (99).

Though he ranged usefully far afield, Keen based his study of chivalry on chivalric manuals, particularly the anonymous *Ordene de Chevalerie* (before 1250), Ramon Llull's *Libre del Ordre de Cavayleria* (c. 1279-83), and Geoffroi de Charny's volume (c. 1350-52). These three largely present the same account of the symbolic meaning of the ceremony of being dubbed a knight. As Keen's quote implies, the ethos of chivalry was complex, but this ceremony provides an encapsulation of it.

First, the prospective knights confess and repent their sins, then submerge themselves in a long bath, representing the need to purify their bodies from sin. Then comes a period of rest in a bed with white sheets, which represents repose “stemming from virtue, from a clear conscience, from making one's peace with God with regard to all past actions that might have angered Him.” Next, they rise from the beds and knights dress them in symbolic clothing. Then they keep vigil in the church until dawn, when they are led to mass. They pray for grace to maintain the order of knighthood, and then they are led on to the one who will knight them. Two knights each place a golden spur on either foot, “signifying that gold is the most coveted of all metals and is placed on their feet as a sign that they should remove from their hearts all unworthy covetousness of riches.” The knight who will dub them takes a sword, whose two sides represent fairness.

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73 This description comes from Keen, *Chivalry*, 167-71.
and equality, particularly in judgment. The dubbing knight kisses them to confirm the order and to signify that peace, love, and loyalty be within them, and that they should strive with all their hearts to uphold the order. Then the dubbing knight gives them the “collée,” a light blow, as a sign that they should forever remember and carry out the order of knighthood.

The ceremony is intensely religious, but it is a secular religiosity. Despite ecclesiastical writings that describe the chivalric order as the right arm of the Church and as subordinate to the superior clergy, this ceremony shows a distinct lack of any obedience to the Church as an institution. Instead, it focuses on notions of physical ability, purity, good judgment, and humility that largely correspond to the aristocratic secular values summarized above: prowess, loyalty, largesse, courtesy, frankness, and so forth. The knighting ceremony does not emphasize all of these virtues, but the chivalric manuals do elsewhere. Even the highly religious Ramon Lull, for example, stresses that the worst sins are to betray one's lord, sleep with his wife, or surrender his castle, notions that arise from these secular virtues.

The secular piety of the chivalric manuals is quite similar, and was perhaps even an inspiration, to that of the hunting manuals. In contrast to some religious opinions, Charny states that there is no sin in combat or in following one's lord's wars, in fighting for a good cause or defending those that need to be.

Were anyone, therefore, to say that those who are engaged in a career of arms would not be able to save their souls, they would not know what they were saying … If one performs well there, one is honored in life, and if

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74 See Keen, *Chivalry*, 64-77, on the tension of the secular and ecclesiastical influences on the knighting ceremony.
75 Cited in Keen, *Chivalry*, 10.
one dies there, one's soul is saved, if other sins do not stand in the way of this. … The man who acts thus wins in noble fashion personal honor and the salvation of his soul.  

Religious wars in particular are righteous, “for his earthly body will be honored in a saintly fashion and his soul will, in a short space of time, be borne in holiness and without pain into paradise.”  

For Charny, knighthood surpasses even the asceticism of holy orders:

However much it may be said to those entering the religious orders that when they want to eat, they will fast, and when they want to fast, then they will have to eat, when they want to sleep, they will have to keep vigil, and many other such things, this is all nothing in comparison with the suffering to be endured in the order of knighthood.

Charny thus appropriates the cultural importance placed on self-punishment to argue that knighthood surpasses the secular, and perhaps even the regular, clergy.

Perhaps in an attempt to imply that hunting was even more righteous than war, and certainly in response to King Modus's comment in *Les Livres du Roy Modus* (which Gaston took as a source) that hunters must avoid idleness, Gaston Phébus argued:

Donc di je que, puis que veneur n'est oyseus, il ne peut avoir males ymaginations, et s'il n'a males ymaginations, il ne peut fere males euvres, quar l'imagination va devant, et, s'il ne fet males euvres, il faut qu'il s'en aille tout droit en paradis.

(Thus I say that, since a hunter is not idle, he cannot have evil thoughts, and if he does not have evil thoughts, he cannot do evil deeds, because imagining comes first, and, if he does not do evil deeds, he must go straight to heaven.)

Gaston's argument might come off as a bit sophist in comparison to Charny's, but the thrust is the same: these noble activities are not sinful. In both comments, aristocratic

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76 *Book of Chivalry*, 35.  
77 *Book of Chivalry*, 35.  
78 *Book of Chivalry*, 40.  
79 *Livre de Chasse*, 54.
proponents respond to religious criticism of their pursuits by appropriating clerical arguments and dogma and turning it to their own ends. Charny takes the common explanation of clerical asceticism and claims that knights are more ascetic than clerics, while Gaston seizes upon the common notion of idleness as the gateway to sin and argues, logically if simply, that hunters are not idle and thus cannot sin.

The most intensely interesting point of comparison between chivalric virtues and hunting virtues, however, is not in their shared expression of lay piety, but instead in their differing emphases on the relationship between virtue and action in their individual pursuits. The knighting ceremony is designed so that the knight will keep in mind a particular set of virtues as he goes about his business, but venery is portrayed as a site that requires and instructs one in virtue. One should remember to be virtuous as a knight, precisely because war tempts one to abandon it. Charny states, “As for the order of chivalry, it can truly be said and demonstrated that it is the most dangerous for both soul and body, and the one in which it is necessary to maintain a clearer conscience than in any other order in the world.”

Yet La Chace dou Cerf encouraged hunters with, “Nuns ne les aime qui n'en soit / Mieudres, se il fet ce qu'il doit.” Unlike chivalry, which tested virtue, venery taught it.

It would be easy to see venery as an off-shoot of the chivalric way of life that Keen describes, and that viewpoint is partially valid. Venery referenced many of the same virtues as chivalry. Venery, however, set an ethical and courtly standard that chivalry struggled to maintain. Venery was a foundational activity for the performance of chivalry,

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80 Quoted in Keen, *Chivalry*, 167.
81 Quoted above.
a more controlled and more idealized world in which meaning was more simply and more thoroughly maintained. Venery was, indeed, a training for war. It was more, though, than just a pursuit that made one hardy, knowledgeable of the land, and used to the sight of blood, as Edward stated. Venery also taught the ethical and aesthetic qualities expected in the nobility's public life.

**Venery, Status, and Legitimacy**

Venery's embodiment of noble virtue led directly to venery as a symbol of nobility. In particular, venery was an expression and legitimization of aristocratic status. Medieval romances in particular demonstrate this point by arguing that performing venery provided access to the highest cultural echelons and that knowledge of venery was inherent to aristocracy. The association between nobility and venery was so strong that romances transformed aristocrats into harts and imagined them as falcons and boars, so potent that venery, embodied in appropriate representatives, such as greyhounds, even took on a positive force and set right violations of justice and virtue. Heraldry and public symbolism, such as great seals, illustrate that living aristocrats themselves supported and propagated the connection between venery and nobility.

The context surrounding Tristan's correction of the huntsmen in Gottfried's work illustrates how a performance of venery could provide access to high society by demonstrating one's status. After Tristan escapes from some rather mercenary merchants, he ends up on the coast of Cornwall in southern Britain. The young teenager claims that he has lost his way and misplaced his friends, and in that guise he accompanies some
pilgrims until he sees a party of the king's huntsmen. He tells the pilgrims then that he has
found his friends again and goes to join the hunters. Tristan's statement is not exactly a
lie; he does not know these men in particular, but he is intimately familiar with hunting
and he seems to trust that his knowledge of it will gain him acceptance. He is not
mistaken. In correcting the hunters, Tristan demonstrates his courtliness, and the direct
result of this demonstration is his entrance to the royal court and his acceptance there as
Mark's right-hand man. This sequence of events reveals a logical result of venery's
identification with courtliness. If one was a good hunter, one necessarily belonged at
court. Thus, venery granted access to the highest levels of society. Tristan's lies about his
background and the court's reaction to them reinforce this point. He claims that he is a
merchant's son, but the association of venery with courtliness is too strong for the
huntsmen, or Mark, to believe him. Tristan's behavior marks him out as an aristocrat, and
the court responds to him as one. Wearing the right clothes, talking the right talk, walking
with the right bearing, cutting up the deer properly – these actions define Tristan's
identity. Tristan is a foreigner to Cornwall, but he is a native to the court, and the
huntsmen take him “home.”

If knowledge of venery welcomes one into court, then logically a lack of
knowledge excludes one. The portrait of Tristan found in Thomas of Britain, Gottfried,
the 13th-century romance *Sir Tristrem*, and other works led to a close association
between Tristan and venery as a whole. The association led both to a later collection of
hunting material being attributed to him as “Sir Trystram's Book” and to Malory's later
emphasis on venery as part of Tristan's character. He emphasizes both sides of this
correlation between venery and nobility:
As he growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and in hawkynge – never jantylman more that ever we herde rede of. And as the booke seyth, he began good mesures of blowynge of beestes of venery and beestes of chaace and all maner of vermaynes, and all the tearmys we have yet of hawkynge and huntynge. And therefore the booke of venery, of hawkynge and huntynge is called the booke of sir Trystrams. Wherefore, as me semyth, all jantyllmen that beryth olde armys ought of ryght to honoure sir Trystrams for the goodly tearmys that jantylmen have and use and shall do unto the Day of Dome, that thereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discer a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne. For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll tacchis and to folow the noble customys of jantylmen.\footnote{Malory, \textit{Works}, 232.}

Malory's comments illustrate the logical opposite to Tristan's acceptance at court: a lack of knowledge of venery defines one as decidedly ignoble. These comments imply, though, a sliding scale of nobility based on venery. Malory does not describe an either-or scenario, but instead naturalizes venery into the social hierarchy. The nobler one is, the more one knows about venery. Malory's comments both emphasize the association between venery and nobility and demonstrate why the gentry were so avid for courtesy books, including books on hunting, a desire encapsulated in the 1486 \textit{Book of St. Albans}, which compiled treatises on hunting, hawking, and heraldry, with some miscellaneous material on terminology, into one, and which was reprinted some two dozen times in little more than a century.

The association between venery and status, between venery and nobility, is strong enough that hunting, its animals, and its attendant aspects even become imaginatively realized in actual transformations in literature and in symbolic transformations in real life. The \textit{Romance of William of Palerne} draws out this link even further when, in order to run away together, William and Melior seem to transform into hunting animals. They first put on white bear skins and, for all intents and purposes, change into bears for a
fortnight. The transformation is an odd one, but it seems that no one can tell the
difference between the transformed lovers and real bears: “þat no man upon mold miȝt
oþer perceyue / but sche a bere were to bait at a stake,” the text claims of Melior. There
were no wild bears in England when the text was adapted into English, but bears were
restricted as solely royal prey in Spain, which suggests the status the composer may have
had in mind. The lovers' second transformation is into red deer, which held elite status in
England as the largest, strongest, and most clever of all deer. Thus, the associations
suggest that William and Melior, both themselves royal, become “royal” animals.
Because of this link, it seems unlikely that the two could have become cows or pigs.
Instead, they transform along a lateral plane, into animals who possess the same
characteristics.

These playful transformations of humans into hunting animals simply extend a
widespread symbolic connection between status and hunting. Heraldry and great seals
provide particular examples of this overlap between real and symbolic identity. Richard II
took for himself the badge of the white hart in chains, which must have symbolized
something like humbled nobility or humbled pride, since the white hart was idealized in
romances as a rare and magical animal whose pursuit would lead one on miraculous
adventures. Great seals similarly symbolized the status of their owners, and while the
image of a galloping knight might have been most common, images of aristocratic
hunters were not unusual. Earl Simon de Montfort (d.1265) had created for him a great
seal whose obverse shows the “eminent soldier-earl riding through a wood blowing a
horn, in hunting garb, a dog running at his horse's side.”

83 William of Palerne, II.1722-23
from Lincolnshire portrays a knight riding along with his hawk on his wrist and dogs running just ahead.\textsuperscript{85} There are also any number of instances of the aristocracy's employing hunting images as simple emblems of status. The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, provide one notable example.\textsuperscript{86} These tapestries, made on the Continent and intended to line the walls of a great hall, depict hunts for boar, deer, bear, and fowl, accompanied by numerous smaller scenes. The hunting scenes are central, but the tapestries spill outward into lush depictions of medieval life centered on venery, from taking eyas hawks to tending to the hounds.

In these examples, aristocrats imaginatively or symbolically became hunting animals. In metaphorical terms, the transformation is fairly simple, both because of venery's embodiment of nobility and because it was a common practice, then as now, to describe outstandingly good or bad human qualities as animalistic: swift as a falcon, for instance, or as vain as a peacock. Yet, venery, through its symbolic representatives, could imaginatively become an agent, legitimizing rightful lords and revenging wrongful deaths. Froissart relates a now-famous story about the behavior of Richard II's greyhound when Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, forced the King to surrender:

King Richard had a greyhound called Math, a truly magnificent dog, which would follow no one except the King. Whenever he was about to go riding, the greyhound was loosed and came bounding up to the King and put his paws on his shoulders. Now, as the King and the Duke were standing talking in the middle of the courtyard, with their horses ready for mounting, this greyhound Math left the King and went to the Duke of Lancaster, showing him all the


\textsuperscript{86} On these tapestries, see Linda Woolley, \textit{Medieval Life and Leisure in the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries} (London: V&A Publications, 2002).
marks of affection which he used to show to the King. He placed his forepaws on his shoulders and began to lick his face. The Duke of Lancaster, who had never seen the dog before, asked the King: “What does this greyhound want?” “Cousin,” replied the King, “it is an excellent omen for you and a bad one for me.” “What do you mean?” asked the Duke. “I mean,” said the King, “that the dog is hailing and honouring you today as the King of England which you will be, while I shall be deposed. The dog knows it by instinct. So keep him with you, for he will stay with you and leave me.” The Duke of Lancaster understood perfectly and stroked the greyhound, which henceforth ignored Richard of Bordeaux and followed him. These things were observed or known by over thirty thousand people.87

The greyhound was first and foremost a hunting dog, and it represented venery and courtliness itself. Its form was admired, as Tristan's form is admired, and it was often kept in households for its beauty. When Richard II's greyhound here favors Henry, it signals, as the text points out, the transition of power to the soon-to-be king because the greyhound is a living embodiment of venery, symbolizing status and legitimacy.

Far more difficult a task is it for an animal to become a human. Edward of Norwich himself, quoting Gaston directly, recounts similar tales of greyhounds' abilities and virtues, emphasizing that there is “so mich noblesse in houndes” and commenting that dogs are the smartest of all animals and smarter than some humans.88 One story particularly stands out for its display of the imaginative agency of venery as embodied in a greyhound. In it, a greyhound fights a judicial duel as if it were human – and wins. Aubery of Mondidier, Edward recounts, was riding through the wood of Bondys with his greyhound when a great gentleman named Makary, who “hated him for gret enuy” ambushes and slays him. The greyhound covers his dead master with dirt and leaves and stays by his side for three days until he becomes too hungry to remain. He then runs to the court, where he sees Makary and leaps upon him. Men separate them, and the king,

87 Froissart, Chronicles, 453.
88 Master of Game, 192.
who was “wyse and percuying,” orders them to let the dog be. The greyhound takes food from the table, returns to his master, and puts it in his mouth. He does the same for three or four days, until the king orders the hound followed. They come upon Aubery's body, “cherissh” the greyhound, and try to lead him away, but he will not budge. The king then commands Makary to take some meat and give it to the hound. When the hound sees him, he charges him, and the king “had grete suspicioun vpon Makary, and seid to him that þat he most nedes fiȝt agaynes þe greihounde”: 89

On of þe kynnesmen of Aubery sawe þe grete merueil of þe greihounde, and seid þat he wolde swere þe sacrement þat is custumed in suych a cas for þe greihound. And Makary swerd in þe toþer side, and þen were þei led into Oure Ladies Yle at Parys, and þer faught þe greihound and Makary, þe which Makary had a grete two-handyd staf; and so þei faught þat Makary was scomfited. And þenne þe kyng comaunted þat þe greihounde, þe which had Makary vndir him, shuld be taken vp, and þenne made enquere þe soth of Makary, þe which knowleched þat he had slayn Aubery in tresoun. And þerfor he was hanged and drawe. 90

Edward, still following Gaston, recounts that the story was well-known, stating that “men may se [it] painted in þe reaume of Fraunce in many places.” 91 The tale possesses several remarkable elements: that the king would “wisely” permit the greyhound to steal food from his table and attack a member of his court; that on seeing the dog rush Makary a second time, the king would move straight to the idea of a judicial ordeal; and of course that the greyhound would guard his master's body, attempt to feed him, recognize and attack Makary, and, especially, defeat him in a duel. The duel itself is unusual. Judicial ordeals, here trial by combat, were used to distinguish truth in amibiguous circumstances. 92 The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 officially forbade clerical

89 The preceeding account comes from Master of Game, 196-97.
90 Master of Game, 197.
91 Master of Game, 196.
92 See Robert Bartlett, Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal (Oxford: Claredon Press,
participation in them, declaring that they “tempted God,” since the entire concept of the ordeal revolved around the notion that God would favor the righteous, but trial by combat continued for several centuries.\textsuperscript{93} The dog's victory here thus implicitly declares that God favored the righteousness of his cause, but even more astonishing is the fact that the dog fights the duel in the first place. Whether the story is based on an actual account or not, the effect is the same: the dog and its symbolic representation of justice, righteousness, and law take on the figurative rights and form of a man. Edward stresses that he tells this story “to afferme þe noblesse of houndes,” and this emphasis makes a particular point about venery. Here, a central animal of venery assumes agency and responsibility for enforcing the courtly code that venery normally only represents and teaches. A parallel would be if a destrier took a lance in its teeth and jousted against a miscreant knight. From emblematic and symbolic expressions of status in seals and artwork to greyhounds as agents of courtly justice, venery and noble status were nearly synonymous.

\textbf{Hunting Manuals and Royal Authority}

Venery's embodiment of courtly virtue and noble status helps to explain the existence and proliferation of hunting manuals. These manuals typically have royal or elite authorship and convey the rules of hunting, usually to the court or to elite huntsmen. As a result, the manuals set a standard for courtly behavior and would have disseminated the courts' particular ethical visions. They seem to have been at least partial attempts to

\textsuperscript{93} See Bartlett, \textit{Trial By Fire and Water}, 53, 86, 103-113.
control the meaning of venery due to its quintessential expression of courtly virtue. They were also, of course, declamations of the superlative virtue of their authors or dedicatees.

The earliest manuals were *De arte bersandi* and *De arte venandi cum avibus*, and a pattern of courtly authorship is evident from them onward. *De arte bersandi* was composed by Guicennas, a “miles teotonicus” (German knight), and written down around 1250, and it provides instructions on how to train one's scenthound and how to station the archers, among other details, before it breaks off, unfinished. It was contemporary with Frederick II's *De arte venandi cum avibus*, a massive treatise on avian natural philosophy and hawking techniques. Both are German works, but they were written in the international language of Latin. The earliest hunting manual in French is the anonymous *La Chace dou Cerf*, composed in the last half of the 13th century, which presents a dialogue between a lord and his huntsmen in which the lord describes how to train one's dogs, how to find and take the hart, how to break it, and how to behave during the hunt itself.

These texts started a pattern of authorship and audience: typically, a powerful nobleman, sometimes a king or emperor, sometimes someone connected to the court and writing for a royal and courtly audience, wrote a manual laying out an ideal pattern of hunting. Frederick II, perhaps the most powerful ruler of his era, produced his manual after the result of three decades of personal research and costly expenditures on falconry. *De arte venandi* instructs its audience on the natural philosophy and techniques of falconry; in it, Frederick credits himself with having brought the idea of the hood back from the Crusades and having introduced it to the West as an alternative to “seeling”
(sewing the bird's eyelids shut). "His son, King Manfred, followed in his footsteps and completed the manual. The work is technically dedicated to “M.E.” who might have been Malik El-Kamal, the Sultan of Egypt. If that designation is accurate, then the work was both composed at and dedicated to the absolute highest levels of society. Frederick stresses that falconry is a nobler sport than the chase because it is, he claims, more difficult, more refined, and more elite, and because falcons are more elegant than dogs, and those comments suggest an aristocratic audience for the manual as well. Frederick does differ somewhat from the other manual writers in that his approach is particularly “scientific.” One of his reasons for writing, he states, is that falconry had to date been devoid of artistic or scientific treatment. Nonetheless, his attention to hawking and his authorship of the manual fits the broader pattern.

Guicennas's work was probably written at a similar, if not quite so elevated, level. De arte bersandi was composed posthumously and attributed to Guicennas, but the scribe states that:

Fuit magister in omni venatione et in super summus omnium venatorum et specialiter in arte bersandi, sicut testificabantur magni barones et principes de Allemannia et maxime venatores excellentis viri domini Frederici Romanorum imperatoris.”

(He was a master of all hunting and the unsurpassed summit of all hunters, especially in the art of the chase (bersandi), as have attested the great barons and princes of Germany and especially the hunters of the excellent lord Frederic, emperor of the Romans.)

Though we know little about Guicennas today, if we take the scribe's words at face value

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95 De arte venandi, prologue; for a discussion of the dedication, lxxxiii-lxxxiv.
96 De arte venandi, ch. 1.
97 De arte bersandi, 1.c.
and not just as rhetorical exaggeration, Guicennas must have been well-known at
Frederick's court and among the German nobility. *De arte bersandi* is not dedicated to
one person in particular, but the composer does state, as noted above, “Si quis scire
desideret de arte bresandi [sic], in hoc tractatu cognoscere poterit magistratum.” 98 (If
anyone desires to know about the art of the chase, in this treatise he will find its
instruction.) That comment implies that it was specifically intended to be didactic, and
the mention of the great barons and princes of Germany suggests that they or their courts
were at least a potential audience.

This pattern of elite authorship and audience was the norm until the 15th century.
If the rulers and lords themselves were not writing, their huntsmen were. *La Chace dou
Cerf* is anonymous, but in it a lord instructs his huntsmen in how to hunt properly, which
suggests that the audience was either other lords or courtly huntsmen. William Twiti was
a royal huntsman for Edward II of England and wrote *L'Art de venerie* shortly before his
death in 1328. 99 Henri de Ferrières, the author of the *Livres du Roy Modus et de la Reine
Ratio*, was probably part of the Ferrières family who were the proprietors of the Forest of
Breteuil, who assisted with the royal hunts, and Gaces de la Bugne was the personal
chaplain of Jean II, le Bon, and, as noted above, wrote the *Roman des Deduis*, which,
while not a manual, is a lengthy, didactic discussion of falconry, at the king's request in
order to instruct the his son, Phillip, the duke of Burgundy, in manners and virtues and to
keep him from idleness. Gaston Phébus, Count of Foix, wrote his *Livre de Chasse* with a
seemingly broader audience in mind, arguing that anyone could and should hunt because
it kept men from idleness and sent them straight to heaven, but he dedicated it to that

98 *De arte bersandi*, l.a.
99 See Danielsson, introduction, 33-34.
same Duke of Burgundy. Edward of Norwich, second Duke of York, translated and adapted the manual, dedicating it to Prince Henry (the future Henry V), stating that he wrote it so that the royal huntsmen would know the “parfytenesse of this artee.” These are not all: in Castile, Lopez d'Ayala, the chancellor, wrote on hawking, while Alfonso X wrote on boar hunting; in Portugal, John I wrote on boar hunting as well; and Charles IX of France was just following the trend when he wrote his own poem on the stag hunt in the sixteenth century. As Keen has commented, “I think it may be said that there are no other matters on which the princes and the very great of those times wrote so much, displaying such a technical command of their subjects, as they did on these two forms of the chase.”

The later 15th-century English manuals, on the other hand, like the Book of St. Albans, seem to have been amalgamations or basic adaptations of these older texts and were consumed by the gentry as part of the fashion for courtesy literature.

This level of authorship, in which the highest nobility (or their huntsmen representing them) wrote for a generally courtly or aristocratic audience, suggests that these manuals were setting a standard for how hunting should be done and what it should mean. As one sees in the Tristan example in particular, venery was about courtliness, and so it makes perfect sense that the courts should be producing didactic works on hunting

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100 Livre de Chasse, 291.
101 Master of Game, 139.
104 For the influence of the court on the literature produced in England in the late Middle Ages, see Richard Firth Green, Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); for advice literature among the gentry, Raluca Radulescu, “Literature,” in Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England, eds. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 100-18.
as a way of enforcing their particular views and of performing their own courtly superiority. Writing or commissioning a manual would have made an emphatic statement of elite identity. In a way, the manuals were royal or noble propaganda, not just in what they said, but in the fact of their existence. Propaganda might well have been the Count of Foix's intent in composing his manual. Froissart states in his *Chronicles* that it was well known that Gaston had killed his only legitimate son and heir for an alleged attempt to poison him, and Gaston wrote his *Livre des oraisons*, a lengthy series of prayers, in partial atonement.\textsuperscript{105} The *Livre des oraisons* was typically combined in manuscripts with the *Livre de Chasse*, and it is possible that, along with the more penitential book of prayers, Gaston wrote the *Livre de Chasse* as an implicit statement of his aristocratic virtue. His emphasis on hunting as preventing sins might have arisen from the same cause. Whether that was Gaston's reason for writing or not, though, the general point about authorship and audience remains valid. Hunting manuals were an elite genre that rhetorically emphasized the elevated status of their authors, commissioners, or dedicatees and that set a performative standard for hunting based on what was practiced at the highest courts of the realm.

**Conclusion**

Taken collectively, these several individual points illustrate that venery: 1) provided the fundamental conceptual patterns through which the aristocracy apprehended

\textsuperscript{105} For this text, see Gunnar Tilander and Pierre Tucoo-Chala, eds. *Gaston Fébus: Livre des Oraisons* (Pau: Editions Marrimpouey Jeune, 1974).
its world, including the pursuits of chivalry and courtly love; 2) embodied ideal
courtliness; and 3) functioned as a cipher for nobility itself. In the educational and
instructive nature of venery and in the hunting manuals, which proliferated from the
twelfth century to the fifteenth, one finds a constant focus on virtue and an attention to
the way venery represents the ideals of the noble and courtly life. These values evoke the
same super-set of aristocratic virtues as chivalry, but the emphasis falls far less heavily on
prowess and loyalty and far more strongly on frankness and courtesy, both in behavior
and in respect for tradition and custom. While chivalry tests virtue by its nature, venery
by its nature instills it. The preceding discussion stands as a snap-shot of the place of
venery within noble life and redefines its utility for a criticism that, while it has often
glanced at it, has not acknowledged its central importance in aristocratic culture. The
following chapter complements this broader description by analyzing how the courtly
par-force hunt particularly represents an ideal vision of society. The third and fourth
chapters then use the insights of these first two chapters as stepping stones to analyze the
way the authors of Troilus and Criseyde and the Alliterative Morte Arthure employ
veneric themes to shape their audience's attitudes toward love and warfare respectively.
Chapter 2: The Courtly Hunt and Social Metaphor

“The late Middle Ages is one of the end periods in which the cultural life of the higher circles has become, almost in its entirety, social play.”

~Johan Huizinga, 1921

Octavian's courtly hunt begins and ends the dream vision in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and Chaucer challenges the reader to interpret the vision's meaning:

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Y trowe no man had the wyt
To konne wel my sweven rede
No, not Joseph …
Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus.
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The bare fact of this challenge implies that his audience was well equipped to offer a plausible interpretation. Modern audiences, however, lack the contextual knowledge to draw similar inferences. That lack has encouraged interpretations that range from assertions that Octavian numerologically represents Christ to arguments that (more rightly in my view) correlate the hart hunt with the Dreamer's hunt for the Black Knight's

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1 A version of this chapter is appearing as “The Game of the Courtly Hunt: Chasing and Breaking Deer in Late Medieval English Literature,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*: Forthcoming.
2 Huizinga, *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 85.
3 *Book of the Duchess*, ll.277-84, in Larry Benson, ed. *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All references to Chaucer's works are from this edition unless otherwise noted.
feelings in one fashion or another. Yet, even the best of these interpretations does not question why Chaucer would have chosen a hart to represent the Black Knight and his extra-textual corollary John of Gaunt, nor why he would have framed the poem with a particular kind of hunt – the *chasse par force des chiens* (chase by strength of hounds). These details were not random. Instead, they drew on the powerful cultural institution of medieval courtly hunting and its attendant literature. These references were richly meaningful for Chaucer's audience, but they are deeply opaque to a modern one, and this gap represents a critical need. In order to grasp much of courtly society's way of thinking about the world, one must better understand courtly hunting, as both literary topic and lived practice.

According both to its portrayal in literature and more historical texts, the medieval English aristocracy loved no leisure activity more than hunting. Jousting, feasting, dancing, gaming, and polite conversation might have rounded out these activities, but none competed with the total cost, time, and effort devoted to hunting. Immense swaths of countryside were legal forests, and hunting parks and lodges liberally dotted the landscape. Literary works invoking the hunt and the records of its laws, rights, and disputes are extensive. Not all types of hunting were equally important, however, and none compared in nobility to the *par-force* hunt for the hart, the male red deer, which

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5 Women hunted as well as men, but they seem to have been involved in the more social and less physically taxing types of hunting. In particular, women seem to have participated in the bow and stable hunt on a regular basis, and to have been very fond of hawking. Though much of his evidence is visual, Richard Almond comes to a similar conclusion in the only book on the subject: *Daughters of Artemis*, 150. For a foundational and still-valuable article on the noble hunt, see Marcelle Thiébault, “The Mediaeval Chase.”

6 The red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) is very similar to the North American elk. Modern harts (the males) can weigh up to 420lbs and measure more than 4ft at the shoulders. They're remarkable for their “bellow”
was “þe fairest huntyng þat any man may hunte aftir.” 
In this hunt, the entire infrastructure of the hunting establishment was focused on chasing down, killing, and breaking (butchering) a hart with a maximum of physical and emotional investment. The most recent scholarly interpretation of the courtly hunt, by Susan Crane, describes par-force hunting as a persuasive, even coercive, ritual signifying aristocratic domination. As an alternative, and as a further inquiry into what the courtly hunt meant to medieval aristocrats and how they thought about it, this chapter presents two arguments: 1) As late medieval hunting manuals present it, the courtly hunt was first and foremost conceived of as an aristocratic game; and 2) this game evoked a conservative feudal ideology until approximately the first half of the 15th century, when lower-class imitations of the aristocracy and other pressures complicated that social metaphor. In other words, the medieval English aristocracy hunted, at least in literary terms, because the hunt modeled in its physical process and aesthetic experiences a way of thinking about their ideal social world.

In addition to complicating Crane’s analysis, this perspective questions William Marvin’s argument that medieval hunting derived its meaning from a constant tension during the rut, which is in September and October. Their antlers (or “head”) rise in a concave curve (viewed from the front) in three tiers (antler, royal, and surroyal), with the top tier sporting more tines as the hart ages. The hinds weigh up to 265lbs and are about a foot shorter.

7 Master of Game, 159. See also Thiébaut, “The Mediaeval Chase,” 260.
8 The definition of the hunt as a sport, pastime, game, ritual, activity, or what-have-you has been uncertain. Susan Crane argues that ritual is the hardest definition and defends it (“Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force”); Barbara Hanawalt discusses poaching as a game for men of the gentry (“Men's Games, King's Deer”); Compton Reeves considers it generally as a sport in his book on pastimes, Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), 89-122; and Griffin considers it as a sport as well.
9 Crane provides a suggestive comment about this process when she says of the par-force hunt, “It sets up a performance space in which aristocracy mimes its own myth of itself,” “Ritual Aspects,” 69. This process can also be described in Lakoff and Johnson's metaphorical shorthand: the par-force hunt demonstrates a conceptual conflation between Hunting, Game, Nobility, and Society, four separate conceptual domains simultaneously evoked in an elaborate and complex metaphor that illustrates one of the basic ways the aristocracy understood how the world worked.
between those permitted to hunt and those forbidden, which he bases on an evolution of hunting laws.\textsuperscript{10} Along with Marvin, I too see hunting practices as reflections of sociocultural concerns, but I base my analysis on the performative idealism of the hunting manuals, where, until the fifteenth century, I find an inclusive, if hierarchical, vision rather than an exclusive one. Also, while I agree strongly with Anne Rooney's declaration that “hunting was not simply a matter of chasing and killing animals,” her volume argues that courtly hunting was characterized by its ambivalent morality, its association with nobility, and its haphazardness.\textsuperscript{11} Those assertions are certainly valid, but of limited help in defining the specific character and meaning of the courtly hunt. Corinne Saunders's analysis of the “play and game” of Sir Tristram as a hunter in Malory is far more accurate and is part of a broader aesthetic of the courtly hunt.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, my view of the hunt and the breaking revises both John Cummins's suggestion and Richard Almond’s brief argument that the English saw the breaking as a superfluous French custom.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, the breaking was central to the cultural meaning of the English hunt. The categories of game and social metaphor in which I base my analysis might on the surface seem contradictory, but one has only to glance at Clifford Geertz’s investigation of the Balinese cockfight, at Roland Barthes’ discussion of wrestling, or at the social allegory that inheres in chess

\textsuperscript{10} See Marvin, \textit{Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature}, 4-5, for the initial thesis, and 14-16 for the specific outline of his chapters, which make this structure clear.

\textsuperscript{11} Rooney, \textit{Hunting In Middle English Literature}, pp. 137-38.

\textsuperscript{12} Saunders, “Malory's 'Book of Huntynge,'” p. 19.

\textsuperscript{13} Cummins suggests that English hunters considered it “Frenchified nonsense,” despite its presence in numerous English texts: \textit{The Hound and the Hawk}, 43. Almond asks if the English gentleman thought breaking a deer beneath his dignity or if he simply “did not like getting his hands dirty” before stating, “There is probably some truth in both these notions, but I think that there is another very English reason, which I have no evidence whatsoever from the hunting books. Englishmen have never placed much worth on unnecessary ceremony … The procedural way of breaking a carcass is simply the best way of tackling a not too difficult problem, the requirements being a good sharp, strong knife, patience, and a minimum of training,” \textit{Medieval Hunting}, 80-81.
(noted by John Lydgate, William Caxton, and others) to agree that games are reflections of the societies that play them.\(^{14}\)

### The Par-Force Hunt as a Game

According to the hunting manuals, a typical *par-force* (sometimes *à force*) hunt would begin before dawn, when huntsmen would take *lymers* out to *harbor* a hart in the “gray dawnyng.”\(^{15}\) While the huntsmen were tracking the hart, which might take a couple of hours or more, the lord and his company would breakfast in a clearing near running water.\(^{16}\) After identifying and locating a hart, each huntsman would bring back the *fewmets* for examination and with the lord would decide on the most challenging hart to hunt. The lord would establish relays of men and hounds along the hart’s most likely paths, and then the chase would begin. A complicated series of horn calls would keep the hunting party in touch and informed about the hart’s movements. After a long chase in which the hart would probably double-back on his own tracks and run through streams to try to hide his scent, the dogs would surround him as he heaved in exhaustion and hold him *at bay*. The lord and his company would arrive and one of them would *spay* the hart with his sword. The horns would blow the *mort* in celebration and then, if he did not do it himself, the lord would direct one of the huntsmen to *break* the deer, to cut it apart.

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\(^{15}\) The italicized words come from medieval hunting terminology: *lymers* – scenthounds specially trained to remain silent while tracking a deer; *harbor* – to track a deer to its resting spot; *fewmets* – droppings; *at bay* - holding the hart confined to a small space on the defensive; *spay* - to kill the hart with a single blade thrust; *blow the mort* - to sound the horn call reserved for the death of the deer; *break* – ritually divide, see below. This narrative is from *Master of Game*, 262-74. For a fuller discussion of each stage of the hunt, see Thièbaux, “The Mediaeval Chase,” 265-74. “Gray dawnyng,” *Master of Game*, 247.

\(^{16}\) Edward here follows Gaston's description of the French practice.
ceremoniously and divide the meat among the hunters.

This description comes largely from *Master of Game* (c.1410). Other manuals, from the late 13th-century *La Chace dou Cerf* to the late 15th-century *Book of St. Albans* agree on the general outline of the *par-force* hunt, though specific details can occasionally change, both in the manuals and certainly in practice. When Edward describes the gathering, where the lord and his company breakfast in the forest before the hunt, for instance, he mentions that the French do it differently than the English. Similarly, Edward does not mention the *fourchée*, a forked stick on which choice bits of meat are placed during the breaking. Overall, though, the manuals display a customary pattern and method that in their broad forms probably changed little from roughly 1100 to 1500.

As best as the evidence and current scholarship can know, the Normans instituted the *par-force* hunt as described here at some point between 1066 and 1250, probably in a slow evolution. They seem at first to have hunted the red deer mostly with bows while on foot. Although they used horses to pursue the animals, they dismounted to shoot at them. The hunters employed dogs and beaters to drive the deer toward their arrows during that period, just as they did later during the bow-and-stable hunt, in which stationed archers waited for deer to be driven toward them (e.g. the deer drive in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). The chase itself seems to have picked up in intensity during the 12th century (there were more recorded hunting deaths due to rapid pursuit),

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19 For more on this typically less ceremonious hunt, see Cummins, *The Hound and The Hawk*, 47-67.
and it seems likely that this particular fashion and order of events – the mounted pursuit of the hart with dogs, the abay, the spaying, and the breaking – developed in the late 12th or early 13th century, though some elements were far older. The mid-13th century is a firm *terminus a quo* by which this form of the hunt existed. The earliest hunting manuals were composed in the 13th century, and while Guicennas's *De arte bersandi*, which was probably composed in Frederick II's time and which would have reflected Germanic practices, describes a drive hunt in which the hunters shoot from a standing position as dogs drive the deer toward them, the French *La Chace dou Cerf* (second half of the 13th century) describes the *par-force* hunt as laid out here and in the later manuals, such as *Master of Game*, the *Tretyse off Huntyng*, and the *Book of St. Albans*. On the basis of Guicennas's work, the *par-force* hunt might not have been in use at Frederick's court (though Gottfried describes it in *Tristan*), but it was certainly known and practiced in Anglo-French society by the mid-13th century. Since it is unlikely that the *par-force* hunt sprang into existence fully formed and some portions of it existed almost as early as the Conquest, 1200-1250 seems a reasonable, if heuristic, approximation for it to have achieved the form the later manuals describe.

Scholars have characterized medieval hunting, *par-force* or otherwise, as an activity, a pastime, a sport, a ritual, and a game, often without much elaboration, and these designations are important not only for accurate description, but because they govern how we ourselves think about the hunt and what we metaphorically compare to it. We need to think about the hunt properly before we can analyze it accurately. For the *par-force* hunt, game is by far the best of these definitions both because medieval hunters themselves thought of hunting as a game and because the modern meaning of “game”
provides the most accurate description of the par-force hunt. It is simple to cross off “activity” and “pastime” as useful definitions. They are accurate descriptions of the hunt with hounds, but they are such vague terms that they do little to help capture its essential nature. In the medieval usage, “sport” and “game” were close to synonymous, as when Master of Game states that hunting was “to every gentyll herfe ofenseste most disportfull of alle gamys” (emphasis added).21 Both implied “entertainment,” but “game” was specifically used to refer to hunting, while “sport” seems to have been a more general term for “play” and “entertainment.”22 Contrary to the modern usage, “sport” seems to have had no suggestion of “contest,” though “game” did. For medieval hunters, the hunt was a “game” (entertaining pursuit, activity, contest); the prey was “game” (objects of a hunt); and the entertainment they derived from the hunt was “game” (entertainment, delight).23 All in all, “sport” was a very general term for an entertaining pursuit, one that applied equally to an entertaining dinner or to the hunt, while “game” was a more specific term with resonances of “contest” and “entertainment” both. Significantly, this usage underlines the fact that medieval hunters referred to hunting in the same way as they referred to a “game” of cards or chess, as an entertaining event in which the outcome was uncertain, which was governed by a certain typical process or common rules, and in which success had certain stakes. In short, “game” is the more accurate medieval term for the hunt as well as a better-substantiated medieval conceptual metaphor for it.24

Defining the hunt as a metaphorical game not only provides the best window onto

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21 Master of Game, 138.
22 See Middle English Dictionary, “sport(e)” and “sporten.”
23 Oxford English Dictionary, “game” (n.) I.1, 3a, 4a, 9, 10a, 11a and Middle English Dictionary, “game” (n.) 1a, 2a-c, 3a-c, and 6a.
24 “Hunting Is Game” in Lakoff and Johnson’s shorthand.
the medieval view of the hunt, but it also the most specific modern definition and metaphor. A modern definition of a game might be, to condense its several meanings: “a formalized, repeatable, and non-utilitarian act with overtones of strategy, struggle, and entertainment, usually played for specified stakes and governed by rules to enhance the experience.” Each of these criteria is apparent even in the brief description of the chase above. In modern terms, the medieval hunt can also be seen as a sport, but “game” more accurately captures the medieval activity. It was certainly a physically demanding contest against wild nature and it had rules and a goal, and so in many ways, the modern “sport” is very close to the medieval “game.” The modern connotation of competitions between teams can distract somewhat from the reality of the medieval \textit{par-force} hunt, however, and “game” more immediately implies a bet, risk, or stake, which is essential to an understanding of this hunt. In other words, “game” is preferable because it is the primary meaning of the \textit{par-force} hunt. The athletic exertion, the physical contest, and any competitive spirit that did arise were only aspects of the broader meaning of the game of the hunt, of the stakes embodied in this sporting game. “Game” also neatly parallels the medieval usage.

Crane makes a strong argument for aspects of the hunt as “rituals,” but states that the term does not suit hunting perfectly and that no term really does. \textsuperscript{25} “In its classic definition, a ritual is a ceremonial occasion that calls the community together to mark some kind of change,” \textsuperscript{26} as with a marriage or a funeral, which change the status of the participants. More broadly, a ritual describes a formalized, meaningful repetition. Rituals

\textsuperscript{25} Crane, “Ritual Aspects,” 63-64. “My contention is that the hunt \textit{à force} is a mimetic ritual designed to celebrate and perpetuate aristocratic authority,” 68.

\textsuperscript{26} Crane, “Ritual Aspects,” 66.
tightly control the meaning of an event, while one of the central features of the par-force hunt is its unpredictability. One could easily see some aspects of the hunt, particularly the breaking (though Crane focuses on the hunt itself), as ritualized parts of the game, but “game” is still the primary category, just as it takes precedence over “sport.” Both “sport” and “ritual” describe certain qualities of the game of the hunt and enhance a scholarly understanding of its enactment and social meaning, but overall, “game” provides a more accurate definition (and a more accurate metaphor) for courtly hunting than do “sport” and “ritual.”

Proving that “game” accurately describes the medieval understanding of the par-force hunt requires mapping out the conflation between the aspects of the hunt that are also the aspects of a game. Most of these links are easily seen, but identifying the risk and stakes of the hunt is more complicated. Thus, the crux of identifying medieval hunting as a game is the clarification of these two categories. Why was the game played? As with any game, the stakes were closely tied to the risks, especially the risk of losing. The risks of the hunt took several forms. In the first instance, the hunt was physically demanding and dangerous, which is where it seems similar to modern “sport.” Hunters would jump over obstacles and spend hours on foot or horseback in the woods, often at great speeds, and it took skill and temerity to slay the hart. It was a strenuous and occasionally deadly pursuit. There are numerous examples of lords and kings meeting their ends during the hunt, either under the tusks and antlers of the animals they hunted or from hunting accidents. William Rufus, the son of William the Conqueror, famously died with a hunting arrow in his chest, for instance, and fatal accidents from simple falls were not
uncommon. An old proverb drives home the physical risk of a boar's tusks and a hart's antlers: “And þerfore men sayn in olde sawes, 'Aftir þe boor, þe lech, and aftir þe hart, þe beere.'” Such risks provided a basic thrill, a sense of danger and a pleasure in one’s prowess, and they also encouraged hunters to view hunting as training for war, which was one of its long-standing justifications among the aristocracy.

The physical risk enhanced the primary drama of the hunt, in which the hunters took a more meaningful gamble: they intentionally risked losing the hart. The par-force described in the manuals was in no way practical, and its methods were meant not to capture a hart with a minimum of effort, but with a maximum. The course and methods of the par-force hunt argue that the nobility wanted a contest in its own hunts, wanted “a good game,” and the harder it was to win, the better. Lords employed professional hunters to bring in game for their tables and feasts, and those hunters used traps, snares, and other much more efficient and utilitarian means of capturing deer. Aristocratic hunters, however, considered it ignoble to use such methods. Gaston Phébus spends several chapters describing how to trap animals properly, but he introduces them by saying, “Mes de ce parle je mal voulentiers, quar je ne devroye enseigner a prendre les bestes si n'est par noblesce et gentillesce et par avoir biaux deduiz.” (But I speak of it unwillingly, because I should not teach how to take beasts if it isn't with nobility and gentility and in order to have beautiful delights.) He does go on to discuss them, but only because he views hunting as a cure to sinfulness and thinks some people are capable only

of trapping. “Donc … est droitement deduit d'omme gras ou d'omme vieill ou d'un prelat ou d'omme qui ne veult travaillier, et est belle chasce pour eulx, mes non pas pour homme qui veult chascier par mestrise et par droit venerie.”

Thus … it is properly the delight of a fat man or an old man or a priest or a man who doesn't want to work, and it is a good hunt for them, but not for a man who wants to work by mastery and true venery.) Edward of Norwich omitted entirely the chapters on trapping in his adaptation of Gaston’s book. For aristocratic hunters, the game of the hunt was everything. In order to have the greatest game, the contest with the most risks, the manuals argue that one should go to great lengths to find the hart most able to evade the hunters and escape, and give that hart the opportunity to do so.

An ideal hart had to be at least seven years old, by which time he should have become “a hart of ten” or more. This number designated the number of the highest tines, the surroyals, on the hart’s antlers, which, unlike the lower antlers, would continue to multiply as the hart aged. Younger deer were known as “folly” or “rascal” and considered to be of comparatively little worth. The deer should be fat and healthy, in “full grease,” which the hunters judged by his tracks and the quality of the fewmets. There was a complicated method of judging these droppings on their size, shape, consistency, color, and odor to ascertain the animal’s health. A sick or weak animal would not produce a good hunt. The goal was to find the hart best able to provide a difficult chase, and the chase itself was designed to give a hart every chance to escape. The chase played to a hart’s natural strengths of speed, stamina, and guile. It was taken only if the hunters and

30 Livre de Chasse, 250-51.

31 See Master of Game, 240-41, for a discussion of the hart’s antlers. A hart of ten did not have ten surroyals. Instead, the surroyals brought the total count to that number.

32 Master of Game, 236.
their hounds could outrun, outlast, and outsmart it. A hart would “ruse,” or double-back on its tracks and jump sideways to send the dogs off on a dead-end, or would run through another herd of deer or through a stream to conceal its scent. Hunters even claimed that a hart would find a younger deer and push it into the path of the hounds as a distraction.\textsuperscript{33} The better the hart, the better the game, and a good game followed rules specifically designed to make the chase more difficult in order to make it more meaningful.

The more difficult the hunt, the riskier it was, and the risks of the chase were directly tied to its stakes. But what did the success or failure of the hunt mean? Crane has argued that “the hunt à force is a mimetic ritual designed to celebrate and perpetuate aristocratic authority.” Following James Howe’s study of modern fox-hunting, she concludes that the hunt presents an ideology of aristocratic social and natural domination and that “it is less a manifestation of a prior consensus than a means by which people are persuaded to consent to the social hierarchy, or if they cannot be entirely persuaded, a means by which they can be induced to give conventional signs of assent.”\textsuperscript{34} While I agree that the hunt is about social authority and that it could have been persuasive, even coercive, in reality, this resistance is not present when we consider the portrayal of the hunt in the manuals.

Implicit in the process and risks of the courtly hunt was a portrait of society the way the aristocracy (that is, the authors and the ideal audience of the hunting manuals) would have liked it to have been. In the literary portrayal of the hunt, disparate groups of

\textsuperscript{33} Thiébaux, “The Mediaeval Chase,” 269.
\textsuperscript{34} Crane, “Ritual Aspects,” 71. She quotes Howe here, but agrees, “In the boar hunt illustration, those on foot are endorsing their subordination by acting it out with every step – whether or not they would endorse it in principle.” Howe’s modern study may be considering practices derived from the late 15\textsuperscript{th}-century evolution of hunting practices.
people and animals had to work together to run down the deer, bound only by their shared purpose and the language of the hunting horn. Communication was key, and the manuals stressed the appropriate times to sound the *recheat* and the *forloin* and the other horn calls that kept this dispersed group in touch and focused. The stress on communication and teamwork in these portrayals of the hunt creates a vision of a perfectly ordered and functioning society. The hunting lord of the manuals, who was at least technically in charge of the hunt, was for his part portrayed as an instructive figure who oversaw this society with his top officials (here the Master of Game). The first illustration in *Livre de Chasse* depicts a richly garbed Gaston seated on an elaborate white chair under a canopy, surrounded by his huntsmen and dogs. He grasps a baton in one hand and holds his other half raised, apparently providing instructions. From the oldest texts, such as *La Chace dou Cerf* (c.1250), onward, many hunting manuals employed a dialogic structure between a master and pupil, in which a lord (though sometimes an older huntsman) educated one of his huntsmen in how to hunt properly. Though the huntsman might often have been the more knowledgeable party in reality, the hierarchical instincts of the late Middle Ages usually required that knowledge be hierarchized as well, and the end result of this portrayal was to fashion the lord into a paternalistic and didactic figure, even if the lord

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35 *Master of Game*, for instance, instructs that when the party puts the lymer on the hart’s scent, “þan shall þe lorde, if he can blow, blow iii. mote; and aftir hym, þe maister of þe game; and aftir, þe hunters as þei ben grettest in office, þat been atte þe fyndyng; and þan þe lymnere.” Whenever he sees droppings, the lymerer should shout and “relie” (relay) with his horn, and when he has forced the hart to move, he should blow the “rechace,” and when he sights the deer, he should blow “þe mote … byfore þe rechasyng.” When the hounds have overshot the deer, the first hunter to notice should blow the “styn” (stop) and if a hunter gets lost or away from the party, he should blow the “forloyn” (far away). *Master of Game*, 263-68.


37 See Chapter 1, subsection “Venery and Courtly Virtue.”
might not fit that image in all aspects, as one sees with the youthful Tristan's performance during the breaking of the hart in Gottfried's work.\footnote{Tristan, 78-82. See Chapter 1, subsection “Venery and Courtly Virtue.”}

Such portrayals of the hunting party and of the hunting lord emphasized communication between the hunters, animals, and aristocrats in the hunt and in particular established an instructive relationship between the upper and lower classes. The lord is certainly in charge, but his “domination” is not in these descriptions an oppressive or one-sided force. Crane describes \textit{par-force} hunting as a ritual signifying aristocratic domination; in contrast, I argue that the manuals present the courtly hunt as a metaphorical game representing an idealized feudalism. Aristocratic domination and feudal lordship are not exactly the same. These manuals envision hunts as a time when the community, broken into visible classes and orders, comes together. Not all participate, but all parts have a symbolic place. The key difference between domination over the lower classes and the hunting manuals’ view of the hunt is that in the manuals the classes are all willing participants who work together in harmony with each other and with tame animals in pursuit of a common goal. The strongest evidence for this feudal view comes from the most symbolic moments of the hunt: the breaking of the deer and the distribution of the meat.

\textbf{The Meaning of the Breaking}

The breaking was a traditional and meticulous process heavily emphasized in the literature of the hunt. First, the breaker would \textit{encorn} the hart, and then slit the hide from
throat to tail and from right foot to left before stripping it.\textsuperscript{39} He would next remove the gullet and the shoulder bones, pausing to \textit{assay} the thickness of the fat on them, and then the stomach, spleen, and esophagus. After that, he would cut through the shoulders, clean the meat off the breast, remove the \textit{numbles}, and separate the haunches. Certain symbolic portions of meat would be reserved on the \textit{fourchée} for the lord. The offal would be washed and cut up, then placed on the skin, where the blood had collected, and often mixed with bread. This portion was the \textit{curée} (from \textit{à cuir}; on the hide) and it was given to the hounds as a reward. The head of the hart would be placed at the top of the \textit{curée} in a mimicry of the living deer. A ring of hunters and dogs would observe this ritual and the best would be rewarded after the breaking with certain cuts of meat. The hunting party would then proceed home in procession to present the trophies.

In the narrative of the \textit{par-force} hunt in medieval literature, including both imaginative literature and the manuals, the breaking, the division of the deer, is the climax. The death of the deer, while important, is not the end of the hunt and, indeed, is not even its most important moment. Even the procession home and the presentation of the trophies are an anticlimax to the breaking. The amount of attention given to this moment can strike a modern reader as puzzling or uncommonly tedious since, after all, the breaking is simply the cutting up of a deer. The Gawain-poet's scene in \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} is perhaps the most famous account of the breaking, but there are similarly extended accounts in the Tristan legends, the \textit{Parlement of the Thre Ages}, and

\textsuperscript{39} Encorn - turn the hart upside down so it rests on its antlers with its breast exposed; numbles – probably the kidneys; fourchiée - a forked stick placed in the ground near the deer to hold select tidbits for the lord. These details for division of the deer and the apportioning of its meat come mainly from Anne Rooney, ed., \textit{Treatyse off Huntyng. The Treatyse off Huntyng: Cambridge University Library MS Ll.1.1.18, fols.48r-55v, Scripta, 19 (Brussels: OMIREL, 1987), ll.225-46. Hereafter, \textit{Tretyse}. For the fourchiée, see \textit{Tristan}, 80. For another description of the breaking, see Thiébaut, “The Mediaeval Chase,” 272.
hunting manuals like the *Tretyse off Huntyng* and the *Book of St. Albans*, while there are briefer versions in other hunting manuals, in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in the *Avowyng of Arthur*; in Malory, in visual works such as the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, and in such late works as “Chevy Chase” and Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*. These scenes are often lengthy and technical and any reader who has been baffled by them might agree with Tolkien and Gordon in their edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the breaking takes up some forty lines: “The narrative is not without its superfluities, most conspicuous in the descriptions of the hunts and the breaking of the deer, which are extended, for enjoyment, rather beyond the bounds of reasonable elaboration.”

What could be simpler and more utilitarian than cutting up a carcass? What need is there for this precise process and the attendant ceremony, which seems to be even older than the *par-force* hunt itself and to go back to the Conquest?

Just as the process of the chase itself served implicitly to bind disparate social elements together with each other and with natural elements (men with men, and men with horses and hounds) in a single cause, the breaking synthesized these ties in a single metaphorical act that portrayed the hunt as a microcosm of a feudal society. The account of the division of the meat after the breaking from the *Tretyse off Huntyng* demonstrates this point more elaborately than any other version of it:

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{40,41,42}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{40}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{41}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{42}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{40}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{41}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{42}}\]
Whoso sleyth hym wyth a bow shall haue þe skyn, and who so wyth houndez slo hym of veanters he shall haue þe skin, and so be þat pe hunt fynd hym wyth hys houndez & halowe hym thryez & atte every tyme cast off freshe houndez, he shall haue þe skyn. And also whoso breketh hym shall haue þe chyne, & þe parson þe ryght shulder, & a quarter to pore men, & þe parker þe lyfte shulder.  

(Whoever slays him [the hart] with a bow shall have the hide, and whoever slays him with greyhounds shall have the hide, and if it happens that the hunter finds him with his [running] hounds and blows his horn three times and every time casts off fresh [relays of] hounds, he shall have the hide. And also, whoever breaks him shall have the chine, and the parson the right shoulder, and a quarter to poor men, and the parker the left shoulder.)

The *Tretys* indicates that the meat and trophies from the hart are divided among the hunters, the poor, the church, and the forester. The remainder goes implicitly to the lord. Such a division argues that the *Tretys* sees the breaking as a symbolic recognition of social bonds, particularly those between the lord, who gives the meat, and the other parts of society, who receive it. Importantly, a recent zooarchaeological investigation of deer bones in waste piles supports this literary account with physical evidence, demonstrating that the division of the deer took place as the hunting manuals portray it, with the forequarters going to lower-class recipients. Naomi Sykes's investigation of these waste piles revealed that in high-status waste sites in England, red deer remains underwent a sharp spike after the Conquest, but that the front shoulders and forelimbs of the deer are scarce. In low-status sites, however, nearly the only bones that appear are the ones missing from the elite sites. Sykes rightly suggests that this pattern matches the breaking ceremony as it is described in later medieval English texts and her work demonstrates it shows strong indications of provincial origins” (32). These qualities may suggest a much earlier origin than the mid-15th century. Still, an accurate date is difficult to produce.

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43 *Treatys*, ll. 237-46.
that this pattern goes back to the Norman Conquest.\textsuperscript{45} Intriguingly, there is no similar evidence for this ceremony in Normandy itself at the time of the Conquest, though it is possible that the Anglo-Normans imported the ritual from Norman Sicily.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, the oldest Western work on hunting with dogs, \textit{De arte bersandi} (circa 1250), also stresses the breaking of the deer as an important part of the hunt: “Item debet bene scire foliare cervum cum accepit [quod multum convenit venatori].”\textsuperscript{47} (Also, [a hunter] ought to know how to skin a stag when he takes it, which is most appropriate for a hunter.) The latter portion is added in two manuscripts, seemingly in a desire to emphasize the point. In all, the breaking was a well-established and highly regarded part of both the actual and literary hunt, and it can be traced back to the Conquest.

Other works generally corroborate these details of the breaking, though of the English versions, the \textit{Tretys} gives the most thorough description of the recipients of the meat. In \textit{Sir Tristrem} (mid-13\textsuperscript{th} century), Tristrem “the forster for his rightes / The left schulder gaf he, / With hert, liver, and lightes / And blod til his quirré [curée],” and \textit{The Craft of Venery} states that the huntsman takes the skin by “right” and the breaker has the shoulder by “reason.”\textsuperscript{48} \textit{La Chace dou Cerf} instructs that the heart of the hart should be given to lepers as a gift, while the small “bone” inside it should be given to a pregnant woman (because it represents courage and perseverance, presumably). It goes on in more detail about what the hunters receive, emphasizing courtesy and generosity:

\textsuperscript{46} Sykes, “Zooarchaeology,” 193-194.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{De arte bersandi}, 3.
Mes je te vuie faire asavoir
Quez drois tu doiz dou serf avoir:
Li cuirs est tienz et li nomblet
Et les espaules. Li vallet
En ont le col, c'est lor droiture.
Mais tu doiz savoir par nature
Que cil droit te furent lessie
Pour ce qu'il fussent emploie
Cortoisement et departi,
Que garde n'avigne par ti
Que nuns hom t'en puist ablamer
Par la defaute dou donner. 49

(But I want you to know what rights you have of the hart: The hide and the
numbles are yours, and the shoulders. The valets get the neck; that's their right.
But you ought to know naturally which rights belong to you so that things are
done and divided courteously, and take care that nothing you do can be
reproached for a lack of generosity.)

The repetition of the rights of the recipients and the emphasis on generosity suggest an
ethical social context for these gifts, reflecting the broader association between venery,
virtue, and courtliness. 50 Considered in the light of similar literary accounts and the
archaeological evidence, as well as the didactic genre of the hunting manual, these
remarks in the Tretyse and elsewhere expand to become more than just isolated
expressions of social bonds and obligations. Rather, they are a reflection of a broader
literary and social conception of the breaking that the manuals both express and
propagate. As a result, the literary breaking is an idealized expression of how society
should function and, particularly, of how these texts and their authors wished to conceive
of society.

The precise manner in which the deer is divided, cut by cut, establishes a ritual
order that is then projected onto broader society by gifts of meat to representative

49 La Chace dou Cerf, ll.391-94.
50 Discussed at length in Chapter 1, subsection “Venery and Courtly Virtue.”
factions. Because the breaking is so highly structured and because the audience is so focused on it, the breaking encourages the audience to think in terms of order and process, and to transfer those ideas from the division of the carcass to the community, which is implicated by the rewards and gifts of meat. These gifts recognize the best hunters, the clergy, the poor, and even the animal companions who assisted in the hunt. The procession back home and the presentation of the trophies to women rounds out the hunt’s vision of the social system. As a result, the division encourages exemplary behavior and lays out both the various parts of society and their relations to each other. The best hunters (“whoso sleyth hym wyth a bow,” etc.) are rewarded with trophies (“þe skyn”) and those who do good service to the lord (“whoso breketh hym shall haue þe chyne … & þe parker þe lyfte shulder”) or those whom the lord is obligated to support (“& þe parson þe ryght shulder & a quarter to pore men”) are given portions of the meat. This event thus recognized as the parts of society the lord, his servants (including the animal ones), the clergy, the poor, and, in the presentation of the trophies, women – who served, it seems, mostly to affirm the men’s prowess. The breaking was the most symbolic moment in the hunt and its climax, and it defines the meaning of the entire event. The hunt and the breaking as a whole thus served as a social microcosm, reflecting and recreating a specific, feudal view of the social order every time they were performed. The “ritual” aspect of hunting is most present at this time, because the hunt and, especially, the breaking transform a disparate and disjointed set of different social groups, genders, and species (aristocrats and peasants, men and women, human and companion animals) into one communal whole.

The ritual is not the primary definition of the hunt here, however, but rather only
one aspect of it. The hunt and the breaking were both part of the game, and the gaming context enhanced and controlled the ritual and social meaning of the hunt. In effect, the game of the hunt was played to determine the structure of society by deciding whether or not the ritual occurred. If the hunt were successful, then this ritual took place and the hunt and breaking expressed this communal, feudal vision. If not, then the absence of that meaning implicitly endangered that view. Notably, there is almost no mention of failed hunts in literature. The only example I can recall of such a hunt is when Chaucer equates Octavian’s par-force hunt in the Book of the Duchess, which is implicitly unsuccessful, with the inconsolable grief of the Black Knight for his dead lady. The failed hunt is thus seen not in reality, but in a dream vision where it is associated with great grief, and that unreal and hyperbolic fact underscores the conceptual stakes of the par-force hunt. The ethic of risk that underlies the choice of the best hart emphasizes the value of the conceptual, social goal: the harder it was to catch the hart, the more it validated the view of society the hunt embodied. The metaphorical connection between hunting, game, and ideal feudal society was intricate and mutually illuminating.

The conflation of the metaphors evolves in the breaking. In the hunt, the risks of the game are those of physical danger, of the instability of disparate people working together, and of uncertain success in capturing the hart. Those risks signify the difficulty of disparate voices producing a single social harmony, a harmony embodied in the successful capture and death of the deer, and the game of the hunt is to put those ideals to the test. The metaphor of the hunt as game frames the metaphor of the hunt as ideal feudal society present in the breaking. The breaking becomes a game about authority and trust, about confidence that others agree with and will not challenge the social hierarchy.
The hart has already been caught and killed, and now the symbolic body of the animal must be appropriately handled in order to signify the social bonds portrayed in the *Tretyse* and similar texts. The cutting up of the body of the hart is thus a weighty and momentous occasion, where the meaning of the event is at stake, at risk, even more explicitly than in the hunt itself. At the breaking, the blood of the hunters has cooled, the body of the hart lies on the ground before them, and no physical danger, rushing gallop, nor vivid goal distracts from the meaning.

In the typical version of the breaking, the lord vests his authority in the huntsman and trusts him, under supervision, to act in his stead. The knowledge of the act was an integral part of the ethos of the courtly hunter, though, and a lord might do it himself as a superlative display of courtliness or to instruct his men, as one sees with Tristan and Mark's hunstmen.\textsuperscript{51} The system is one based on mutual cooperation and reciprocity, one in which the huntsman accepts the lord's authority, is entrusted to uphold it, gives it up again, and is then rewarded for doing so. For the lord's part, this investment of authority in the huntsman requires a great deal of trust, for in breaking the deer, the huntsman performs the aristocrat's identity. The lord thus playfully risks his class's vision of society by trusting the huntsman to accept these conceptual structures, and the huntsman takes a great risk in trusting that the lord will fulfill his half of the bargain. The division of the deer and the gifts of its parts to the various parts of society then in turn symbolize that fulfillment. The breaker is rewarded for his service with the chine. Knife in hand and on

\textsuperscript{51} *Tristan*, 78-84, see also: *La Chace dou Cerf*, where a “seigneur” instructs a huntsman in how to go about the breaking; *Livre de Chasse*, f.70, which shows an illustration of a nobleman instructing hunters in how to break a deer; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Bertilak has his huntsmen break the does, ll.1325-27. *Ipomodon*, where Ipomodon breaks the harts himself and impresses the Fere, ll. 687-88. On this scene, see Jordi Sánchez-Martí, “The Test of Venery in *Ipomodon A*,” *Studia Neophilologica* 79.2 (2007): 148-58.
his knees, the huntsman wears a mantle of symbolic nobility, becomes his own master for
a metaphorical moment. There is a fine line, conceptually speaking, between dividing the
deer and apportioning it on one's own terms and dividing the deer and apportioning it on
behalf of the lord. In respectively making a gift of authority and in being willing to give
up this mantle of nobility again, the aristocrat and the huntsman each take risks, and each
time this authority is passed back and forth, the social bond between the classes is
strengthened. Even at this most ritual of moments, the gaming metaphor guides the
meaning of the events. This is not, at least ideally, an assured ceremony with a
predetermined outcome, repeated continuously as needed, but a conceptual risk, a game
of its own. As unlikely as it would have been for a huntsman to refuse to do as his lord
requested when breaking the deer, the conceptual risk did not disappear.

If the hunt were a metaphor of oppression over the other social classes, we would
see a very different event. Perhaps the lord would raise high the stag’s bloody head and
all the hunters would kneel in front of him and repeat oaths of allegiance. Instead, what
we see is a chase that is only successful if all of its disparate parts – hounds, horses,
huntsmen – work together as one organism whose voice is the hunting horn; if any one
part fails and the others cannot bring it back into the social body, as when the huntsmen
redirect hounds who have lost the scent or wayward hunters blow their horns to find their
comrades, then the hunt fails and the hart escapes. Every person and animal in the hunt is
trusted with a measure of individual responsibility, and a successful hunt requires that
each perform his respective duties without much oversight.

With its narrative of mutual cooperation between humans of different social
classes and tame animals, all of them working together to achieve one purpose, the chase
is thus the first act of the play that concludes in the breaking, with its equally risky game in which a huntsman for a moment becomes a lord and then surrenders the title again, before the gifts of venison symbolically recreate and reinforce the bonds of the community. The chase has been a communal effort, and the breaking recognizes that effort and projects the cohesive spirit of the hunting party into the entire social structure, microcosm to macrocosm, metaphorically and rhetorically envisioning the hunting party as a harmonious, feudal society united under reciprocal obligation. The vagueness of those obligations is part of the strength of the metaphorical division of the hart, for its power lies not in delimiting relationships, but in expressing their universal continuity. In the hunt and breaking of the hart, medieval society is united in one universal and eternal web, as strong as it is amorphous, and the messages spelled out in that web are ones of mutual trust and obligation.

This interpretation of the hunt and breaking is based on a study of the various hunting manuals, whose purpose was a didactic one and whose expressions are necessarily idealized. The actual practice of the hunt and the breaking was no doubt murkier, though the historical accounts largely match the more literary ones and the archaeological evidence does imply that the division of the deer took place much as the manuals suggest, even if the manuals are more nuanced in their interpretation. Overall, these accounts emphasize the metaphors of game and society in the par-force hunt and provide a careful reader the means to elaborate on them. The fact that the 13th- and 14th-century manuals broadly agree on the meaning of the hunt, insofar as they portray its proper process similarly, argues that the interpretation I have given here was a strong and widespread one. This fact makes it very likely that the authors and audiences of the
manuals, and even the aristocracy as a whole, understood these events as a conflation of venery, nobility, game-playing, and a feudal ideal.

**Challenges to the Social Metaphor**

While the social metaphors of the *par-force* hunt and the breaking ceremony just laid out were long-standing ones, they were not maintained without struggle. A more thorough investigation of 15th-century texts helps to contextualize the view just presented. In short, the 15th century witnessed a dramatic upswing in lower-class interest in the hunt and a defensive aristocratic response. When challenged by imitators, the aristocracy, as far as one can tell from the literature, responded by becoming more exclusionary, and the literary presentation of the hunt and breaking changed significantly. Hunting manuals through the 14th century addressed either the nobility or its huntsmen and seem mainly to have been used by them, but in the 15th century, the gentry appropriated these manuals as courtesy books. The uptick in imitation and the growing power of the gentry meant that there was a cognitive dissonance between actual society and the metaphorical feudal society. This situation undermined and contradicted the social cohesion metaphorically represented in the game of the hunt and led to revisions in the literature to try to maintain the hunt as the exclusive purvue of the aristocracy.

The historical context for this rising pressure is well-documented, and 1400 provides a useful date for marking a social shift as it is reflected in the literature. 1400 is not a date significant in itself, but rather one that sits at a temporal and social juncture when attitudes and opinions on the relations of the social classes were in flux and were
particularly represented in contentions over hunting practices.\textsuperscript{52} The social upheaval of the Black Death in the mid-14\textsuperscript{th} century resulted in an upward social mobility for many of the lower classes that was contributing to social unrest, an unrest particularly evident in the unenforceable Statute of Laborers, the sumptuary laws of the 1360s, and the failed 1381 Peasants’ Revolt, in which large numbers of peasants marched on London and demanded a cessation of serfdom, an end to taxes, and the abolishment of the aristocracy. Notably, they also demanded the elimination of private hunting reserves so that, “the parks and woods should be common to all.”\textsuperscript{53} For related reasons, the gentry was increasing in power at the same time and was appropriating many aristocratic practices for itself. In response to this situation, Richard II passed his Game Law in 1389 in an attempt to preserve hunting rights solely for the aristocracy and, perhaps grudgingly, for the upper members of the gentry. That law restricted anyone earning less than 40 shillings a year in rent \textit{from their lands} from owning hunting dogs, ferrets, hayes (nets), and similar devices.\textsuperscript{54} These events collectively describe an encroachment upon aristocratic activities, particularly hunting, by the lower classes and a strong reaction from the nobility, and this social situation contradicted the cohesive social vision present in the old form of the literary hunt.

This tension between the old metaphors of the hunt and the new pressures that contradicted it is present in Edward of Norwich's ambivalence over the breaking ceremony. Edward's manual, \textit{Master of Game}, is by far the most thorough and useful of the English hunting texts, and one would expect him to follow in the footsteps of earlier \textsuperscript{52} For a much fuller history of the hunt and these sorts of conflicts, see Griffin, \textit{Blood Sport}, passim. Marvin, \textit{Hunting Law and Ritual}, also outlines some of this situation, particularly the 1389 Game Law. \textsuperscript{53} For this quote, see Griffin, \textit{Blood Sport}, 47. \textsuperscript{54} See Griffin, \textit{Blood Sport}, 62, for a discussion of this law.
English writers and lavish attention on the breaking. Instead, Edward refuses to discuss it at all:

If þe lorde woll haue þat dere vndone, he þat he byddeth, as byforn is seide, shuld vndone hym þe moste wodmanly and clenly þat he can. And ne wondreth you noght þat I say wodmanly, for it is a point þat longeth to a wodmanes craft; and þough it be wele fittyng to ane hunter for to kunne done it, neuerþelatter it longeth more to wodmancraft þan to hunters. And þerfore, as of þe manere how he shuld be vndo, I passe ouere lyghtly, for þer nys no wodman ne good hunter in Englonde þat þei ne can do it wele inow, and wele bettir þan I can tech hem.55

Edward attempts to head off his audience's objections to this omission, telling them not to be surprised that he does not describe the breaking. The fact that they would expect it and that he thus needs to address their surprise indicates just how common and widespread the description of the breaking was and illustrates the requirements of the genre.

Edward's excuse is that there is no good hunter in England who does not know how to break a deer properly, and that excuse itself reveals his intentions. By making the breaking a subject to be practically taught, rather than theoretically taught (as through a manual), he restricts it to those who are already in the know and tries to prevent social climbers from using his book to enhance their standing. Edward had to strike a delicate balance between writing a book that was actually useful and one that did not give away too much. He describes certain hunts and types of dogs in great detail, but he refuses to describe the breaking. Edward seems to have been well aware of the ability of a book to travel outside the circle for which it was intended (he composed it for the future Henry V), and his suspicion was validated by later manuscripts that included his text along with treatises on carving, wines, and other such topics studied by the upwardly mobile.56

55 Master of Game, 271.
56 For a list of some of these manuscripts, see Hands, Book of St. Albans, xlv-l.
The duke's attempt to exclude social climbers from the aristocratic hunt and preserve the meaning of the hunt for the nobility was not an isolated one. A similar desire is evinced in 15th century romances such as *The Avowyng of Arthur* and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, where the lower classes are absent and the lord personally breaks the animal. In the *Avowyng*, Arthur vows to find and kill a marauding boar alone and does so.  

Compare that scene to Bercilak’s similar battle with a boar in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where he fights the animal alone but is surrounded by his men. In Malory, Arthur hunts down and “dights” a hart by himself, and on that occasion there are only two other lords with him.  

These texts rewrite the traditional communal metaphor of the hunt in response to the rising challenge to the social structure. This revision suggests that the delicate balance of power and responsibility between the lord, as the representative of the aristocracy, and the breaker, as the embodiment of the lower classes, has been disrupted, and as a result these romances have simply written out the lower classes. These romances are more polarized than Edward's manual, which maintains the respective responsibilities of the lord and breaker, and show more clearly a reactionary and exclusionary desire.

Malory's Questing Beast further embodies this new ideal of the chase. It appears briefly and inexplicably in Malory's account, passing in and out of the narrative like a dream that fades on waking. Its first appearance, in fact, occurs as Arthur "felle downe in grete thought" at a fountain (probably a spring, though perhaps a real fountain in the logic of Malory's narrative world), perhaps pondering, perhaps drowsing. The king has just lost

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57 Thomas Hahn, ed. *The Avowyng of Arthur* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), accessed May 22, 2011, http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/avowint.htm). “Avowyng survives in a single manuscript, Ireland Blackburn, fols. 35r-59r; the manuscript is now in the Robert H. Taylor Collection at Princeton University. The extant version dates from about the third quarter of the fifteenth century, though *Avowyng* may have been composed as early as the last quarter of the fourteenth century” (Introduction).

track of a hart whose pursuit has killed his horse, and as he awaits another one:

So the kynge saw the hart unboced and hys horse dede, he sette hym downe by a fowmentayne, and there he felle downe in grete thought. And as he sate so hym thought he herde a noyse of howundis to the som of thirty, and with that the kynge saw com towarde hym the strongste beste that ever he saw or herde of. So thys beste wente to the welle and dranke, and the noyse was in the bestes bealy lyke unto the questyng of thirty coupyl houndes, but alle the whyle the beest dranke there was no noyse in the bestes bealy. And therewith the beeste departed with a grete noyse, whereof the kynge had grete mervayle. And so he was in a grete thought, and therewith he felle on slepe.\textsuperscript{59}

Arthur's drowsing state makes one wonder about the beast he saw, but King Pellinore's arrival, which awakens him, at least confirms its reality. Pellinore, like Arthur, has killed his horse in the chase and he requests that Arthur give him the new horse that a servant has just brought. He reveals that he has pursued the "stronge beeste" for twelve months and that he intends either to achieve his quest or to "blede of the beste bloode in my body." When Arthur asks to take over the quest and promises to pursue the beast himself for another twelve months, Pellinore scoffs, "A, foole!' seyd the kynge unto Arthure, 'hit ys in vayne thy desire, for hit shall never be encheved but by me other by my nexte kynne." He then steals Arthur's horse, ironically thanks him, and rides after it.\textsuperscript{60}

The parallel between Arthur and Pellinore, each having killed their horses in the chase, makes it clear that Pellinore's pursuit of the Beast is a hunt of some fashion. Yet, it defies the normal logic of a hunt in significant ways. In this chase, a hunter pursues the beast, loses track of it, reorients himself and continues – endlessly. The pursuit of the Questing Beast is both the most ideal and the most dangerous of hunts. In following it, Pellinore rides along a sword-bridge of risk, with success and pleasure on one side and risk and disaster on the other. Always before him is the promise of capturing the Beast, of

\textsuperscript{59} Malory, \textit{Works}, 28.

\textsuperscript{60} Malory, \textit{Works}, 28-29.
affirming the social metaphors put at risk in the course of the hunt, and always before him is the danger of failure. The end of the hunt, the death and the breaking ceremony, are constantly deferred, and that deferment avoids the questions of the social order traditionally imaged in the breaking. Though Arthur elsewhere in the text breaks a hart personally, here with the Questing Beast one finds a vision of a hunt that refuses to end, arguably in order to avoid the social issues newly implicated in the hunt.

Additionally, this hunt for the Questing Beast is a solitary one. Pellinore, himself a king and thus possessed of the highest possible social rank, pursues the Beast by himself. The hunter, often a king or aristocrat, separated from his attendants is a romance commonplace, but Pellinore’s case is clearly different. Arthur's hunt for the "grete hart" in which he kills his horse follows a similar pattern: he has attendants with him, but he hunts alone. This hunt is an individualistic affirmation of rank and of privilege that needs no assistance and that tells no tale of social harmony. As Pellinore says, "hit shall never be encheved but by me other by my nexte kynne." Thus, the pursuit of the Questing Beast is an embodiment of the new ideals of the chase in the 15th century, ideals that affirm aristocratic privilege and explicitly exclude the lower classes. In fact, Pellinore's argument to Arthur relies not even on social distinctions between kings and peasants, but explicitly on ones of blood and heredity, which strengthen this quest's embodiment of the exclusive privilege of the chase.

In a seeming contradiction to this strengthening of the divide between the aristocracy and the peasantry, the hereditary hunters and the newcomers, the strongest feudal portrayal of the breaking ceremony is found in the _Tretyse off Huntyng_, which is extant only in a manuscript from c.1463. If the _Tretyse_ is roughly contemporary with the
extant manuscript, then it must have been expressing a nostalgic wish for the passing feudal society portrayed in the pre-15th century metaphors of the hunt and breaking ceremony. It seems much more likely, however, that the Tretyse was composed some years before, probably in the 14th century, and that the vagaries of manuscript circulation and survival simply have not provided us with an earlier version. This scenario is suggested not only by the themes of the work itself, but also by its language and manuscript context. Rooney, its only editor, points out that it lacks French hunting cries, unlike nearly every other manual, and that it seems to be of a provincial origin, which suggests a conservative ideology. Moreover, the manuscript that contains the Tretyse binds it together with texts on household management and the family, cookery, hawking, veterinary recipes, personal health, legal issues, heraldry, and historical and geographical information. The current binding is modern, but an early hand has written in catch-words to connect the quires, and the individual works themselves are written in a large variety of hands. As a result, it seems probable that the compiler copied an older text. This series of texts closely parallels the Menagier de Paris and other such works, including commonplace books, for the gentry or those styling themselves after the nobility. It seems probable, then, that the Tretyse off Huntyng was a text assembled for someone with social ambitions, someone who had perhaps turned to an older account of the breaking because of the lack of contemporary ones.

The Book of St. Albans was first printed in 1486 and essentially provided a mass-produced version of the Tretyse manuscript, answering a popular demand for texts that instructed the readers in how to discuss the hunt properly. The Book includes texts

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61 Rooney, Tretyse, 10.
different than those found in the *Tretyse*, but deals with similar topics. Its four-part organization includes instruction on “hawking, hunting, coat-armour, and the blazing of arms,” and it addresses, significantly, “gentle men and honest persons.” The *Book*’s address helps to clarify the lower-class audience for these sorts of works, while some twenty editions of it through the sixteenth century illustrate its popularity. Although the *Book* compiles a handful of different texts into one, its sources are often found in manuscripts along with texts on other social graces, such as “the description of a good greyhound, carving terms, wines, and bishoprics, and perhaps various moral precepts.” These texts tend to treat hunting rather superficially, being more interested in providing lists of terms than outlining a real hunt. This characteristic led Rachel Hands, in her edition of the *Book*, to comment that, “The whole seems to have aimed at equipping its reader as much with the social graces proper to the practice of the two sports [hunting and hawking] as with detailed knowledge. … It is a popular collection rather than a handbook; the kind of entry frequently found in the more eclectic fifteenth-century commonplace books.” Hands was referring not to the *Book* itself but to the sources of some of its material, but her comment also illuminates the probable audience for the *Tretyse* and the *Book* itself. While they might have been somewhat more thorough, they are hardly comprehensive, and trying to use them to stage a hunt would have been difficult. In all, what these two works demonstrate is an avid interest in noble behavior in order to imitate it as a ethical form so as to advance oneself socially.

Taken as a whole, the themes and history of these works in the 15th century indicates a departure from the traditional literary view of the hunt and breaking as

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socially cohesive activities in the service of a feudal ideology to an attitude in which the hunt is a marker of aristocratic identity that must be protected. As the lower classes attempted to imitate it, the aristocracy retreated inward. A chronological examination of various hunting texts, then, firstly demonstrates a feudal metaphor in which the aristocracy sees itself as the leader of a social community linked by mutual obligation, and then secondly indicates a polarization between the classes with the aristocracy attempting to maintain its position in the face of an increasingly influential gentry.

**Conclusion**

I have laid out so far some of the basic meanings of the hunt and breaking as expressed in the English hunting manuals, particularly *Master of Game*, the *Treyse off Hunting*, and the *Book of St. Albans*, texts that deal with issues that were prevalent in the late 14th and 15th centuries, and tried to contextualize them with a wide range of imaginative and technical literature from the 13th to the 15th centuries. Overall, these texts argue that the aristocracy conceptualized the par-force hunt as a game and metaphorically conflated it with both nobility and a social ideal. As a game, the hunt was enjoyable, and its basis was an ethic of risk that drove the aristocracy to choose in the par-force hunt the most difficult prey available. The stakes of the game were, on the surface, the success or failure of the hunt, but to catch or lose the hart meant something more. The process of the hunt and the ceremony of the breaking presented a feudal social vision.

This series of conflated metaphors reveals that hunting was a way of conceptualizing and thinking about society for the aristocracy. It is difficult to overstate
the importance of aristocratic thought-patterns for analyzing medieval culture, literature, and history. Metaphors indicate not just what people think; they also structure how they think. Medieval authors were aware both of the central importance of venery in aristocratic society and of the influence of metaphors for structuring thought and behavior. The following two chapters take the insights provided so far and illustrate how Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the anonymous author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* attempt to reshape their audiences' perspectives on love and warfare by manipulating the hunting metaphors that underlay those perspectives.
Chapter 3: Courtship and Falconry in *Troilus and Criseyde*

“Symbolism was very nearly the life's breath of medieval thought.”

~Johan Huizinga, 1921¹

The previous chapters analyzed the importance of venery and part of its meaning in medieval aristocratic society as revealed by both imaginative and technical literature. This chapter and the following one complement that analysis by examining in turn how authors marshalled the symbolic and imaginative processes of venery, intimately familiar to their aristocratic audiences, for rhetorical ends. An investigation of such works, particularly Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the anonymous Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, reveals both the conventional perspectives of those audiences and the way medieval authors might engage them within a broader, often reflective or critical, context. These inquiries use detailed evidence to show that both courtship and chivalry, those two great pillars of courtly literature, were frequently understood by audiences in veneric terms, and they demonstrate how that fact colored the aristocratic view of life. This

¹ Huizinga, *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 249.
chapter examines how Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* compares love to falconry in order to critique different models of love, while the following one illustrates how the author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* compares chivalry to hunting in order to comment critically on conventional aristocratic attitudes toward warfare as a veneric game.

A handful of common, secular metaphors for love and courtship pervades medieval literature. Those metaphors include “Love as Sickness,” where the lover is an invalid and the beloved is his physician, healing the wound of love (often by sleeping with him), and “Love as Service,” where the lover is a knight and the beloved is his liege. A host of courtship metaphors also evolves out of the root conception of “Love as Venery.” Previous discussions of hunting and love have focused on the idea of the man pursuing the woman, but the reality was far more complex than that -- and in fact that particular metaphor was comparatively rare in late medieval England. Just as there was a variety of types of hunting, each enriched with its own symbolism, each version of "Love is Venery" distinguishes individual emphases on what love is, what courtship entails, and how men and women relate socially and sexually. The most common versions of “Love is Venery” in Anglo-French literature of the late 14th century evolve from the narrower metaphor of “Love is Falconry.” Some texts depict Love as a falconer, with the lady as his falcon, but the most fully elaborated courtship metaphor portrays the lover as the falconer and the beloved as his demanding falcon, a metaphor that achieved its apogee in

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3 Primarily Thiébault, *The Stag of Love*.  

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Machaut's *Dit de l'Alerion.*

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* provides an ideal text for discussing these metaphors of love within late 14th-century English courtly society because of its playful satirization of Troilus as a lover who cannot decide which pattern of love to follow.⁴ Through Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, Chaucer demonstrates the incongruities between the conventional conceptions of love and his society. He suggests that the overly passive invalid lover is a contradiction in terms and that the skills of the knightly lover are poorly suited to the bedchamber and to addressing a lady's real problems (which are more political and social than martial). Chaucer also shies away from the masculine supremacy of the man-as-hawk and woman-as-lark metaphor that draws upon the “love hunt” found in older and mostly Continental texts; instead, he explores a comparatively more mutual, if still androcentric and chauvinistic,⁵ relationship between lovers embodied in the metaphor of the man as the falconer and the woman as his fussy falcon, a model that he may have found in Machaut.⁶ Chaucer paints a colorful portrait of competing attitudes toward love, courtship, gender relations, and sexual dynamics through these

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⁶ The view of Chaucer's work that I present here is what C. David Benson would probably call a “didactic” view. For a reading of *Troilus and Criseyde* as a text focused on aesthetic goals rather than didactic ones, though open to multiple perspectives, see his work, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991). For an older, but still useful, work that treats with Chaucer's potential knowledge of hunting, see Oliver Farrar Emerson, “Chaucer and Medieval Hunting,” *Romantic Review* 13 (1922): 15-50.
hunting metaphors and their juxtapositions to other metaphorical structures. Particularly, his employment of venery as a metaphorical reservoir for discussing love suggests that his courtly audience was intimately familiar with hunting and already understood the world through such metaphors. Appreciating this fundamental courtly apprehension of venery as a means by which to imagine the world deeply nuances an understanding of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

This approach draws upon from the strengths of two of the most common strands of criticism on the *Troilus*. On the one hand, for much of the twentieth century, critics worked backward from the ending of the *Troilus* to see the text as pushing toward a unified statement on the transience of earthly love. This religiose view sublimated the complexity of the forms of secular love in Troilus to mere discarded markers along the path to a divine love. More recently, critics have tended to take a “postmodern” stance that engages with the multiple perspectives and subjectivities of the text. On the one hand, Chaucer's text undeniably presents a multiplicity of perspectives, and each of these must be considered on its own merits, not just sublimated into the morality of Troilus's comments from the eighth sphere; given the attention paid to the various forms of love and its complexity in the text, Troilus's spirit's reaction seems ironic and distinctly unsatisfying. On the other hand, these perspectives are not equally valid for Chaucer's ideal 14th-century audience nor are they treated that way in the text.

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The first powerful metaphor for love in *Troilus and Criseyde* is that of love as a sickness. Troilus's lovesickness has been well discussed, but it functions only as one of several love-metaphors within the text and Chaucer particularly discards it as an adequate paradigm for lovers, and these points, especially the latter, require a brief outline. The conventional form of the metaphor illustrates how unrequited love weakens the lover, metaphorically killing him. He must beg his beloved to take "pity" on him and "save his life," usually by sleeping with him. Chaucer reduces this metaphor to absurdity, illustrating the contradictions between what is required of a lover and what of an invalid, and implying that women do not desire men who behave in such a passive and overly emotional fashion. Chaucer does not attempt to divorce emotion from masculinity as some societies do, but he does find a contradiction between the immobility and passivity brought on by an excess of emotion and the active forcefulness a lover needs to gain his desires.

Troilus's desire for Criseyde arises as a figurative punishment, a situation that flows naturally from the metaphor of love as a disease that afflicts the lover. Like Apollo when he looses a divine plague upon the Greeks at the beginning of the *Iliad*, Cupid takes offense at Troilus's behavior at the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde*. As the story opens,

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Troilus and his retinue are walking among the crowd in the temple of Athena during a spring festival and Troilus, in particular, is eyeing the women critically:

Byholding ay the ladies of the town,
Now here, now there; for no devocioun
Hadde he to non, to reven hym his reste,
But gan to preise and lakken whom hym leste. (1.186-89)

His commentary seems to arise from the fact that he himself is not in love, and thus not sympathetic to lovers, so he does not refrain from mocking his friends about their feelings.

And in his walk ful faste he gan to wayten
If knyght or squyer of his compaignie
Gan for to syke, or lete his eighen baien
On any womman that he koude espye.
He wolde smyle and holden it folye,
And seye hym thus, “God woot, she slepeth softe
For love of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte!” (1.190-96)

Troilus characterizes their love as unrequited and futile at first, but then goes on to expand his criticism to courtship in general.

“I have herd told, pardieux, of youre lyvynge,
Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,
And which a labour folk han in wynnynge
Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;
And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces.
O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!
Ther nys not oon kan war by other be.” (1.197-203)

The actions of lovers seem to Troilus to be foolish, exhausting, fruitless, and repetitive.

Troilus finishes his assertions by boldly asking if he has not spoken wisely, and his question riles the God of Love enough that he responds decisively in the negative.

At which the God of Love gan loken rowe,

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10 The text of *Troilus and Criseyde* is taken from Stephen A. Barney, ed. Geoffrey Chaucer: *Troilus and Criseyde With Facing-Page Il Filostrato* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), which reprints with corrections the text of *Troilus and Criseyde* that Barney edited for *The Riverside Chaucer*.  

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Right for despit, and shop for to ben wroken.
He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken;
For sodeynly he hitte hym atte fulle –
And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle. (1.206-10)

Love's arrow as a metaphor for being “lovestruck” was quite traditional. Andreas Cappellanus opens The Art of Courtly Love with the image, for instance. The effect that the arrow has on Troilus, however, is not entirely conventional. Chaucer's method through much of Troilus and Criseyde proceeds by illustrating and then satirizing a typical situation. In this case, he illustrates the conventional motif of the lover struck by Love's arrow, which represents the “wound” of love that will “kill” the lover if it is not “healed” and which was nearly synonymous with “love sickness” or love as a disease, but then reduces the convention to absurdity by characterizing Troilus as so overcome by love that he will neither leave his sickbed nor even tell Criseyde of his desire. Troilus's actions demonstrate the contradictions of the “Lover as Invalid” metaphor.

The traditional version of this metaphor follows a clear outline. In the anonymously composed Romance of William of Palerne, Alphonse, the prince of Spain transformed by his wicked stepmother into a werewolf, steals William, the heir to the Sicilian throne, away before his own stepmother can have him killed and deposits him with a childless herder and his wife near Rome. The Roman emperor, lost while hunting, comes across and demands the boy, and then raises him in his household with his daughter, Melior. William falls deeply in love with Melior, and his desire for her follows the “Lover as Invalid” convention. Literally lovesick, William is afflicted with fevers and can no longer ride or fight. He drags his lovesick body to the garden outside

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11 The Art of Courtly Love, 27.
12 William of Palerne, ll. 1-79.
13 William of Palerne, ll. 198-383.
Melior's chambers so that he might catch a glimpse of her as he dies;\(^{14}\) when she sees him, he relates his feelings to her and asks her to take pity on him. Melior, the metaphorical physician, though here simultaneously a lovesick lover herself, heals him with her “gras,” a polysemic reference to both an herb and grace.\(^{15}\)

That scene illustrates how the metaphor typically runs. The man, the invalid, begs the woman, the physician, for her pity, and generally receives it. The metaphor is suggestive. It portrays love as an inexorable force that renders men helpless before it, even killing them. In particular, it destroys masculine virility. The traits that often defined men of the upper class, at least imaginatively, were those of the knight: the ability to fight, to ride, and to assert control. Afflicted with love, William, the best knight of the realm, can barely move his body and must beg Melior for her pity. Love seems to reverse the gender roles, placing women in a position of power over men, who have now become their supplicants. Ironically, this metaphor of love does not actually empower women. Instead, it acts as psychological coercion. Chaucer's famous statement that “Pite renneth soon in gentil herte” illustrates the tight connection between nobility and the performance, at least, of emotional sympathy and generosity. This metaphor thus requires the woman to take pity on the man or to violate a conception of noble virtue (as well as, presumably, feminine virtue) and to be seen as cold and uncaring. Although it is hardly the woman's fault that the man is in love with her, the trope makes her responsible for his “survival,” and thus coerces her into helping him. In *William of Palerne*, this help, grace, or pity is synonymous with sex (e.g., “William wel wiþ Meliors his wille þan dede”).\(^{16}\) As

\(^{14}\) *William of Palerne*, ll. 731-86.

\(^{15}\) *William of Palerne*, e.g. l. 799 for the pun, ll. 967-1040 for the scene.

\(^{16}\) *William of Palerne*, l.1025.
a result, the “Lover as Invalid” metaphor can become a complicated method for coercing women into bed by portraying them as responsible for a masculine desire over which they have no actual control and by dividing their choices into a binary between the promiscuous and merciful healer or the chaste and merciless murderer. That situation is precisely the paradigm exemplified in Alain Chartier's controversial fifteenth-century poem, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

Although Chaucer employs this metaphor, he does not subscribe to it. He implies that it provides an effective means of emotional manipulation, but he highlights critically that very manipulation and satirizes the convention's contradictions. Troilus's sudden desire for Criseyde portrays many of the conventional elements of the invalid-lover:

> Whan that he in chambre was allone,
> He doun upon his beddes feet hym sette,
> And first he gan to sike, and eft to grone,
> And thought ay on hire so, withouten lette. (1.358-61)

Troilus's sighs and groans are those both of the lover and of the invalid, just as his bed likewise functions dually as sexual symbol and sickbed. Troilus's situation continually associates the two domains. “If he dede his cure / To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace,” the narrator states, relating Troilus's inner thoughts, noting that “he myghte ought recovered be therby” (1.369-70, 383). If Troilus can win Criseyde's love, he will “cure” himself and “recover” from his love sickness. As Troilus's suffering progresses:

> Fyr of love ... ne him forbar in no degree, for al
> His vertu or his excellent prowesse,
> But held hym as his thral lowe in destresse,
> And brende hym so in soundry wise ay newe,
> That sexti tyme a day he loste his hewe. (1.436-441)

“Now wolde God, Criseyde,” he then declares, “Ye wolden on me rewe, er that I deyde! /
My dere herte, allas, myn hele and hewe / And lif is lost, but ye wol on me rewe!” (1.459-62). Lovesickness threatens Troilus's life, following the convention, unless Criseyde agrees to cure him. Troilus even explicitly compares the fire of love to a fever when he “seyde he hadde a fevere and ferde amys” (1.491) and uses that as an excuse for sticking to his bed, and before Troilus fell in love himself and suffered the same symptoms, he had, according to Pandarus, “Maad thi nyce japes … and som, thow seydest, hadde a blauche fevere” (1.911-16).

Had Chaucer merely made Troilus suffer the same pangs as the lovers he had mocked, there would have been a simple irony to the text, but Chaucer satirizes the metaphor of lovesickness through Troilus. Whereas William dragged himself to Melior's garden to ask for her pity and received it, Troilus suffers alone in his chambers, which the narrator describes humorously as “bywayling in his chambre thus allone” (1.547). Troilus is too overcome by his love to do anything about it. Without even asking her, he determines that Criseyde “lakked hir pitee! But also cold in love towards the / Thi lady is as frost in wynter moone, / And thow fordon as snow in fire is soone” (1.522-25). His fear of mockery also holds him back: “I shal byjaped ben a thousand tyme / More than that fol of whos folie men ryme” (1.531-32), he declares. Instead, Troilus will simply expire in his bedchamber, never having spoken to the object of his desire, who knows nothing of his affections.

When Pandarus finally arrives, Troilus says as much:

“What cas,” quod Troilus, “or what aventure
Hath gided the to sen me langwisshinge,
That am refus of every creature?
But for the love of God, at my preyinge,
Go hennes awey; for certes my deyinge
Troilus seems only to understand this metaphor of lovesickness by half. He has never before been in love, though he has observed and mocked lovers, and his naivety conceals from him the real utility of the metaphor of the invalid lover, which is to manipulate the woman into granting him her affections. Instead, he seems to take lovesickness at face value and, prevented by his fear of rejection and mockery, intends actually to die in his bedchamber. The satire lies in Troilus's taking a coercive metaphor of courtship and performing it seriously. Chaucer's audience would have been smiling, perhaps fondly, at such an innocent lover.

Fortunately for Troilus, his more experienced friend Pandarus does understand the coerciveness of the invalid lover metaphor and employs it on his behalf. Both his conventional exploitation of it and his criticism of Troilus are telling. “How hastow thus unkyndely and longe / Hid this fro me, thow fol?” (1.617-18), Pandarus asks. “Swych is the delit of foles to bywepe / Hire wo, but seken bote they ne kepe … What may this be, / That thow diseired art thus causeles?” (1.762-63, 778-79). Troilus's actions seem to him to be unnatural and foolish, which provides a guideline for how the audience would likely have interpreted Troilus, and Pandarus illustrates the normal response when he first offers to ask Criseye to have pity on Troilus and then adroitly manipulates her into doing so.

“Dorstestow that I tolde in hire ere / Thi wo, sith thow darst naught thiself for feere, / And hire bysoughte on the to han som routhe?” (1.767-69), he offers to Troilus, who

17 On the other hand, Arlyn Diamond views the couple's love as a fantasy both idealized and impossible within the “feudal patriarchy” of the social context. In her reading, their love is a wishful movement away from the economic and political brutalities of life that, as one might expect, in fact reinscribes those political realities and never really challenges them, “Troilus and Criseyde: The Politics of Love,” in Chaucer in the Eighties, 93-103.
eventually takes him up on it.

When Pandarus does approach Criseyde, his manipulation is both obvious and effective, which highlights in turn the manipulativeness of the lovesickness metaphor. He first teases her and piques her curiosity by stating that he could tell her “a thyng to doon you pleye,” but refuses to do so (2.120-33). Criseyde says she will not believe he has a funny story unless he tells her, but Pandarus refuses, criticizing her arrogance, “for prouder womman is ther noon on lyve” (2.138). His technique of building her curiosity and then refusing to satisfy it ignites her interest, “for nevere, sith the tyme that she was born, / To knowe thyng desired she so faste” (2.143-44), and she takes a circuitous route to try and find out, making small talk (2.148-54). Guiding the conversation, Pandarus strongly praises Troilus to build an honorable image of him in her mind (2.169-207), and then he gets up to leave (2.208). Still unsatisfied, she stops him by asking him for his advice on her affairs, which lets her get him alone (2.213-19). He asks her for the second time to take off her widow's habit and dance with him, and she finally asks him why (2.225-26). He states that the reason requires leisure to tell and she might take it amiss, all of which only further fire her curiosity, and he then states that he loves her most of any woman in the world to emphasize that she should trust him (2.232-38). She asks again what he means (2.248-49), and he takes a long-winded approach to telling her, again presumably to build her interest.

Significantly, he takes a moment to judge exactly what tactics he should employ, thinking to himself that the dim-witted believe everything complicated is deceptive, and so he should take a simple approach (2.266-73). Despite his plan, he still approaches the topic circuitously, telling her how fortunate she is for four stanzas, which scares her
Pandarus seems to lose control of his rhetoric at times, but his approach is effective overall. She begs him to just tell her straight out and he finally does, following the metaphorical conventions:

“The noble Troilus, so loveth the,
That, but ye helpe, it wol his bane be.
Lo, here is al! What sholde I moore seye?
Doth what you lest to make hym lyve or deye.” (2.319-22)

The extreme deliberation with which Pandarus brings up Troilus's desire for Criseyde emphasizes his manipulation of her emotions, as does his inner reflection on how to phrase his comments. His rhetoric contextualizes his conclusion, that she must take pity on Troilus or cause him to suffer and die, as itself a manipulation, and Chaucer's presentation of Pandarus's argument and thoughts highlights that fact and implicitly criticizes it by making it so obvious.

Chaucer's sympathetic presentation of Criseyde adds to his implicit criticism of the coerciveness of the lover-as-invalid metaphor. Criseyde is a widow, nearly alone in the city except for the protection she begs from Troilus's family, particularly Hector. Her uncle, who ought to be her protector, seems instead bent on exploiting her to satisfy his friend's lust and believes she is dim-witted. Unable to take out their anger on her father for his betrayal, the people of the city see her as an excellent target until they are warned off, and she seems to have trouble with lawsuits from grasping men. All told, Criseyde's position in the city is tenuous, and Chaucer's treatment of her suggests that she is a potential, if not outright, victim of her circumstances.\(^\text{18}\) Those later authors, like

Henryson, who reviled her, seem to have missed or willfully ignored Chaucer's subtlety. Pandarus's manipulation of his imperiled niece by means of the lovesickness metaphor highlights its exploitativeness.

Along with criticizing the lover-as-invalid metaphor as manipulative and unjust, Chaucer highlights its other contradictions through Troilus's lovesickness. The passivity and languor of the sickbed contradict the active manliness required of an aristocrat in Troilus's position. When Troilus mopes around in his bedroom and refuses to help himself, Pandarus criticizes him as unmanly, a point that Troilus himself admits (1.824). Troilus's childish antics illustrate the contradiction between the sickbed and the lover's couch. The surfeit of emotion that binds Troilus to his bed is self-defeating. If the trope is taken seriously, as more than a rhetorical manipulation, Chaucer suggests, then it must induce emasculate behavior in lovers. Thus, though Chaucer discusses the invalid lover metaphor at length, he dismisses it as alternately manipulative and rhetorical or emasculating and self-defeating.

Love as Service: Troilus as Criseyde's Knight

Perhaps as a result of his inexperience, Troilus has trouble sorting out how he should love Criseyde properly. He seems to take up the conventional metaphors of the day, confuse them, and fail to achieve his ends as a result. His courtship of Criseyde thus illustrates not just the problems inherent within single metaphors of love, but the

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19 In a contrary view, however, Derek Brewer argued that Troilus's manliness has been unfairly criticized, “Troilus 'Gentil' Manhood,” in Beidler, Masculinities in Chaucer, 237-52.
contradictory discourses of love current in the Ricardian court. Troilus's thoughts illustrate this confusion of metaphors.

It was to hym a right good aventure,
To love swich oon, and if he dede his cure
To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace,
Or ellis for oon of hire servantz pace. (1.368-71)

This thought conflates the images of the knightly servant (“serven,” “servantz”), the lover (“love”), and the invalid (“cure,” “grace”), and this conflation is visible in practice when the lovesick Troilus finds out that Criseyde may well return his love and attempts to act additionally as her knight.20 Troilus, and the fourteenth-century courtly society he represents, is full of clashing metaphors. As with the love-as-sickness metaphor, the chivalric paradigm of behavior has been well-discussed, but it too grants Troilus little success and becomes simply another metaphor that Chaucer discards as inviable. While Troilus is, indeed, an excellent knight on the battlefield when not moping about and while Criseyde is fond of imagining him as her knightly servant, their relationship shows that Criseyde's problems cannot be solved by chivalric force and that knightly skills do not necessarily make one a good lover.21 In effect, Chaucer criticizes the conflation of


21 On the other hand, Myra Stokes argues that the pledges of “love-trotth” in the work suggest a “solemn and binding” relationship between the man and woman and sees influence from the Prose Lancelot on their relationship: “The Contract of Love-Service: Lancelot and Troilus,” Litteraria Pragensia 9.18
chivalric service with love as much as he criticized that of sickness with love.

Chaucer clues his audience in on this problem of clashing metaphors when his narrator defends his characterizations at the beginning of Book Two with a nicely phrased comment on the cultural and temporal relativity of courting customs:

Ek though I speeke of love unfelyngly,  
No wondre is, for it nothyng of newe is.  
A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis.  
Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge  
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge  
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;  
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,  
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages. (2.19-28)

Chaucer's narrator apologizes for being a bit unemotional about love and excuses himself with the self-deprecating statement that he lacks personal experience of it. He then states that the forms of courtship change from place to place and that “every wight which that to Rome went / Hath not o path, or alwey o manere” in order to head off any complaints that Troilus is acting oddly, which is of course just an open invitation to his audience to question Troilus's behavior. His comment is an ironic justification for the overwrought depiction of Troilus's love-sickness in Book One, and it stimulates the audience to question that portrait. The comment about the relativity of courtship styles also suggests the series of behaviors, each the product of a different metaphor for love, that Troilus attempts and fails to employ adequately. The narrator's commentary seems designed to make the audience think critically about the nature of love.

In Book Two, Troilus transitions from invalid-lover to knightly lover, which was another long-standing and conventional pattern of behavior. It came in large part from

Andreas Cappellanus and Chrétien de Troyes, with a classical basis in a (misunderstanding of) Ovid, and it left a powerful legacy among later texts.\textsuperscript{22} One familiar example is Yvain in Chrétien's \textit{Knight of the Lion}, who suffers pains and wins victories in the name of his demanding lover who exercises power over him.\textsuperscript{23} Theoretically, the knightly lover is inspired to greater chivalric heights by his devotion to a lady, and so love in this metaphor is ancillary to chivalry.\textsuperscript{24} The knightly lover became such a widespread trope that in the mid-fourteenth century Geoffroi de Charny takes almost for granted that a young knight should have a beloved to inspire him to gain greater honor.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, Malory sometimes reduces damsels to necessary plot elements of the knightly adventure. Sir Marhalte declares, for instance, on requesting lodging for the night, “For I am wery, my damesel and my horse both” (p.105); the silent and unnamed lady is essentially equivalent to the horse in Marhalte's comment. She too needs a bit of rest and a good feed.

Troilus attempts to style himself as a knightly servant to Criseyde on several occasions, as when he promises, “In trouthe alwey to don yow my servise, / As to my lady right and chief resort” (3.133-34) just before they kiss for the first time at the beginning of Book 3. Conventionally, though, Troilus should be out doing deeds to increase his lady's honor or saving her from difficulties, and he is incapable of doing either. Although he is ferocious in battle, Troilus never once manages to save Criseyde from anything. In fact, it is she who must constantly save him: from his lovesickness, his

\textsuperscript{22} See Lewis, \textit{Allegory of Love}, 5-8
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Yvain}, e.g. l.1986.
\textsuperscript{24} See Lewis, \textit{Allegory of Love}, 12-13, for the lady as the feudal overlord and the overlap of the roles.
\textsuperscript{25} Geoffroi de Charni, \textit{The Book of Chivalry}, §12. Love explicitly makes Troilus a better fighter at 3.1777-78.
overwrought emotionality, and his despair at their impending separation, all instances rich with ironic humor as a result. For instance, when Pandarus lies to Criseyde and says that Troilus is jealous and thinks she has been unfaithful to their nascent relationship, Criseyde weeps, sighs, and protests to Troilus that the rumor is untrue. If Troilus were to act “normally,” he would capitalize on the moment, as Pandarus intended, and turn it to his advantage. Instead, he faints from sorrow (3.1092). Pandarus begs Criseyde to “save” Troilus, and she tells him that she is not mad at him and asks him, “Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?” (3.1126-27). Although Troilus flirts with the rhetoric of the knightly servant, it is not a model of behavior that he can maintain due to his excessive emotionalism and passivity.

Criseyde, however, sometimes refers to Troilus as her knight and seems to be fond of the courtly lover paradigm. Though her psychology and the process of her enamoration with Troilus are complex, she recognizes her love for him when he rides triumphantly through the city (2.624-79), and so it seems as if the knightly paradigm might serve Troilus as a more successful pattern for courtship than lovesickness. Chaucer questions the illusion of feminine dominance in that portrait of the lady and her knight, however, by implicitly paralleling courtly love with Criseyde's tenuous position in Troy. Criseyde in

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26 Gretchen Mieszkowski warns that one must not assume that fainting and passivity are effeminate, arguing that they acquired feminine gender only after the fourteenth century. "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," in Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec, eds. Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 43-57.

part listens to Pandarus about Troilus not because she thinks the prince attractive, but because she desperately needs a protector and is terrified that if she offends him, she might damage her position in the city (2.711-12); as she says, “Myn estat lith in a jupartie” (2.465). Criseyde is in charge of very little, and that fact highlights the incongruity of the knightly lover metaphor, with its implicit service to a feudal lady.

Criseyde does, however, sigh longingly after Troilus and imagine him as her chivalric lover (e.g. 3.983-84), despite the fact that Troilus cannot maintain that image. Criseyde's longing embodies a fanciful wish for a different social context, one in which she herself might have some control over her situation and in which Troilus could in fact solve her problems as a knight through force. Chaucer shows, however, that Criseyde's problems are far too complex for such a simple solution. With her father, Calchas, having fled to the Greek camp, one of Criseyde's major issues is her legal, not her physical, vulnerability. Though Criseyde, on Pandarus's advice, uses an old legal dispute with Poliphete as a pretext to further her love affair with Troilus (2.1415-19, and identified as Poliphete at 2.1465), the ploy illustrates the sorts of problems to which Criseyde is actually vulnerable. No one is threatening to kill her, but they are threatening her reputation and her possessions, and the situation is not one that can be solved by the use of blunt force. Instead, it requires a powerful political and legal patron, whom Criseyde finds in Hector and, to a lesser extent, in Troilus himself. Thus, Criseyde's promotion of the knightly lover metaphor is a nostalgic wish-fulfillment, but not an accurate depiction of her social situation or her relationship with Troilus.

Through the metaphors of the courtly lover and the invalid lover, Troilus is trying to act out two different, conventional, even stereotypical, roles simultaneously and failing
at both. Overall, Chaucer not only makes these two paradigms of love appear incongruous in the person of an inexperienced lover who seems to be imitating the cliché metaphors of the day but he also points out their internal discrepancies. The lovesick invalid metaphor is a manipulative tactic if taken rhetorically and emasculating and unattractive if taken seriously, while the knightly lover paradigm contradicts the social reality. Thus, Chaucer undermines these two metaphors as effective models for amatory behavior.

Love as Falconry: Troilus as Hawk

Rather than idealizing love as service or sickness, Chaucer explores metaphors of venery to examine the realities of courtship. He draws from a full range of veneric imagery when he variously characterizes the God of Love as a trapper or a falconer (with the lovers as his prey or Criseyde as his falcon) and describes Troilus as a hawk with Criseyde as his prey. Elsewhere, he portrays Troilus as the falconer who flies Criseyde. These metaphors are not given equal weight, and Chaucer's complex portrayal of the tale's love affair is entwined within them. He rejects the portrait of domineering masculinity found in the love hunt of Continental poetry and favors instead a relatively balanced relationship between the lovers. These veneric metaphors are made all the more compelling because they do not exist in Il Filostrato, Chaucer's major source for Troilus and Criseyde.

For an opposing view, one that argues that Chaucer rejects conventional depictions of love as a hunt, confusing language and reality, see Karla Taylor, "Proverbs and the Authentication of Convention in 'Troilus and Criseyde'," in Stephen A. Barney, ed. Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism (Hamden, Conn.: Shoestring Press, 1980), 277-96.
As these instances already suggest, the first and most significant point about veneric imagery in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (and indeed about veneric imagery more broadly) is that it is not monolithic. Hunting as an activity had a variety of forms and within those forms there could be various metaphorical and symbolic constructions: a hart might represent one thing, a boar another, a certain type of hawk this idea, and a certain type of hunting that one. Venery offered a flexible semiotic structure. In order to provide an interpretive pattern for scholars, Rooney set out to define a basic meaning for hunting in her monograph on the subject, working to identify common hunting themes, such as the “hunting heroes (and villains)” and “the hunt of the world and the hunt of Christ.”

Though interesting, this approach is problematic in that these themes themselves are the culled and carded products of individual authorial responses to the aristocratic hunt. The act of drawing broad comparisons, while not entirely futile, simplifies these responses to such an extent that one produces in “general themes” mere superficial overviews. By keeping venery contextualized within individual texts and treating it as a mediated expression of the ethos and habitus of the aristocracy, however, one possesses a method of interpretation both strong enough to be meaningful and flexible enough to account for authorial adaptations and social change. With care, such an approach can lead to usefully broad readings.

In the European tradition of the love-hunt, the male lover, or the God of Love (or both), swoops like a hawk down on his beloved, portrayed as a quail or lark, and captures or devours her; in other versions, he chases her down with allegorical hounds, as in Hadamar von Laber's *Jagd.*

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29 Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature.*

30 See Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, 185-228
bloody death the surrender to love or the consummation of the relationship. The image often is one of overpowering and conquering masculinity and helpless and subjected femininity, though on occasion the female lover might in turn be portrayed as hunting the male prey. Thiébaux discussed the love hunt in detail, tracing it back to classical literature, including Ovid and Vergil. While she found ample evidence for it in French poetry, she faltered when she tried to extend it to late medieval England. Her major evidence is from Latin and French poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, particularly texts such as *Li dis dou cerf amoreus*, which is an involved allegory of a stag hunt as the courtship of a lady. She attempted to distinguish a love hunt in the *Book of the Duchess*, examining a potential metaphorical connection between the hart that Octavian hunts and the black knight's beloved, but the argument is problematic on several levels. The hart is much more closely identified with the knight, and though natural gender is not metaphorically insurmountable, it is difficult to correlate a female beloved with a male deer (the female red deer is a hind). It is even more difficult to force a hunting metaphor onto the relationship, since the black knight is characterized by his grief and passivity. As Rooney has noted, “No extended explorations of the image of love's hunt survive in Middle English.” She suggests instead that “English writers may have rejected this popular literary motif because of the extravagant fusion of passionate

31 Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, e.g. 89. Criseyde's eyes, which ensnare Troilus like nets, provide an example of this reversal as well (3.1355). Boccaccio's *Caccia di Diana* provides another example of this reversal. In it, women hunt down and capture animals under Diana's guidance, but then turn to Venus, who transforms their prey into noble lovers. See Diana's Hunt – Caccia di Diana: Boccaccio's First Fiction, ed. and trans. Anthony K. Cassell and Victoria Kirkham (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).


love and agony it involves.”

Chaucer's treatment of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship follows this particularly English emphasis, but rather than just ignoring the love hunt, he explicitly evokes and then rejects the characterization. When Criseyde is beginning to respond to Troilus's love, she falls asleep:

> And as she slep, anonright tho her mette  
> How that an egle, fethered white as bon,  
> Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,  
> And out hire herte he rente. (2.925-28)

The dream seems at first to emphasize the conquering masculine power of the eagle, but the dream continues: “And dide his herte into hire brest to gon – / Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte –/ And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte” (2.928-31).

Thus, while Chaucer initially raises the prospect of a love-hunt metaphor for courtship, he seems to have found it too one-sided, too domineering, for his tastes or for those of his audience, and he adapts it to a more mutual version in which the eagle tears out his lover's heart, but then replaces it with his own.

Criseyde's dream thus takes a quintessential expression of the love-hunt and reshapes its vision of courtship. The exchange of hearts suggests an exchange of affections as well as an economic balancing of emotions. The eagle here is still the active...

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35 Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 45.
36 In this vein, Joseph Gallagher argued that Criseyde's erotic dream of the eagle symbolizes her fear of man's aggressive nature. "Criseyde’s Dream of the Eagle: Love and War in "Troilus and Criseyde",
"*Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975): 115-32. Alan J. Fletcher discusses the traditional idea that eagles carry off the hearts of their prey, "Lost Hearts: Troilus and Criseyde Book II, lines 925-31,
"*Notes and Queries* 37.2 (1990): 163-64.
37 Compare Jill Mann's reading of the exchange-of-hearts as “an aggression that is not felt as an oppression,” “Troilus' Swoon,” *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979-80): 319-35.
38 K.P. Clarke sees this scene as a reference to Dante and, with Criseyde's later speech on eagles and doves at 3.1492-98, an implicit statement that the love affair is doomed. "Eagles Mating with Doves: Troilus and Criseyde, II, 925-931, Inferno V and Purgatorio IX,
party, still dominant and irresistible, but he is no longer predatory. The dream rejects the
pain and agony of the original metaphor, the “cruel claws” and the torn body of the
beloved, and emphasizes that Criseyde “ne nothyng smerte.” An analysis of the scene is
complicated by the fact that these images occur in Criseyde's dream, which suggests that
this version of events might be simple wish-fulfillment; certainly the image of the royal
eagle suggests Criseyde's unconscious (and rather wishful) evaluation of Troilus. One
might ask if the actual relationship is, indeed, one-sided and brutal and Criseyde's
slumbering mind revises it, but this scenario is patently false. If anything, Criseyde's
fantasy over-estimates and over-dramatizes the passive Troilus's character, dominance,
and aggressiveness.

No scene makes the reality of the lovers' relationship clearer than when the two
consummate it. Troilus tries to act precisely as an aggressive and dominant hawk, only to
fail miserably. When Troilus takes Criseyde in his arms in bed for the first time, the
narrator asks, “What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / Whan that the sperhauk hath it
in his foot?”, portraying Troilus as the hawk and Criseyde as his captive prey (3.1191-
92). Taken out of context, the line seems to emphasize a masculine dominance in bed, but
in context, it is deeply ironic. Troilus has just woken up from the swoon that followed his
failure to follow up on the opening Pandarus gave him by telling Criseyde that Troilus
thought she had been unfaithful, and Criseyde and Pandarus have just criticized him with,

39 The mutual aspect of the dream has been well noted, see, e.g., Allen J. Frantzen, “The 'Joie and Tene' of
Dreams in Troilus and Criseyde,” in Chaucer in the Eighties, eds. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J.
Blanch (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 105-19, who points out that the painlessness
is implausible, but that the dream reassures Criseyde, 109-10.
40 Constance B. Hieatt also reads Criseyde's dream as wish-fulfillment, The Realism of Dream Visions
41 This point is reinforced by the eagle's white feathers. Though eagles were not actually flown in
England, the white gyrfalcon was one of the rarest and most valued of raptors. See Oggins, Kings and
Their Hawks, 12-13, for gyrfalcons, and see below for further discussion.
“O thef, is this a mannes herte?” and “Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?” (3.1098, 1126-27). Moreover, in the lines just before the sparrowhawk metaphor, Troilus has given up any dominance in bed, sighing and telling Criseyde, “I wol no more trespace. / Doth what yow list; I am al in youre grace” (3.1175-76). These events leading up to the metaphor cast it in a deeply ironic light and turn it from the act of a dominant lover into an awkward fumble. Troilus's attempt at dominance suggests that he might consider the conquering hawk a potentially effective paradigm of love, but his attempt to embody it is at odds with his prior behavior and it fails. Criseyde in fact points out the disparity between his two behaviors to him. Troilus declares to her, “Now be ye kaught; now is ther but we tweyne! / Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!” She undercuts him: “Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere, / Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought here!” (3.1207-09, 1211-12). His attempt at masculine dominance, she implies, is not what got him into her bed. She “yielded” instead to her own desires and Pandarus's manipulation.

Troilus further undermines the comparison to a dominant hawk by showing himself to be an exceptionally awkward lover. After he grabs Criseyde, “right as an aspes leef she gan to quake, / Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde” (3.1200-01). She starts to shake in fear, but he completely ignores it, and “therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste, / That what to don, for joie unnethe he wiste” (3.1252-53). Troilus is so eager, and perhaps so nervous, that he hardly knows what to do next, even though they are both

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42 For Criseyde as the one with a “mannes herte,” see Angela Jane Weisl, ”'A Mannes Game’: Criseyde’s Masculinity in Troilus and Criseyde.” In Pugh and Marzec, eds., Men and Masculinities, 115-31. For Troilus as a character torn between two genres, embodied in this line, see Maud Burnett McInerney, “'Is This a Mannes Herte'? Unmanning Troilus Through Ovidian Allusion,” in Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyd, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 221-35.
naked in bed and he holds Criseyde in his arms. In his nervousness, he instead goes off on a 49-line tangent (3.1254-1302) in praise of love until Criseyde shushes him with, “Lat us falle awey fro this matere” (3.1306), a polite equivalent of “Please be quiet.” She must take the lead instead, guiding him into the next act with, “And at o word, withouen repentance, / Welcome, my knyght, my pees, my suffisaunce” (3.1308-09, emphasis added).

The sparrowhawk image itself further develops the irony of this scene, for it stands in stark contrast to Criseyde's fantastical portrait of Troilus as an eagle, the king of the air in bestiaries. In the famous hierarchy that ends the Book of St. Albans, the eagle belongs to an emperor, while the sparrowhawk belongs to a priest. Sparrowhawks were relatively small raptors that hunted common prey (usually teal); though some romances regard them as quite noble, the Book of St. Albans states, “She may be callid a Spere hawke for of all the hawkys that ther be she is moost spere, that is to say moost tendre to kepe, for the leest [misfeeding or mishandling] sleth her. One might compare Troilus's swoon and his malingering to the latter statement. The disjunction between Criseyde's unconscious portrait of Troilus and his actual performance in the bedchamber is embodied in the contrast between the royal eagle and the tender sparrowhawk.

Despite Criseyde's dream of a fulfilling, mutual relationship with a powerful lover, and despite the European tradition of the love hunt, the sparrowhawk metaphor

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43 Book of St. Albans, 54-55. This chart is an imaginative imposition of a human hierarchy onto the animal world, and it is rather confused in its attributions at times. The sparrowhawk, it says for instance, goes to a priest, while the musket goes to a holy water clerk, yet the sparrowhawk and the musket are the same bird. Real medieval falconers respected no such distinction of human rank and assigned birds; instead, they flew specific types of raptors at specific types of game as appropriate and desired.

44 Book of St. Albans, 48. The text actually reads, “mysoetyng” (error of food?) and “mysentenoyng” (error of judgment?). On sparrowhawks, see Oggins, The Kings and Their Hawks, 15-16, and De arte venandi cum avibus, 127-28. In contrast, modern falconers and conservationists regard the sparrowhawk as a very hardy bird.
only points out how far Troilus is from either model. Instead, Criseyde must guide and
soothe him. Criseyde's dream of Troilus as an eagle tearing out her heart and the
description of the two in bed as a sparrowhawk and lark are the most recognized
instances of hunting imagery in the poem, but they only support the love-hunt themes if
taken out of context, and in fact the comparison raises a subtle irony. Through these
metaphors, Chaucer dramatically undermines the love hunt's portrait of domineering
masculinity and subjected femininity as a pattern for courtship.

Chaucer does, however, invoke the love hunt (even the motif of Troilus hunting
Criseyde) on a very few occasions. When Troilus is first criticizing lovers, before Love
shoots him with an arrow, he states that love is foolish and the lover finds only, “whan
youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces” (1.201). Similarly, when Pandarus plots to win
Criseyde on Troilus's behalf, he instructs Troilus to “hold the at thi triste cloos, and I /
Shal wel the deer unto thi bowe dryve” (2.1534-35). These metaphors certainly raise the
image of female prey and male hunters. In Troilus's first comment, though, he speaks
without authority because he has yet ever to fall in love, and his comments in fact offend
Cupid. Pandarus's “driving” of Criseyde to Troilus's bow is equally questionable since it
is fraught with ethical issues that he himself raises: “For the am I bicomen, / Bitwixen
game and ernest, swich a meene / As maken wommen unto men to comen” (that is, a
pimp) (3.253-55). Neither of these is an ideal spokesman. Even if one were to take their
words at face value for an authorized version of love, Troilus's position in the tryst, which
is a stand at which an archer waits while the huntsmen and hounds drive a deer toward
him, portrays him in his typically passive role, not in the role of the conquering hawk or
Neither of these instances presents a positive version of the love hunt.

Still, one might ask if Chaucer exploits the love-hunt paradigm despite Troilus's passivity and awkwardness. Criseyde's wishful dream and the narrator's ironic description of Troilus as a sparrowhawk might suggest that Chaucer employs the sparrowhawk metaphor ironically not to undermine that portrait of courtship but instead to show how awkwardly it fits the ineffective, passive, and awkward Troilus. Such a reading cannot really be supported. Chaucer's attention to Criseyde's emotions and her reactions to masculine aggression undercut the love hunt's version of courtship. As already discussed, Criseyde's wishful thinking revises the love hunt into a painless exchange of mutual affections in her dream, and when Troilus grabs her, Chaucer's narrator empathetically describes how she shakes like a leaf. Neither she nor the narrator glories in pain and subjection. Moreover, Criseyde emphatically rejects the love hunt's themes when she tells Troilus,

"But natheles, this warne I yow," quod she,
"A kynge's sone although ye be, ywys,
Ye shal namore han sovereigntet
Of me in love, than right in that cas is." (3.169-73)

This attention to Criseyde's emotions and her reaction to Troilus emphasizes that Troilus's show of aggression in bed is badly misjudged. Not only is it comic in context, but it terrifies Criseyde and contradicts the rules she has established (and this text does not portray Criseyde as a woman who sets boundaries only because she loves to have them crossed lightly). A naïve lover blindly following his friend's advice, Troilus here is trying out yet another paradigm of love, and he fails not only because he has been unable to

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45 Rooney makes a similar point about Troilus's passivity and the tryst in her discussion of the love hunt, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 47-48.
enact that paradigm fully, but, more seriously, because it is abusive and
contradicts the basis on which the lovers' relationship is founded. Criseyde wants a
strong lover, wants the royal eagle of her dream, but not a murderously domineering one.
Though Chaucer introduces the love hunt in these metaphors, he does so to reject it as an
effective pattern for courtship.

Diomede acts as a foil to Troilus in love, and his relationship with Criseyde
clarifies Chaucer's negative view of the love hunt. While Troilus asks himself “Whi nyl I
helpen to myn owen cure?” (5.49), Diomede “koude his goode” (5.106). He hunts
Criseyde without hesitation, and she eventually yields (5.1030-43). Chaucer's description
of Diomede's behavior is telling. When Diomede leads Criseyde away from the Trojans,
Chaucer twice offers a suggestive play on words: Diomede “by the reine hire hente” and
“ledde hire by the bridel” (5.90, 92). Diomede leads both Criseyde and her horse, but the
unclear antecedent for the pronoun “hire” collapses the two into one. Chaucer repeats the
metaphor during Diomede's argument that Criseyde should love him instead of a Trojan:
“Syn I first hond on youre bridel leyde, / Whan ye out come of Troie by the morwe, / Ne
koude I nevere sen yow but in sorwe” (5.873-75). Criseyde is figuratively a horse led by
Diomede's rein and bridle, with all that this metaphor implies. Additionally, when
Diomede plots how best to win her, he considers how “into his net Criseyde's herte
brynge. / To this entent he koude nevere fyne; / To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and
lyne” (5.775-77). Diomede's treatment of Criseyde as an animal and as a fish to be caught
suggests the themes of the love hunt and in fact parallels a description of the lover as a
fisherman in De arte honeste amandi (which makes a play on amor and amus, hook).46

46 The Art of Courtly Love, p. 31.
Lest one think that the love hunt is a successful or noble pattern for courtship, however, Chaucer emphasizes that Diomede's relationship with Criseyde preys upon her fear “that she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help” (5.1026-27) and he shows her weeping for her betrayal of Troilus (5.1051-78). Thus, Chaucer portrays Criseyde as a woman forced by circumstance and fear to abandon a gentle lover and take up with a domineering one.

Perhaps even more telling for Chaucer's characterization of Criseyde's and Diomede's relationship, and thus his judgement on the love hunt, is his deletion of the only moment in Il Filostrato that evokes the themes of the love hunt. In Il Filostrato, Troilo falls asleep and dreams of Diomede and Criseida:

Ché gli parea, per entro un bosco ombroso, un gran fracasso e spiacevol sentire; per che, levato il capo, gli sembiava un gran cinghier veder che valicava E poi appresso gli parve vedere sotto a' suoi piè Crisêida, alla quale col grifo il cor traeva, ed al parere di lui, Criseida di così gran male non si curava, ma quasi piacere prendea di ciò che facea l'animale; il che a lui si forte era in dispetto, che questo ruppe il sonno deboletto.47

(He seemed to hear within a shady wood a great and unpleasant crashing: at that, when he raised his head, he seemed to see a great charging boar. And then afterward he seemed to see Crisëida underneath its feet, from whom it drew her heart with its snout, and it appeared to him that Crisëida was not concerned by such a great hurt but almost took pleasure in what the animal did, which made him so strongly indignant that it broke his feeble sleep.)

The image of Diomede as a boar is ambivalent. The text explains that it is a hereditary (i.e. semi-heraldic) symbol for the Greek (5.1450-1519), and while the boar was one of the most highly regarded prey animals, it was not regarded as a prize for its cunning, speed or grace, as was the hart, but for its ferocity and perilousness. In describing his style of courtship, Chaucer may be suggesting that Diomede is a more brutish lover than than Troilus. In any case, Diomede's removal of Criseida's heart and her pleasure in it resemble the love hunt more or less as Thiébaux described it. If Chaucer were to favor the idea of the love hunt, here would be the ideal opportunity; instead, he revises this scene:

And so byfel that yn his slep hym thoughte  
That in a forest faste he welk to wepe  
For love of here that hym these peynes wroughte;  
And up and doun as he the forest soughte,  
He mette he saugh a bor with tuskes grete,  
That slepte ayeyn the bryghte sonnes hete.  
And by the bor, faste in his armes folde,  
Lay, kyssyng ay, his lady bryght, Criseyde. (5.1234-41)

Chaucer revises the scene to remove the boar's capture of Criseyde's heart as well as Criseyde's overt pleasure in the boar's victory. The removal of the love-hunt imagery suggests his rejection of that model of courtship and a refusal to portray Diomede as a lover to be emulated, while the removal of Criseyde's overt pleasure parallels her

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50 Compare, for instance, *Decameron*, Day 5, Tale Eight, in which the spurned lover, Nastagio, has a vision of a knight who chases his shrieking lady into the forest, has her torn apart by his hounds, and throws her unyielding heart to them. Cited in Thiébaux, *Stag of Love*, 105.
unhappiness. Instead, he provides a strikingly unusual image of a “queer” relationship in which Criseyde continually kisses the boar (the boar is sleeping, so presumably Criseyde is the subject of “lay” and “kissing”). None of the other hunting metaphors in Troilus and Criseyde invoke this same sort of sexual transgressiveness. Even the falconer-and-falcon imagery (discussed a little below), while it involves different species, does not suggest that the literal falconer and his bird will go to bed together. Yet here there is something of the old legend of Pasiphae and the bull. Perhaps Troilus's dream is a reflection of his disgust with Criseyde and his opinion of Diomede, or perhaps the implication is that Criseyde is forced to kiss the boar, which fits with her difficult circumstances. Either way, the image is unnerving and the inter-species relationship suggests that Criseyde and Diomede are an undesirable match. Furthermore, since Diomede is the best embodiment of the love-hunt pattern in the text, this scene and Chaucer's revisions to it particularly emphasize his reaction against that version of courtship.

While Chaucer rejects the love hunt as a metaphor for how Troilus ought to court Criseyde, though, he does use it to describe the effect of Criseyde's beauty on Troilus. When Pandarus tells Criseyde of Troilus's love for her, he exclaims, “Right good thrift, I prey to God, have ye, / That han swich oon ykaught withouten net!” (2.582-83). Troilus himself also describes Criseyde's eyes as nets:


Frantzen points out that it is unclear in the manuscripts whether the pronoun in l. 1240 is “his” or “hire,” and so it is uncertain who is holding whom, “The 'Joie and Tene' of Dreams,” 110-11.
“This Troilus ful ofte hire eyen two
gan for to kisse, and seyde, ‘O eyen clere,
it weren ye that wroughte me swich wo,
ye humble nettes of my lady deere!’” (3.1352-55)

Similarly, the narrator relates that:

The goodlihede or beaute which that kynde
In any other lady hadde yset
Kan nought the montance of a knotte unbynde
Aboute his herte of al Criseydes net.
He was so narwe ymasked and yknet,
That it undon on any manere syde,
That nyl naught ben, for aught that may bitide. (3.1730-36)

The difference between Chaucer's treatment of the love hunt in the two scenarios is based both on gender and on active engagement. While Chaucer finds the idea of the male lover hunting the female lover domineering and distasteful, he has no qualms about portraying the lady's beauty as a net that entraps the male lover. She does not hunt him, but she does capture him without trying, which neatly reflects how Criseyde does, indeed, “win” Troilus.

This description of how Criseyde's beauty entraps Troilus parallels Chaucer's conventional description of Love's influence on lovers. Though Chaucer rejects the love hunt as a form of courtship, he does use it to emphasize the over-powering and irresistible nature of love. Drawing on a conventional image, Chaucer depicts Love as a hunter and, especially, as a trapper, showing how the net of Criseyde's beauty arises less from her own actions than from the nature of love itself. “Kaught is proud, and kaught is debonaire” in Love's net (1.214), and:

Men reden nat that folk han gretter wit
Than they that han be most with love ynome;
And strengest folk ben therwith overcome,

53 See, for instance, Tristan, 52, where Love limes the lover's feet.
The worthiest and gretest of degree:
This was, and is, and yet men shall it see (1.241-45).

When Troilus is struck by Love's arrow:

Thus to hymself ful ofte he gan to pleyne;
He seyde, 'O fool, now artow in the snare,
That whilom japedest at loves peye.
Now artow hent, now gnaw thin owen cheyne!’” (1.506-09)

He thinks that he is “ikaught, ye, nevere wight so faste” by Love (1.534), and Pandarus
compares him to Apollo, “for love hadde hym so bounden in a snare, / Al for the doughter
of the kyng Amete, / That al his craft ne koude his sorwes bete” (1.663-65). This constant
refrain depicts Love as an indomitable hunter, particularly a trapper. The imagery casts
the lovers into the position of the prey, emphasizing their vulnerability before such a
superhuman force. Against a human opponent, such weakness might have been
problematic, but in a contest with Cupid, a lover had no options and thus no shame. The
hunting metaphor emphasizes the insurmountable power difference within the categorical
division between the predator and the prey.

Along with entrapping lovers with his snares, Love briefly appears as a fowler in
the text. “Love bigan his fetheres so to lyme” that Troilus can barely keep up appearances
(1.353). Birdlime was a sticky substance that a fowler spread on a branch to entrap
birds. When they landed on it, their feet became stuck and the fowler could retrieve them
at his leisure. In both of these metaphors, the trapper and the fowler, Love is rather
underhanded. Noble hunters, as mentioned a little earlier, disdained traps as unworthy.
Thus, that the God of Love is characterized as a trapper says much about his nature, and

54 This metaphor of Love as a trapper of various sorts was quite traditional. See Chapter 1 for additional
examples of the “snare” of Love, particularly in Tristan.
55 On birdlime, see Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk, 243-44.
also about the ability of lovers to resist him, a point that extends beyond even the
categorical division of the predator and his prey. The fowler metaphor is particularly
interesting in that it portrays Troilus as a bird, and Chaucer elsewhere in the text portrays
him as a hawk, which brings one back to the discussion of the sparrowhawk metaphor
with which this section began. As the first chapter of this work laid out, there was a
strong connection between venery and nobility and, in particular, between harts and
aristocrats and hawks (which I use broadly here to include both hawks and falcons) and
aristocrats. For Chaucer to portray Troilus as a hawk is thus a natural extension of the
convention. The way he does so, however, is unique and complements his broader
depiction of Troilus's conflicted behavior.

When Chaucer does describe Troilus as a hawk, he portrays him as either hooded
or confined. The narrator relates that when Troilus first falls in love, he intends “to hiden
his desir in muwe / From every wight yborn” (1.381-82). Like a stable for horses, mews
are where hawks and falcons are kept. Typically, the birds are tied to their perches and
have a limited range of motion, and they often are kept in the dark to keep them calm.56
Similarly, when Troilus pesters Pandarus as he tries to fall asleep, Pandarus retorts, “Ly
stytte and lat me slepe, / And don thyng howd!” (2.953-54). Stephen Barney, in his critical
edition of the text, glosses the phrase as “of uncertain sense: keep your shirt on! be at
ease! prepare for bed! get ready to go (to sleep)!”57 Pandarus is more likely simply
characterizing Troilus as a restless hawk who requires a hood to relax and go to sleep.
Chaucer continues to characterize Troilus as a restrained or hooded hawk. When

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56 On this typical technique, see one discussion: Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks*, 24-26.
57 Barney, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 111, n. 7.
closet: “Thoroughout a litel wyndow in a stewe, / Ther he bishet syn mydnyght was in mewe” (3.601-02); when Criseyde leaves Troy, Pandarus criticizes Troilus, saying “It non honour is to the / To wepe and in thi bedde to jouken (roost) thus” (5.409); and Troilus himself states that “was there nevere fowel so fayn of May / As I shal ben whan that she comth in Troie” (5.425-26), referring to Criseyde's planned return. While these metaphors all draw on the conventional connection between aristocrats and hunting birds, they particularly portray Troilus as restrained, passive, blind or otherwise hobbled, and perhaps in need of external correction to control himself (i.e. a hood). This characterization contextualizes the sparrowhawk metaphor and together they present a broader portrait of Troilus as a flightless hawk. The reasons for that state are only implied by the metaphors, but they might include, in actuality, youthfulness, sickness, or a temporary physical impairment, such as moulting. The other common reason why a hawk will not fly, satiation, seems unlikely. In any case, although Chaucer does portray Troilus as a hawk, in a portrait that suggests the passive aspects of his character, the poet does not portray him as the conquering predator of the love hunt.

All told, Chaucer rejects the love hunt as a paradigm of courtship. His careful attention to Criseyde's emotions and the wishful revisions of her dream, along with the suppression of the love-hunt imagery in Troilus's dream of Diomede and the transgressive interspecies sexuality that replaces it, argue that the love hunt is too one-sided and

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58 For an alternate reading of the falconry and mews imagery, see R.A. Shoaf, "Troilus and Creiseyde: The Falcon in the Mew," in Hugh T. Keenan, ed. Typology and English Medieval Literature (New York: AMS, 1992), 149-68. He argues that these images represent the Neo-Platonic notion of the soul as a winged captive in the body. In contrast to my narrow reading of falconry, Caitlin Quinn-Lang presents a broader view of birds in the work, arguing that they represent treachery and unnatural, sorrowful love: "'The Augerye of Thise Fowles': Treacherous Birds in Chaucer’s 'Troilus and Creiseyde'," in The Image of Nature in Literature, the Media, and Society, eds. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan (Pueblo, CO.: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 1993), 38-47.
domineering to suit Chaucer's tastes or those of his audience. Instead, the exchange-of-hearts metaphor argues for a more mutual and balanced relationship. Despite Chaucer's rejection of the love-hunt trope, he does portray Troilus as a hawk, but that image is more in keeping with the strong link between aristocracy and falconry than it is an endorsement of the love hunt, and it particularly represents Troilus as enfeebled. Nonetheless, while Chaucer rejects the love hunt's domineering vision of love, his extensive employment of hunting imagery to make that point illustrates venery's semantic power and flexibility. The intricate meanings embodied in this hunting discourse rely rhetorically on, and make implicitly clear, the audience's intimate knowledge of the subject. The fact that neither Criseyde's dream of the eagle nor Troilus's fumblings as a figurative sparrowhawk (nor most of Chaucer's other hunting metaphors) has a parallel in *Il Filostrato* illustrates that Chaucer placed a particular emphasis on conveying his points through veneric imagery. Both Chaucer and his audience are thinking through love with falconry.

**Love as Falconry: Troilus as Falconer**

Troilus's characterization as a hawk is not the only place in the work, however, where Chaucer draws links between falconry and love. Chaucer also characterizes Criseyde as a falcon and Troilus as her falconer. Chaucer may have found this metaphor of love as falconry in Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit de l'Alerion*. In the latter half of the poem, Chaucer several times refers to Criseyde as a falcon. The first of these instances is just before the consummation of the lovers' relationship discussed a little above. When Troilus hesitates nervously before pursuing Criseyde, Pandarus mocks
him, then drags him along by the lapel of his shirt: “Quod Pandarus, 'Thow wrecched mouses herte, / Artow agast so that she wol the bite? / Wy!' … Troilus he brought in by the lappe” (3.736-342). Pandarus's insult is one more instance of Troilus's typical passivity, and the metaphor he employs depicts Troilus as a figurative mouse and Criseyde as a predator. A modern audience probably thinks first of a cat in this comparison, and medieval bestiaries do distinguish the cat for its ability to catch mice, but the cat is also an untrustworthy and dubious creature in them. More probably, in light of other descriptions of Criseyde, Chaucer here imagines her as a hawk, or falcon, which also eats mice. Or perhaps he envisages Troilus as an incompetent falconer afraid of being bitten by his own bird.

Coming as it does just before the sparrowhawk and lark metaphor, this earlier depiction emphasizes, again, the irony of the later one. Instead of possessing the passive vulnerability of the lark, Criseyde instead intimidates Troilus with the predatory aggression of a falcon – or at least, that is how he sees her. Pandarus tells Troilus to get ready, “for thow shalt into hevene blisse wende,” but he is terrified: “‘Now, blisful Venus, thow me grace sende!’ / Quod Troilus, ‘For nevere yet no nede / Hadde ich er now, ne halvendel the drede’” (3.704-07). In the same fashion, though Pandarus tells him, “Ne drede the nevere a deel,” Troilus's prayers reveal his concerns. He beseeches Venus to help him on behalf of Adonis, but Adonis was slain by a boar. He asks Jupiter to aid him for love of Europa, but Europa was abducted (perhaps raped). He begs Mars to assist him for love of Venus, but Mars's desire made him a laughing stock when Vulcan captured them together in bed. He prays Phoebus to favor him for the sake of Daphne, but she prayed to be turned into a tree out of fear rather than submit to his desire. Finally, he
invokes Mercury to smile on him for his love of Herse, but Herse's envious sister Mercury turned to stone (3.715-30). None of these classical allusions is reassuring, and collectively they suggest how badly Troilus is intimidated by the thought of meeting Criseyde.

This intimidating feminine figure that Troilus imagines partially resembles the women that Guillaume de Machaut depicts in his *Dit de l'Alerion*, which might have provided Chaucer with inspiration for some of his adaptations in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The *Dit*, one of Machaut's longest works at 4814 lines, was probably composed sometime between 1342 and 1349, and was probably well known to Chaucer, who was an admirer and imitator of Machaut. At one point, Machaut compares the lover's heart to a little bird. His lady is a powerful hawk who captures the little bird and uses it to warm her cold feet overnight. At another point, Machaut emphasizes how skilled this female sparrowhawk is at hunting (he uses hunting as an elaborate metaphor for courtship), describing how she charms other birds and preys on them (ll.1164-76). These other birds represent suitors who attempt to win her affections away from the narrator-lover of the *Dit*, who rejoices at her conquests since she always returns to him. Machaut's narrator is simultaneously a falconer who “tames,” “trains,” and “flies” the four female birds he

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59 As Barney points out, Chaucer revises the story to suggest that “Mercury's love for Herse made Pallas angry (wroth) with Aglauros,” *Troilus and Criseyde*, 176, n.7. Either way, the negative implications remain.

60 The only critical edition of the text, by Ernest Hoeppfner, *Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut*, places the date between 1342 and 1357, Volume 2, bxiii, while a more recent consideration places it between 1342 and 1349: van den Abeele, *La Fauconnerie dans les lettres françaises*, 229.


62 *Dit de l'Alerion*, ll. 1285-1380. English translations, and all references unless otherwise cited, of the *Dit* are taken from Minnette Gaudet and Constance B. Hieatt, eds. and trans. *Guillaume de Machaut: The Tale of the Alerion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). With rare exceptions, the lines coincide.
loves throughout the *Dit* and a lover who courts and wins four different women. The falconer-narrator never forgets the power and feistiness of his birds, and his accounts of winning them relate careful negotiations between him, the birds, and, often, the birds' keepers (who represent the lady's family and so forth). Machaut's notion of femininity might lie behind Troilus's trepidation at meeting Criseyde and Pandarus's mocking question of whether Troilus thinks Criseyde will bite him. Criseyde is not, of course, going to bite Troilus, as both he and the audience soon find out, nor is she going to enact the predatory potential of Machaut's women (who use it against men other than their lovers). Troilus in his naivety misunderstands his relationship with Criseyde, as he does consistently through the poem, and here he momentarily believes that she might be a danger to him (as his mythical comparisons reveal).

If this reference were the only time Chaucer referred to Criseyde as a falcon, it would be a slim thread with which to weave a metaphor of love as falconry in the *Troilus*. Other strands, however, reinforce and expand this reading. When Pandarus takes the letter that Criseyde has written for Troilus, he declares that she has been “hard … ywonne” (2.1236), and that such a circumstance is beneficial, for “Impressiounes lighte / Ful lightly ben ay redy to the flighte” (2.1238-39). The metaphor is a somewhat unusual one that has required an editorial gloss, but perhaps Pandarus merely suggests that Criseyde's affections will no longer take flight like a bird. When Troilus and Criseyde

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64 E.g. Barney, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 131, n. 6.

65 Tempting though a modern parallel is here, “imprinting” (cp. “impressioun”) is a modern term for a bird's emotional attachment to its parents or mate, not a medieval one. The *Oxford English Dictionary* places the earliest use of the term in the 1950s.
decide they must part (they think temporarily) out of duty to Troy, a fact that underscores part of the real tragedy of the poem, Criseyde assures Troilus that she will not be far away and that she can easily return, which she intends to do after a few days.

“And syn I shal no ferther out of Troie
Than I may ride ayeyn on half a morwe,
It oughte lesse causen us to sorwe;
So as I shal not so ben hid in muwe,
That day by day, myn owne herte deere –
Syn wel ye woot that it is now a trewe –
Ye shal ful wel al myn estat yheere.
And er that trewe is doon, I shal ben heere.” (4.1307-14)

Notably, she declares that she shall not be “hid in muwe,” not locked away out of sight and unable to return. The line portrays her, again, as a falcon, and this time it is a self-identification. She can easily, she implies, go wherever she pleases, and in the end wing her way back to Troilus, which she says she will do before the truce is over. Trusting that she will, indeed, return, Troilus agrees to the plan.

Throughout the *Dit de l'Alerion*, Machaut emphasizes that one of the traits of a well-trained falcon is that she will always return to the falconer's wrist, despite whatever other enticements or distractions she may encounter. This return emphasizes the lady's loyalty to her lover. With the first narrator's first bird, the sparrowhawk who delights him until she moults, Machaut stresses this quality:

Car onques ne fist si lonc trait
De voler, fуст tost ou attrait,
Que de quelque part qu'il tournast,
Qu'adès vers moy ne retournast.

Amours, autel puet il bien estre
En ton tres dous gracieus estre,
Quant une dame est bien amee,
Ou cas qu'elle s'est adonnee
De bon cuer a celi qui l'aimme
Et tres douce dame la claimme,
Quant elle de li se depart
Et elle se tourne autre part
Vers gens de debonnairete,
Dont elle par jolieté
Entr'eaus joieusement s'embat
Et la se deduit et esbat
Amiablement et envoie.
...
Car s'elle de la se transporte,
De quelque part qu'elle se tourne,
Son cuer vers son ami atourne,
Entierement entalenté
Vers li de bonne volenté.67

(However long a flight she made / still, on her own or at my call, / no
matter how far she had flown, / she always did come back to me. / So may
it very well be, Love, / according to your gracious nature, / when a lady is
well loved / if she has bestowed herself / in good faith to him who loves
her / and who finds her a sweet lady, / when she may turn away from him
and choose to take another path / towards people of good character, / where
she may thus most joyously / and pleasurably take her place, / there
to amuse herself and take / joyful diversion amiably. / … / But when she
takes herself from there, / wherever she may turn to go, / she turns her
heart towards her true love, / entirely devoted and desiring him with all her
heart.)

The sparrowhawk returns “on her own or at my call,” or out of either her own
faithfulness or her lover's training. One might also note the falconry pun in “joieusement
s'embat / Et la se deduit et esbat,” which means both “joyfully places herself and delights
and entertains herself there” and “joyfully positions herself and delights herself and
strikes there.”68 “Deduit” is of course the word that typically describes the delights both

67 Dit de l'Alerion, ll.1147-63, 1188-92; translation by Gaudet and Hieatt, The Tale of the Alerion, same
lines.
68 See Frédéric Godefroy, Le Dictionnaire de l'Ancienne Langue Française (Nendeln, Liechtenstein:
Kraus Reprint, 1969), s.v. “esbatre” (-battre, emb. verbe), senses 1 (“battre”), 5 (“amuser,” “diverter”),
of the hunt and of love. Machaut here plays on the image of the lady as both courtier and falcon. Conversely, when the narrator courts a gerfalcon, she refuses to come back to his wrist except when she pleases, despite the falconer's experience (she is his fourth bird), and he sees both that refusal and her preference for lesser prey (i.e. other, less noble suitors) as a sign of her degraded nature. After he rids himself of the gerfalcon, the alerion, his favorite of all the birds, returns to him unbidden and lands on his wrist, and the scene promises a long and happy union. If Machaut provided a basis for the depiction of Criseyde as a falcon, then one can compare the lovers' separation to this theme of flight and return, particularly because of the way Chaucer stages the actual separation.

At the beginning of Book 5, Troilus watches Criseyde ride out of the city while he sits on his horse with “hawk on honde” (5.65). Chaucer at this point generally avoids detailing individual scenes in favor of summarizing plot action, and the mention of the hawk here stands out. In light of the comparison of Criseyde to a falcon earlier in the text, the hawk on Troilus's wrist is a deeply poignant image that emphasizes by contrast that Troilus no longer holds Criseyde. Since Troilus expects her to come back after ten days, the image suggests that, like a bird he has trained, he has let Criseyde fly. She does not, however, come back to his wrist. In light of Machaut's account, either Troilus's “training” is at fault, or Criseyde is faithless, or, given Diomede's coercive attitude and the way he handles Criseyde's “reins,” she is prevented from leaving the camp, though a combination of all these reasons is also plausible. Though Criseyde does indeed betray Troilus and even give Diomede her former lover's brooch, Chaucer perhaps also suggests that Troilus has mishandled the love affair. He personally did very little either to gain Criseyde's love

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6 (“passer joyeusement”), and 7 (Ref. “s'amuser, se divertir, etre joyeux”).

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or to keep it, constrained though he was by duty and the greater workings of fate. The intricate enticement of the lady and the careful negotiation of the love affair that Machaut's falconer displays are completely lacking in Troilus, and so it is easy to suggest that he has mismanaged the love affair egregiously enough that she is not inclined to return, at least in concert with her other motivations for staying away. Whether one sees Troilus's actions as flawed or not, however, the image of a male falconer separated from his powerful and beautiful female falcon as an embodiment of the sorrow of lovers parted would have wrenched the heartstrings of a medieval aristocratic audience. Falconry was a difficult game that required immense amounts of free time and financial and emotional investment. One of the ways to train a falcon was to keep it from sleeping, but it required that the falconer himself also forgo sleep. The Book of John Mandeville romanticizes that practice, and underscores its difficulty, during the description of the Castle of the Sparrowhawk. If a man could keep the bird awake for several nights, he will be granted a wish. Some years ago, T.H. White trained a goshawk according to medieval manuals, and his words convey the same deep emotion, even raising a similar courtship metaphor: "My head and eyes ached, from trying to see as piercingly as my mate." To lose a bird after such time and investment was a tragedy, and the metaphor aptly underscores Troilus's roiling emotions at watching Criseyde leave the city.

Another metaphor of Criseyde as a falcon perhaps underlines why this relationship was unsuccessful. In the idyllic interlude at the end of Book 3, Troilus and Criseyde's relationship is going, to all appearances, quite well. The narrator relates:

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69 The Book of John Mandeville, eds. Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2007), 59.

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In tyme of trewe, on haukyng wolde he ride,
Or elles honte boor, beer, or lyoun;
The smale bestes leet he gon bside.
And whan that he com ridyng into town,
Ful ofte his lady from hire wyndow down,
As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe,
Ful redy was hym goodly to saluwe. (3.1779-85)

Troilus and Criseyde's relationship is still secret, of course, but there is an odd
disassociation between the two lovers here. Criseyde, like a falcon who has just arisen or
just moulted, only looks out on the tail-end of the action, and barely associates with
Troilus. In comparison, Machaut's narrator-falconer and his beloved falcon spend a great
deal of time together, and the height of their relationship is the hunt, or the flight, which
Machaut often uses to represent sex. Another classic pair of lovers, Tristan and Isolde,
hunt together for pleasure while at the Cave of Lovers.\(^{71}\) Hunting in these texts is a
central expression of love – not as the love hunt, where the man hunts the woman, but as
an amorous partnership. In Chaucer's work, though, Troilus hunts on his own and
Criseyde merely looks on. If Chaucer were drawing on Machaut, then this scene implies a
problem in their relationship, a lack of essential connection and partnership, despite its
seemingly happy appearance.

A strong metaphor that associates women and hawks comes when Pandarus offers
Troilus a medieval version of the modern adage that “there are plenty of fish in the sea.”
When Troilus believes he has lost Criseyde, Pandarus encourages him just to find another
woman, saying that:

\[\text{“If oon kan synge, another kan wel daunce;}
\text{If this be goodly, she is glad and light;}
\text{And this is fair, and that kan good aright.}
\text{Ech for his vertu holden is for deere,}\]

\(^{71}\) \textit{Tristan}, 267-68.
If one is pretty, another will be a good dancer, he says, and each one has her own virtue, just like different falcons are good for catching different birds. As soon as Troilus finds a new woman, Pandarus goes on, he will forget about Criseyde (4.415). Pandarus's comment too quickly dismisses the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde, and it reduces it from one founded on mutual love to one based on female utility. In this passage, women, and love more broadly, are to be desired and sought after for their varying skills and uses. The narrator declares Pandarus's suggestion nonsense, stating that he had only said it to cheer Troilus up and “roughte nought what unthrift that he seyde” (4.431). This rejection is focused on Pandarus's advice to forget about Criseyde, but it may also question the comparison between women and birds, particularly the emphasis on their interchangeability and utility. In comparison to the Continental love-hunt, the falconer-and-falcon metaphor presents a more balanced and sensitive version of love and courtship, but it is still androcentric and even chauvinistic. The man is still human and in charge, while the woman is a trained animal. The imbalance is somewhat offset, however, by the fact that the association of the woman and the hawk draws on the general connection between the hawk and nobility, emphasizing the bird's aristocratic nature and its physical power. That association transforms the love hunt's passive victim into a dangerous force, one with which a lover must negotiate and which often he must appease.

Perhaps Chaucer suggests that this falconry metaphor, flaws and all, is a more realistic portrait of courtship and love in his day than any of the other metaphors he has raised. People do not actually die from lovesickness. Men do not actually pay homage to empowered women. Men are, however, dominant in love and courtship, taking charge
and making decisions, and women are, indeed, commodities of exchange, respected and powerful as they may be at times. Like falcons, they can be bought and sold, though like falcons, they also can be deeply loved and respected. The falconer displays an attention and concern for the falcon's well-being and behavior. This metaphor, more than all the others, is based on a close observation of and respect for feminine wishes. While the falconer is still nominally in control of the relationship, he is hardly as domineering as the hawk that preys on the lark and the eagle that tears out her heart. Instead, he must stay up nights and strain to be the best falconer (that is, lover) that he can be. The falconer shows a respect for the destructive power and individuality of the falcon. Perhaps the narrator's criticism of Pandarus's comment suggests that Chaucer sees the falconer-and-falcon metaphor as a more accurate, even more successful, view of love than the others, though with stark recognition of the way it represents male privilege and a patriarchal social context.

Conclusion

The various metaphors for love and courtship in *Troilus and Criseyde* break down into a relatively discrete progression from Troilus as invalid to Troilus as falconer. In Book One, Troilus quickly reaches the satirical pinacle of the lover-as-invalid metaphor, contemplating suicide in his sickbed before he has even told Criseyde of his feelings. Chaucer next employs the rhetoric of the lover-as-knight metaphor, but Criseyde is the one who must constantly save Troilus as the relationship unfolds. After waking up from
an emotional swoon for which Criseyde criticizes him, Troilus tries to act the dominant hawk in bed with her as his captive lark, but Criseyde must shush his nervous monologue and show him what to do. In the end, Troilus never quite treats Criseyde as his falcon, but Chaucer suggests, especially in that poignant final scene in which Troilus holds a hawk on his wrist as Criseyde rides away from him, that the falconry as a metaphor can embody deep love and even respect. In these four patterns of love and courtship in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer critiques the conventional paradigms of love and courtship of the late 14th century with irony and wit and presents falconry as a realistic view of love in his day, though he is intimately aware of its imbalances.
Chapter 4: Warfare and Venery in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*

“It is extremely difficult, in matters of medieval thought, to clearly separate seriousness from play.”

~Johan Huizinga, 1921

Courtly literature conflated hunting with warfare even more prominently than with love, and so chivalry provides a yet clearer example of how venery may have influenced aristocratic behavior and how authors employed veneric themes to communicate with their noble audiences. In the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the author

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1 Huizinga, *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 285.
draws a parallel between war and hunting in which typical hunting practices influence both how combatants conduct warfare and, more importantly, how they conceive of it. War and hunting in the poem share a structural process, an emotional register, and an aesthetic sensibility. The interplay between the two turns warfare into a humorous game waged against human prey in a natural paradise—until death in particularly disturbing forms disrupts the association. The poet first creates this association to portray a conventional aristocratic view of war, then uses these deaths to introduce an abrupt shift in tone that deflates that ludic vision of combat and reveals warfare for what it is: a grim and savage activity, destructive of both individual bonds and broader social cohesion, and anything but a game. This shift presents one of the poem's major themes, and studying its evolution allows one to assess the conflation of warfare and hunting and the way it permeates the aristocratic imagination, as well as to contextualize that perspective within one particular treatment of it.

My Foe, My Prey

The prevalence in this text and others of the correlation between hunting and combat, and for that matter between hunting and love, was without doubt a result of the didactic role played by hunting in the formation of the aristocratic consciousness combined with the widespread, and socially preeminent, employment of venery in artwork, literature, music, and other areas. Chapter One of this work discussed how

hunting helped form aristocratic identity and instill virtue in hunters, and how it
functioned as a training for warfare. To Edward of Norwich's testimony,⁴ one may add
both John I of Portugal's and John Gower's. John I wrote in his Livro de Montaria:

Hunting is a training for all types of fighting met with in war: against a foe
crossing in front, in a head-on encounter or in a pursuit, in an awkward
situation or a sounder one. For every kind of military encounter, hunting is
a better training than jousting. If the tourney teaches a man how to strike
with a sword on a helmet, how much better will he learn by striking down
a boar when his only chance of saving himself is by a good thrust with the
spear.⁵

John's elevation of hunting over the jousting tournament is striking and thoroughly
demonstrates the martial associations of hunting. Gower's description of the education of
Achilles provides further evidence that hunting was considered training for war,
particularly in terms of attitude. Gower writes that:

It hath and schal ben evermore
That of knithode the prouesse
Is grounded upon hardinesse
Of him that dar wel undertake.”⁶

He then goes on to describe how Achilles was raised from twelve years of age by the
centaur Chiron, who lived in a wilderness surrounded by many beasts. In order to “maken
his corage / The more hardi be other weie” (4.1984-85), and thus to make him a better
knight, Chiron orders that Achilles “ne scholde / After no beste make his chace, / Which
wolde flen out of his place” (4.1988-90) but only hunt those who “wolden him
withstonde … Upon the tigre and the leon / Pourchace and take his veneison, / As to a

⁵ Quoted in Chapter 1, subsection “Venery and Noble Education.”
kniht is acordanct” (4.1993-97). Chiron then sets Achilles a task:

And therupon a covenant
This Chiro with Achilles sette,
That every day withoute lette
He scholde such a cruel beste
Or slen or wounden ate leste,
So that he mihte a tokne bringe
Of blod upon his hom cominge.
And thus of that Chiro him tawhte
Achilles such an herte cawhte,
That he no more a leon dradde
Whan he his dart on honde hadde
Thanne if a leon were an asse.
And that hath made him for to passe
Alle othre knihtes of his dede
Whan it cam to the grete nede,
As it was afterward wel knowe. (4.1998-2013, emphasis added)

Gower's description attributes Achilles's unsurpassed prowess in battle to his early training in hunting, which taught him to fight ferocious beasts fearlessly, to injure or kill them always, and never to return without a token of their blood. The Latin marginalia that accompanies this section of the Confessio specifies that Achilles's training is part of a broader pattern.

Hic loquitur quod miles in suis primordiis ad audaciam prouocari debet. Et narrat quoliter Chiro Centaurus Achillem, quem secum ab infancia in monte Pileon educauit, vt audax efficeretur, primitus edocuit … Et sic Achilles in iuentute animatus famosissime milicie probitatem postmodum adoptauit.7

(Here he states that a knight in his beginning years ought to be stirred to valor. And he tells how Chiron the centaur, who had taken Achilles unto himself from infancy to educate him to be bold, from the beginning taught him … And Achilles thus disposed from youth later most famously acquired his excellence in arms)

These examples represent one of the typical justifications and reasons for hunting, that it

trained members of the nobility in combat, which was the nominal moral duty and function of that class. As a result, when one finds an overlap between hunting and warfare in the Alliterative Morte, it should be viewed as typical of a conventional aristocratic perspective. The poet plays intricately on this aspect of the noble habitus.

The opening scenes of the Alliterative Morte Arthure draw back the curtain on a courtly pageant in which venery takes center stage, and in which it is intimately linked to warfare. The poet begins by describing how:

When that the king Arthur by conquest had wonnen
Casteles and kingdomes and countrees many,
And he had covered the crown of that kith riche
Of all that Uter in erthe ought in his time
... he skiftes as him likes. (ll.26-32)

Arthur overcame most of Europe and Scandinavia besides, and when he finished, he “dealt out” kingdoms, duchies, and knighthoods, and then held the Round Table (ll.30-53). As soon as he has finished this immediate business of basic governance, he:

Sujourns that seson to solace himselven
In Bretain the brodder, as him best likes;
Sithen went into Wales with his wyes all,
Sways in Swaldie with his snell houndes
For to hunt at the hartes in those high landes
In Glamorgan with glee there gladship was ever. (ll.54-59)

Arthur immediately sets out to hunt for harts, which is his greatest pleasure (“as him best likes”), and the text emphasizes that he does it “with glee,” underscoring the joyousness of the hunt, which is one of its typical attributes (see further below). Here at the beginning of the text, Arthur moves directly from warfare to hunting, a movement soon to be reversed.

The prominence of hunting in the noble and courtly lifestyle and its association
with combat continues when Arthur throws a feast to awe his unwelcome guests a few
lines later. The foods at his table provide not just a carnal embodiment of venery's
centrality in the court, but also a testament to venery's symbolic and imaginative power.
Arthur has barely settled down and built his new capital at Carlisle when Lucius,
Emperor of Rome, sends a senator on New Year's Day to rudely demand Rome's tribute
from the king, whom he declares to be his rebellious subject (ll.78-115). Arthur's eyes
“full bremly for brethe brent as the gledes” at the insults (l.117), but he remains polite. As
an example of his power and distinction, he orders the senator to remain for a week and
instructs Kay to spare no expense in lodging and hosting him. Then, Arthur throws a feast
to awe the senator, who can barely believe his eyes. “Flesh flourist of fermison” (meat
gathered during the close season of hunting, when the harts and stags were off limits)\(^8\)
covers the table, with peacocks, plovers, porcupines, herons, swans, wild boars, barnacle
geese and bitterns, rabbits, pheasants, cranes and curlews, and young birds “in bread”
(perhaps crusted or in a pie, ll.176-199). Arthur sardonically apologizes for the simplicity
of the meal:

\begin{verbatim}
Sirs, bes knightly of countenaunce and comfortes yourselven;
We know nought in this countree of curious metes;
In these barrain landes breedes none other;
Forthy, withouten feining, enforce you the more
To feed you with such feeble as ye before find (ll.222-26).
\end{verbatim}

Arthur's comment is a courteous and deeply ironic reply to Lucius's message, one that
implicitly emphasizes how badly Rome has misjudged him. The senator responds as the
king presumably desires, stating that, “There regned never such realtee within Rome
walles!” (l.228). The subtle interplay of insult, response, and capitulation here is based on
\(^8\) Although these lines occur only shortly after those that describe Arthur's hunting for harts, much time
has apparently passed while Arthur built Caerleon. Christmas has come and, with it, the close season.
the symbolism and metaphorical patterns of venery, particularly as they represent aristocratic identity and combat.

The symbolism begins with the food Arthur has had laid out. Some of the meat dishes are ones that could have been raised or farmed, but nearly all of them are game animals. Arthur intends to awe his guest with the feast, and the carcasses embody his lands, his wealth, and his personal and royal power. Some of the animals are rare, some expensive, some difficult to catch, and some simply impressive as part of a wide spread of flesh. They contain in their carcasses a symbolic message and an implicit threat to the senator and Lucius: “Here is my power, here is my reach, here is the result should you challenge me.” Two points in particular support that argument. First, the detailed connection between warfare and hunting in the text, which one sees here at the beginning and which runs throughout the work, as will become clear, provides a background against which to view victory in the hunt as victory in war, with the implication that losses in each are also equivalent. Second, the senator specifically threatened Arthur with a hunting metaphor when he delivered Lucius's message, and the feast is a reply to it.

Lucius's summons informed the king that:

Yif thou these summons withsit, he (Lucius) sendes thee these wordes:
He shall thee seek over the se, with sixteen kinges,
Brin Bretain the brode and britten thy knights
And bring thee buxomly as a beste with brethe where him likes,
That thou ne shall route ne rest under the heven rich
Though thou for reddour of Rome run to the erthe! (ll. 104-09)

Jeremy Withers offers a similar reading of the feast as an aggressive symbol, though he sees it as particularly centered on Arthur's violent treatment of animals (and by extension men): “The Ecology of War in Late Medieval Chivalric Culture (PhD Diss., The Ohio State University, 2008), 104-06. Henry Louis Harder compares Arthur's feast with actual courtly practice: “Feasting in the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” in Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages, eds. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1980), 49-62, 156-57.
The final line suggests that Lucius will hunt Arthur down like prey that hides in the ground, such as a rabbit or fox, “britten” is the same word used in Middle English when one “breaks” a deer, and the beast metaphor animalizes Arthur.10 The king’s mocking invitation to come and "feed" on the "feeble" of the "barrain landes" of Britain thus becomes a challenge. If the king is a beast, then his words dare Lucius to come and "feed" on him, and the rich feast implies that Lucius will get more than he bargained for.

Arthur's immediate response to the message also reverses the hunting imagery used in the insult. His eyes burn like coals and he:

Looked as a lion and on his lip bites.  
The Romanes for radness rusht to the erthe,  
For ferndness of his face as they fey were;  
Couches as kennetes before the king selven. (ll.119-22)

Though Lucius has threatened to “run (Arthur) to the erthe,” Arthur's angry face alone is enough to force the Romans instead to “rus[h] to the earth” and to cower like small hunting dogs, “kennets,” before him.11 The reversal of roles underscores the power differential between Arthur and Lucius and foreshadows Arthur's eventual victory. 

Arthur's feast thus follows up on the initial exchange and plays on the same veneric concepts.

The scenes are interesting for more than their literary function, however. They indicate that venery, both as symbol (the feast) and metaphor (the insults), represents character, position, and power and stands in for a whole series of social relationships.

That the author employs venery in such a prominent fashion, to introduce the plot and

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10 See The Parliament of the Three Ages, “The foxe and the filmarte thay flede to the erthe” (l.18). Citation taken from Warren Ginsberg, ed. Wynnere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1992). Middle English Dictionary, “britten” (v.). Also see Chapter 2, subsection “The Meaning of the Breaking.”

11 Middle English Dictionary, “kenet.”
foreshadow the eventual result of the conflict, highlights the preeminence of hunting in
the imagination of the aristocratic audience, which is further flattered by the esoteric
exclusivity of the ironic references. One needs to understand and immediately recognize
the symbolism of hunting before the implications of the threats and responses (and thus
much of the entertainment of this early section of the story) become clear. These initial
scenes of diplomatic exchange and courtly feast demonstrate the intimate connection
between hunting and warfare, indeed hunting and conflict of nearly any variety, and the
indivisible link between the aristocrat and the hunter. The author of this text obviously
felt comfortable enough with the connection to be able to employ complex veneric
metaphors in high-level diplomatic exchanges and make them implicit in the social and
diplomatic context of a courtly feast.  

These initial scenes, and particularly their reliance on venery for their meaning,
set the stage for a widespread structural parallel between hunting and warfare that plays
out through the rest of the text. The most obvious instance of this juxtaposition is the
general use of hunting as a metaphor (and thus a conceptual pattern) for combat. When,
for instance, Arthur dreams about his upcoming battles, he imagines himself as a dragon
fighting a massive bear: “The dragon on dregh dressed him againes / And with his duttes
him drove on dregh by the welken; / He fares as a faucon, frekly he strikes; / Both with
feet and with fire he fightes at ones” (ll.786-89). Though the dragon is the primary image
in this vision, Arthur imagines it “as a faucon” that fights “with feet” and climbs high to

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12 On diplomacy more broadly, see Juliet Vale, “Law and Diplomacy in the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” Nottingham Medieval Studies 23 (1979): 31-46. Compare the gift of tennis balls from the Dauphin to Henry V in Shakespeare's play, which is based on chronicle evidence and displays a similar reliance on social context.

13 On metaphors and conceptual patterning, see Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By; a brief overview is provided on 3-6.
swoop down on its prey. As the battle comes to a close:

Then wanders the worm away to his heightes,
Comes glidand fro the cloudes and coupes full even,
Touches him with his talones and teres his rigge,
Betwix the taile and the top ten foot large!
Thus he brittened the bere and brought him o live,
Let him fall in the flood, fleet where him likes. (ll.798-805)

The climb into the clouds and the steep swoop and strike are the typical tactics of falcons (as a group distinct from hawks, who chase and grapple)\(^{14}\). Arthur's imagination (and the author's description) naturally understands the mythical dragon through a familiar sight.\(^ {15}\) The comparison is particularly apt because the dragon represents Arthur and the aristocrat and raptor are typically associated.\(^ {16}\) Thus, in local moments such as this one, combat parallels venery, and not just the process of hunting down an animal itself, but also other patterns and interpretive structures present in the hunt, such as the flight patterns of a hawk.

These isolated moments in the Alliterative *Morte* suggest the strength of the connection between combat and venery in the text, but the *Morte* also demonstrates that merger at a higher and more explicit level. In this text, the entire process of warfare becomes a hunt. The enemy is treated as prey, tracked down, ambushed, killed with hunting spears, and taken back as prizes. A variety of local examples illustrates the essence of this point. In one instance, in the sequence of battles between Arthur and Lucius, Arthur sends Sir Gawain to carry a message to the emperor. One of the Romans

\(^{14}\) On hawks versus falcons, see Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks*, 10-11. I have also personally observed these differences while hawking with Joe Dorrian, a U.S.-licensed Ohio falconer.

\(^{15}\) See also Karl Heinz Göller, “The Dream of the Dragon and Bear,” in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*: A Reassessment of the Poem, 177-79.

\(^{16}\) See, for instance, Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 223-33. Withers points out the semiotic fluidity of this dream, illustrating how it can apply to both Arthur and Mordred and may foreshadow their destructions of their peoples, “Ecology of War,” 127-29.
insults the Britons and Gawain “strikes off his heved, and stertes out to his steed,” leaving quickly before the mass of the Romans can surround and kill him and his men. The Britons ride along the edges of a forest as they flee:

Romans arrayed upon rich steedes  
Chased through a champain our chevalrous knightes  
Til a chef forest …  
A fair flourisht spere in fewter he (a Roman) castes,  
And followes fast on our folk and freshly ascries. (ll.1361-67)

The perspective shifts briefly to Arthur and his men, then back to Gawain, under attack from Sir Idrus:

Then says Sir Gawain, “So me God help,  
We have been chased today and chulled as hares,  
Rebuked with Romanes upon their rich steedes,  
And we lurked under lee as lowrand wretches!  
I look never on my lord the dayes of my life  
And we so litherly him help that him so well liked!” (ll.1444-48)

Gawain's complaint makes obvious what lay implicit in the structure of the battle. The “chase” of combat, the goals of capture and violence, the men fleeing toward and then hiding in the woods, and the implicit interplay of power among the pursuers and the pursued are all compared to a hunt. Gawain's irritated commentary self-consciously recognizes the overlap between hunting and warfare and then uses the unfavorable comparison of his men to hares to urge them to fight more strongly. All this speaks strongly to the self-identification of the aristocracy as hunters (and decidedly not prey) and makes evident the structural parallel between hunting and combat.

A wealth of other examples reinforces the association. The King of Libya, for instance, proceeds to “chase the childer of the kinges chamber, / And killes in the champaines chevalrous knightes; / With a chasing spere he choppes down many!” (l.
1821-23). In another instance, the Romans, fleeing defeat:

To a chef forest they chosen their wayes,
And feeled them so faint they fell in the greves,
In the feren of the firth for ferd of our pople …
By hundreths they hewed down by the holt eves!
Thus our chevalrous men chases the pople. (ll.1873-80)

The pursuit of the enemy as a chase, the use of a hunting spear specifically as a weapon, the reaction of the Romans as they flee to the woods and fling themselves down as if exhausted prey, and the repetition of the “chase” all emphasize the overlap. The “chase” of combat is a constant image throughout the text: Kay “chases on a courser” (l.2166) and knights “chop down in the chase” their opponents (e.g., ll.2269, 2368). When Arthur defeats Mordred and the Saxons, the Saxons flee to a forest and fall down in the groves, “And fers fightand folk followes them after, / Huntes and hewes down the hethen tikes … choppes them down in the chase” (ll.4256-61).

Of course, this language makes one wonder whether chase necessarily implies a hunting metaphor. The Middle English Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary both give “to hunt game” as the primary sense of the word, with “the pursuit of an enemy” as a secondary sense. The word evolved from the late Latin captare (“to seize, catch, chase, hunt”) into the Old French chasser (which also provided la chasse, the French name for hunting with dogs) and eventually the Middle English chacen.17 It seems likely that the secondary sense of “pursuing enemies” evolved as a metaphor based on the primary sense of “taking game.” While that evolution does not necessarily mean that every use of chase invoked conscious notions of the hunt, the textual context suggests strongly that the author employs chase as an intentional hunting reference much of the

17 Middle English Dictionary, “chacen” (v.), sense 1; e.g. “Þe hert to chacen and þe hinde,” Guy of Warwick, l.1206, c. 1330; Oxford English Dictionary, “chase” (v.), sense 1a.
time; thus, the metaphorical valence of phrases like “chasing-spere,” “huntes and hewes,” and “choppes them down in the chase” cannot be easily dismissed.

Richly suggestive as these references are, however, the poet pushes the connection even further. In a more than five-hundred line scene (ll.2482-3028), he fills with vivid color the outlines provided so far. When Arthur lays siege to Metz, the battles of the armies outside the city become an elaborate, extended hunt. The scenes further support the characterization of chivalric enemies as metaphorical game, and they suggest that conceptualizing warfare as a hunt may even have influenced the way combatants engaged in it. The hunting metaphor permeates the descriptions of the battles from the very beginning of the scene, and the parallel continues for over five hundred lines. After briefly skirmishing against the city, Arthur encamps his army and sends Florent, Gawain, and some other men out to hunt in the forest for meat and seek out the enemy, consciously interweaving the language of the two acts:

Here are forestes fair upon fele halves,
And thider fomen are fled with freelich bestes.
Thou shall founde to the felle and forray the mountes:
Sir Ferawnte and Sir Floridas shall follow thy bridle.
Us moste with some fresh mete refresh our pople
That are fed in the firth with the fruit of the erthe. (ll.2487-92)

Arthur states that there are both foes and noble beasts in the forests, and his order to “forray” (forage) the hills refers both to hunting the beasts and pursuing the enemy. His commands seem intentionally ambivalent, and that ambivalence makes his comment

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about “fresh mete” equally uncertain: is it a literal reference to fresh meat, or does Arthur jokingly order his men to round up some “fresh meat” to fight? In either case, Arthur merges the semantic space of “prey” and “foe” by ordering out the party of “forreours,” the foragers, to search out “fomen” and “freelich bestes,” which itself is a play on “noble” animals. The party never actually does any real hunting or foraging, and so Arthur is perhaps using “bestes” to refer to the enemy's warhorses directly, or to the knights themselves figuratively, as the "four-footed" prey of the foragers.

Arthur's ambivalent orders are immediately productive. The foraging party sets out and finds a beautiful clearing to rest in, while Gawain sets out on his own “wonders to seek,” and finds his first prey. He comes upon a lone knight on a hill waiting for battle, who is indeed on a “freelich beste,” a “blonk rich” (l.2518), and the discovery provokes one of the exchanges about prey mentioned above. The new knight, Sir Priamus, demands:

"Whider prikes thou, pilour, that proffers so large?
Here pickes thou no prey, proffer when thee likes,
But thou in this peril put of the better,
Thou shall be my prisoner for all thy proud lates!" (ll.2533-36)

The knight on the hill becomes Gawain's “prey” as the result of Gawain's hunt for fresh meat, and the knight himself consciously characterizes Gawain as a hunter looking for prey to fight. In fact, he turns the situation around on Gawain by referring to him as a “pilour,” which has a double valence here. On the one hand, it means “spearman,” and on the other, it means “robber” or “thief.” A thieving hunter is a poacher, and so Priamus implies that Gawain has trespassed on his place, lands, or authority in approaching him and offering battle. The knight's words raise two other interesting points. Without

19 Middle English Dictionary, “pilour” (n.), sense 1 and 2.
knowing that Gawain is part of a foraging party, he immediately characterizes him as a hunter. Again, the text employs the language of hunting, of hunter and prey, as a structural metaphor for combat, and again the combatants self-identify as hunters and shun the notion of themselves as prey. As these examples demonstrate, warfare and hunting share a structural similarity that particularly evidences itself in a shared vocabulary. The knight's comment also rejects any view of himself as an easy target and indicts Gawain as a trespasser, and thus it provides another instance of characters in the text marshalling veneric concepts to express complex sociocultural points, just as one sees with the feast and diplomatic exchanges at the beginning.

The characterization of the enemy as prey is constantly repeated throughout the series of battles the foragers fight. After Gawain and Priamus join forces, they tell the rest of Gawain's party about the great host of enemies in the woods, and Gawain declares that, “If we get-less go home, the king will be greved / And say we are gadlinges, aghast for a little” (ll. 2727-28). Gawain's words link the structure of a hunt to the structure of combat, and they provide a particular goal to combat as well: capturing prisoners. Although Arthur sometimes idealistically declines to make money from prisoners through ransoms and at other times refuses to take any at all in revenge for his dead knights (ll. 1581-82, 2261-63), the Morte is full of knights taking prisoners in combat in order to ransom them. When Sir Gawain defeats Sir Priamus, for instance, Priamus is pleased, “For me were lever privily be priked to the herte / Than ever (just) any priker had such a prise wonnen!” (ll. 2648-49). He self-consciously refers to himself as a prize, which is true both literally and metaphorically. Gawain could ransom him if he chose and Priamus's captured body represents Gawain's victory. This emphasis on ransoms comes as no surprise; ransoms
were one of the major ways in which war was profitable. At the Battle of Poitiers when King Jean II of France was captured, Froissart relates that his potential captors fought among themselves for such a great prize. Ruf 20 William Marshal, the greatest English knight of his age, made his fortune through capturing prisoners on the tournament circuit, which gave him the right to their horses and gear. Thus, Gawain's conflation of prisoners and game makes perfect sense. He and his men, if they fight well, can literally bring back worthy prizes to Arthur, just like the prizes ceremoniously returned to the court at the end of a hunt.

The characterization of the enemy as prey and prize is motivating. When Priamus suggests that they “work after wit” and “warpes wilily away” from such disadvantageous numbers (five to one and then later one hundred to one), Gawain spurs the men on with a light-hearted joke. “‘I graunt,’ quod Sir Gawain, 'so me God help! / But here are some galiard gomes that of the gree serves (deserve a reward) … We shall prove today who shall the prise win!” (ll.2747-51). The structural comparison perhaps serves a psychologically useful purpose. If the knights conceive of the enemy as prey and prize, the metaphor leaves little room for concern over defeat or worry over uneven numbers. What does it matter if there are fifty thousand deer in the woods? They are merely deer. In the metaphor of war as a hunt, the enemy becomes animalized and receives a monetary and symbolic value, and the focus is shifted to that potential value rather than the conflict itself. Gawain's words remind the other men about their responsibilities and the potential

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20 Froissart, Chronicles, 140-41.
rewards and distance them from the bloody reality of men killing men and the likelihood of defeat. Dehumanization is an age-old trick in warfare, and hunting metaphors serve that purpose, among others, in this text and in medieval society more broadly.

A variety of other veneric references continue and expand the metaphor in these five hundred lines. The weaponry the knights use is either literally or figuratively made for hunting:

But one Chastelayne, a child of the kinges chamber,  
Was ward to Sir Wawain of the west marches,  
Chases to Sir Cheldrik, a cheftain noble;  
With a chasing-spere he shockes him through! (ll.2952-55)

The text also continues to repeat “chase” as "pursuit": “Then our chevalrous men changen their horses, / Chases and choppes down cheftaines noble” (ll.2989-90). Less obvious references perhaps continue the metaphor as well. For instance, after Gawain delivers another rousing battle speech to urge on his men, the knights pursue the enemy into the woods, and:

Was never such a jousting at journee in erthe  
… As was when the rich men of the Round Table  
Rushed into the rout on real steedes,  
For so rathely they rush with rosseld speres  
That the rascal was rade and ran to the greves,  
And kaired to that court as cowardes for ever! (ll.2875-82, emphasis added)

“Rascals” are the members of the lowest social class, the rabble or the common people.22

The use of the word here is certainly an insult, but in context it may also continue the hunting metaphor. Edward of Norwich, Duke of York, specifically defined the younger,

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22 Middle English Dictionary, “rascaile” (n.), sense 1 and 3; Oxford English Dictionary, “rascal” (n.), senses 1 and 3.
worthless deer, the ones who are usually ignored rather than hunted, as “rascal” in *Master of Game*:

Þe first yere þat þei be calfet, þei be called a calf; þe secunde þeer, a bullok; and þat þeer, and so forþe, [þei] go to rutte; þe iii. þeer, a broket; þe iii. þeer, a stagard; þe v. þeer, a stag; þe vi. þeer, a hert of x.; and þenne at arst is he chaceable, for always byfore he schal be called but rascaile or folie.  

In defining the younger deer in such a fashion, Edward makes a point to provide the English terminology, which differed from his source, *Livre de Chasse*. It is unclear if this sense arose with him, but the use of “rascal” for “young deer” was repeated after his work.  

*Master of Game* was written around 1410, while the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* was written down around 1440 by Robert Thornton, though it was probably composed earlier, likely around 1400.  

As a result, the Alliterative *Morte* may echo *Master of Game*’s usage or the social and literary context on which Edward drew to define the younger deer as rascal in the first place. Thus, when the Britons terrify the “rascals” and run them to the groves in this scene, the description may draw on a common term for worthless deer and portray the Romans as ignoble opponents driven as worthless game.

Gawain's men then bring the battle to a close, and in doing so conclude the lengthy hunting metaphor:

There was kinges sonnes caught, courtais and noble,  
And knightes of the countree that knownen was rich;  
Lorde of Lorraine and Lumbardy bothen  
Laght was and led in with our lele knightes.

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24 See Middle English Dictionary, “rascaile,” sense 3, and Oxford English Dictionary, “rascal,” sense 5, for some of these examples.  

Those that chased that day their chaunce was better;
Such a check at a chase escheved them never! (ll.2995-3000)

The knights capture great prey, the best they have ever captured in a hunt, and then they head back to Arthur, while “their preyes and their prisoners passes on after” (ll.3003). Over the course of more than five hundred lines, this scene merges hunting and warfare in structure and vocabulary. The search for one's prey among the woods and fields resembles tracking one's enemy; the rushing pursuit parallels the tempestuous assault; the sudden reverse and attack of one's prey (as one might see with the boar or hart) models the turning tide of battle; the capture of the prey and the triumphant return and presentation offer a pattern for the seizure of prisoners; and the symbolic and physical value of the prey is imitated in the political and financial value of the captives.

The Alliterative Morte was very far from alone in drawing this connection between hunting and combat, which is absent from neither literary nor more practical texts. Battle was consistently metaphorized as a hunt in French and English literature throughout the Middle Ages. In Yvain, one finds both direct descriptions of combat as a hunt and descriptions of particular acts within combat as metaphorical instances of venery. One reads, for instance, that “La chace molt longuemant dure / tant que cil qui fuïent estanchent ” (The chase lasted a long time, until those who were fleeing grew weary), as well as:

Et mes sire Yvains de randon
quanqu'il puet aprés esperone.
Si com girfauz grue randone,
qui de loing muet et tant l'aproche
qu'il la cuide panre et n'i toche,
ensi cil fuit, et cil le chace

26 Yvain, ll. 3268-69.
si pres qu'a po qu'il n l'anbrace

... Mes sire Yvains trestot ausi
les feisoit venir a merci
com fet li faucons les cerceles.27

(My lord Yvain spurred hotly after him, as fast as he could. As the gerfalcon pursues the crane, soaring in from the distance until it thinks to strike, but then misses, thus the knight fled and Yvain pursued so closely that he could nearly touch him. ... Sir Yvain forced them all to cry for mercy just as the falcon does the teal.)

Similarly, Layamon’s Brut is rich with hunting metaphors for combat. When the Saxons flee before Arthur, one reads:

Arthur turned his spear's point and kept them away from the ford. There drowned the Saxons, full seven thousand. Some of them began to wander, as does the wild crane in the moor-fens, when his flock is disrupted, and swift hawks pursue him, and hounds meet him in the reeds with sorrow. Then is neither place good for him, neither the land nor the water. Hawks strike him, hounds bite him. Then is the noble fowl dead at his time.)

Later in Arthur's battle with Colgrim, another scene stands out for its hunting metaphors:

(27 Yvain, ll.880-86, 3197-99.
hæh uppen hulle; fehteð mid hornen.
þenne come[ð] þe wulf wilde; touward hire winden.
Þæh þe wulf beon ane; buten ælc imane.
& þer weoren in ane loken. fif hundred gaten.
þe wulf heom to iwiteð; and alle heom abið.
Swa ich wulle nu to-dæi; Colgrim. al fordemen.
ich am wulf & he is gat. þe gume scal beon faeie.29

(Then Arthur, noblest of kings, saw where Colgrim stood and offered battle. Then the king called, keenly loud. “My bold thanes, advance to the hills! For yesterday was Colgrim the keenest of all men. Now, he is just like a goat, there where he guards that hill. High on the hill, he fights with his horns. Then comes the wild wolf making its way toward him. Though the wolf is alone, and each of them within, and there were in one fold five hundred goats, the wolf would go to them and bite them all. So will I now today utterly destroy Colgrim. I am the wolf and he is the goat. The man shall die!”)

In the same fashion, if less expansively, the eponymous Havelok the Dane hunts down his enemies:

He folwede hem so hund dos hare –
Datheyt on he wolde spare,
That ne made hem everilkon
Ligge stille so doth the ston.30

Just so, in Troilus and Criseyde, does Troilus pursues the Greeks. “Now here, now ther, he hunted hem so faste, / Ther nas but Grekes blood---and Troilus” (2.197-98). These examples all provide a far broader context for the direct metaphorization of combat as a hunt and illustrate that it was exceptionally common in medieval literature and, probably, in medieval linguistic usage in general, in both England and France, certainly as a result of hunting's martial and educational functions.

These metaphors of hunting as combat sometimes range widely from chivalry proper, moving from outright warfare to metaphorical expressions of authority based in

29 Brut, ll.10625-10637.
martial power. The clothing of the king in *Winner and Wastour*, for instance, portrays his secular and martial authority through the hunting scenes embroidered on it:

This kynge was comliche clade in kirtill and mantill –
Bery-brown was his berde – brouderde with fewlys,
Fawkons of fyne golde, flakerande with wynges …
Full gayly was that grete lorde girde in the myddis:
A brighte belte of ble broudirde with fewles,
With drakes and with dukkes – daderande tham semede
For ferdnes of fawkons fete, lesse fawked thay were.31

The king expresses that authority immediately after the description by ordering one of his barons to go and stop the incipient battle. Even more strikingly, in *Tristan*, even verbal combat is a hunt. “He (Mark) set a cunning snare for her (Isolde) and succeeded in catching her in it.”32 The following night, Isolde turns the trap around: “Following Brangane's instructions, the Queen caught her royal master in the snare which he had laid for her and contrived for her downfall.”33 Mark “once more spread his toils by means of questions, and decoyed her into them,”34 but Isolde later reverses things and “resume[s] her verbal stalking by means of question and answer.”35 Such examples, whether hunting represents combat specifically or just the power relations that extend from metaphorizations of warfare, are nearly endless in medieval literature.

As this range of instances demonstrates, there are two broad patterns to these metaphors. The first is what one might call the “qualitative” model. The combatant, one of the combatant's actions, or one of the particulars of the scene takes on one or more qualities of an animal associated with hunting, usually speed, ferocity, courage, and so

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32 *Tristan*, 222.
33 *Tristan*, 224.
34 *Tristan*, 226.
35 *Tristan*, 227.
forth (though the negative aspects exist, too: fear, subjection, pain, and so on). This first pattern is quite typical of human thought processes in general, but it is particularly interesting in medieval literature for the number of these references drawn from the semiotic structure of venery, a point that the Morte demonstrates. The second version is the “structural” model that predominates in the Alliterative Morte, in the preceding example from the Brut, and in the verbal and interpersonal “hunt” from Tristan. This model reveals a more thorough-going association between venery (here specifically the chase) and other human activities. In this instance, metaphorical parallels are drawn not only from, for instance, particular animals noted for superlative qualities, but from the general structure of an event and then applied to another event in order to render it more familiar and thus comprehensible. Naturally, that parallel influences the process of the second event, as it does here, where the metaphor reveals how the form of the hunt parallels the process of combat, a link solidified by the fatal goal of the pursuits. Just as chess might become a metaphor for politics, this structural parallel reveals a deep and abiding pattern of thought.

The Ludic and Aesthetic Elements of War

Along with this structural parallel between hunting and combat, the poet also develops their emotional and aesthetic associations. Throughout the most of the text, the author stresses the beauty of the countryside and treats warfare light-heartedly, de-emphasizing the reality of suffering and death. Battles, slaughter, and even the entire
outcome of wars are a source for puns, jokes, and games.\textsuperscript{36} The text presents war as a light-hearted, almost idle pursuit. If one turns a blind eye to deep and touching moments of human grief (as when Gawain mourns his dead squire), one might almost claim that the author has no conception of the horrors of war.\textsuperscript{37} Or one might claim that the author employs battles only to valorize Arthur's court and that they have no basis in reality, though only by ignoring the element of verisimilitude that contributes to the effectiveness of these rhetorically constructed scenes. Neither explanation accounts for the striking humor and beauty of Arthur's wars as effectively, however, as acknowledging the parallel between hunting and chivalry. The game and risk, the light-hearted pleasure, and the aestheticization of nature found in hunting are dramatically similar to the narrator's descriptions of knightly behavior and warfare.\textsuperscript{38} In this text, one appreciates how an association between the two activities may have guided aristocrats to perceive war as a beautiful game based on their experiences with venery.

Chapter Two discussed in detail the game and risk of the \textit{par-force} hunt, arguing that there were several forms of risk involved in the courtly hunt, including the physical risk of the chase, the intentional risk in choosing the strongest prey and hunting it such a way as to play to its strengths, and the playful risk found in basing an important social metaphor on the successful completion of the hunt. That final risk included the risk of

\textsuperscript{36} John W. Schwetman provides a useful contrast, analyzing how border ballads of the Hundred Years' War may have presented real soldier's contempt for the chivalric ideal in the face of the brutality of war. “Feudal Chivalry in Popular Medieval Battle Poems,” in \textit{The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and Their Decline}, eds. Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto (Gainesville, Fl.: University Press of Florida, 1999), 229-44.


damaging one's public image, which derived from the nature of the hunt as a performance, and especially from the reification of social bonds in the breaking ceremony. These risks, these stakes, defined the game of the hunt. They embodied both its meaning and its appeal, and hunters intentionally heightened these risks in order to enhance this appeal. Along with its structural association of warfare and hunting, the Alliterative Morte also illustrates ludic parallels between the two. The Morte shows how chivalry, too, could be a game based on risks that the players intentionally heighten.

These points rest in part on the typical descriptions of the vows that Arthur's knights swear before the battle and fulfill during it. Throughout the text, one of the most common terms used to describe valiant knights is "aunterous," while to undertake a noble action is often characterized as “to aunter,” words that at their heart mean "risk-taking" and "to risk." Emperor Lucius, for instance, sends “Sir Utolf and Sir Evander, two honourable kinges,/ Erles of the Orient with austeren knightes, / Of the auntrousest men that to his host longed” to rescue Senator Peter of Rome when the Britons take him prisoner (ll.1622-24). “Auntrousest” functions here as a general superlative; these are the best of Lucius's knights. It seems unlikely that the word lost its base meaning and functioned merely as an empty superlative (as “spectacular” or “incredible” have in modern English), though, for the text also uses it in its general sense of “risk” or “chance”: “If here be any hathel man, erl or other, / That for the Emperour love wil aunter himselfen” (ll.1659-60), for example, and Arthur himself declares, “Me ought to honor them in erthe over all other thinges, / That thus in mine absence auters themselven!” (ll.1595-96). Taking risks is so central to the concept of knighthood in this text that the

39 Middle English Dictionary, “aventurous.”
word describes the ideal knight, and knights are held to a standard that expects them to
take these risks, as the final examples show.

We do not now generally praise soldiers for taking unnecessary risks. The modern
world has a more utilitarian view of battle. Yet, taking risks for no reason but honor is one
of the qualities of a valiant Arthurian knight. Arthur's knights do not fight conservatively
nor even necessarily wisely, but they are certainly adventuresome, and they reap praise
for it. Two of the most distinctive moments before and during the battle are when the
knights make their vows and then fulfill them. The king of Brittany declares that he shall
never retreat for fear of any Roman and shall always be at the front of the battle; the
Welsh king swears that he shall command the vanguard until he has defeated the Viscount
of Viterbo, who once did him wrong; Lancelot promises that he will break a spear on
Lucius himself; and even Arthur vows that battle will be joined by the first of June, that
he will control Lorraine and Lumbardy by the first of August, and that he will supply his
knights in the Vale of Viterbo and relax there for six weeks (ll.288-356). As soon as the
armies come together in the main battle, the action pauses as the knights fulfill their oaths
(ll.2044-80). King Lot's response to Lancelot's deed confirms the importance of the vows
for making reputations. “’Me likes well,’ says Sir Lot, ‘yon lordes are delivered! / The lot
lenges now on me, with leve of me lord; / Today shall my name be laid, and my life after’”
(ll.2081-83).40 This narrative attention suggests that the vows are a central aspect of the
conflict and perhaps, in some ways, more important than the battle itself, as if the conflict
were no more than a simple opportunity for the knights to assert their claims to high

40 It seems likely that Lot here also makes a playful pun on his name, further reinforcing the ludic nature
of the battle.
The practical purpose of the vows is clear. They challenge the knights to perform great deeds. Yet, strictly speaking these vows are unnecessary; the war could be won without them. So, their function is not purely utilitarian, though the oaths would indeed make the knights fight more ferociously for fear of embarrassing themselves. The vows' function is not to win the war nor make the battle easier -- just the opposite, in fact. These vows make the battle more dangerous and more difficult. They raise the stakes for the knights who take them, increase both the physical risks of warfare, pitting the knights against their opponents in risky contests, and the personal and social meaning of the combat. The knights swear the vows for honor, to enhance their reputations, to ennoble themselves and Arthur. Along with their partial utility, these vows help to make a game of war, one played with unnecessary and deadly stakes. In this meaningful risk-taking, warfare closely resembles the game of the courtly hunt, which chooses the strongest, fastest, deadliest prey to hunt in order to enhance the risk and, in turn, the meaning of the chase. Warfare and hunting in these instances present a similar ethic.

This valorization of risk fashions war into a game along the same lines as a hunt, and the text fully supports this identification of war as a game. The knights themselves, in fact, often refer to it as such. When Arthur's knights capture Senator Peter of Rome, Arthur declares the whole thing a game, despite the fact that some of his men are wounded.

“I shall them love whiles I live, so me Our Lord help
And give them landes full large where them best likes;
They shall not lose on this laik, yif me life happen
That thus are lamed for my love by these lithe strandes.” (ll.1597-1600,
Similarly, when Gawain's men are fighting overwhelming numbers, Sir Priamus
“perceived their *gamen, / [And] he had pitee in herte that he ne durste proffer” (ll.2811-12, emphasis added), and when Arthur arrays his army for the final battle with Mordred, he rouses his troops with:

“I beseeke you, sirs, for the sake of our Lord, 
That ye do well today and dredes no wepen! 
...
Look ye let for no lede lordly to work; 
Layes yon laddes low by the *laike* end” (ll.4084-85, 92-93, emphasis added).

Thus, one of the common descriptions of battle in the text is “the game.” Moreover, as games do, this one also has prizes, particularly captives, as discussed briefly above.42

This notion of war as a game colors the knights' performance. They are eager for the entertainment of war, delighted by the pleasure that it brings. Sir Cador, upon hearing of Lucius's initial insult to Arthur:

Laugh on him [Arthur] lovely with likand lates; 
“I thank God of that thro that thus us thretes! 
You must be trailed, I trow, but yif ye tret better! 
The lettres of Sir Lucius lightes mine herte 
...
Now wakenes the war! Worshipped be Crist!” (ll.247-57)

Cador particularly mentions that he is glad for the war because the knights have gotten lazy, but that practical reason provides a weak explanation for his joy, especially when contextualized with other knightly attitudes. When Arthur marches on Lumbardy, the text

41 *Middle English Dictionary*, “*leik*” (n.), sense 1 and 2. A word passed down from Old Norse, “leik” was almost an exact synonym for “game.” One may compare their various senses in the *Middle English Dictionary*.  
42 See also, *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ll.1730, 2649, 2751.

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Now he moves his might with mirthes of herte
Over mountes so high, those marvelous wayes,
Gos in by Goddard, the garret he winnes,
Graitthes the garnison grisly woundes!
When he was passed the height, then the king hoves
With his hole batail beholdand about
Lookand on Lumbardy and on loud meles:
“In yon likand land lord be I think!” (ll.3102-3109)

The juxtaposition of Arthur's pleasure with the “grisly woundes” he deals to the garrison three lines later is particularly notable. Throughout most of the text, death and suffering are noted but appear insignificant next to the pleasure taken in war. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if battle is an excuse to throw a picnic afterward. When Arthur conquers his way to the Vale of Viterbo, he fulfills his vow to rest there for six weeks.

There sujournes this soveraign with solace in herte,
To see when the Senatours sent any wordes,
Revel with rich wine, riotes himselven,
This roy with his real men of the Round Table,
With mirthes and melody and manykin gamnes;
Was never merrier men made on this erthe! (ll.3170-75).

Arthur's picnic, of course, is a display of his power and lack of concern for his opponents as well as the fulfillment of his vow, but it is also an instance of a broader pleasure in the game of war.

As part of this delight, rarely do the knights take any conflict very seriously. More often, they joke and mock. After a vicious battle between Sir Gawain and Sir Priamus in which each has driven a lance-point six inches deep into the shoulder of the other, Gawain has cut Priamus so deeply that his liver is visible, and Priamus has poisoned Gawain with a potentially fatal cut through the armor on his arm, Gawain actually teases
Priamus. Priamus gives his own lineage and then asks to know his opponent's name, to which Gawain replies:

... Knight was I never!
   With the kidd conquerour a knave of his chamber
   Has wrought in his wardrobe winters and yeres
   On his long armour that him best liked;
   I poine all his paviliouns that to himselfe pendes,
   Dightes his doublettes for dukes and erles,
   Aketoun avenaunt for Arthur himselfe
   That he has used in war all these eight winter!
   He made me yomen at Yole and gave me grete giftes,
   An hundreth pound, and a horse, and harness full rich. (ll.2620-29)

Gawain playfully implies that he has learned swordplay from stitching Arthur's tents, a joke that Priamus picks up later when he says that he would “lever privily be priked to the herte / Than ever any priker had such a prise wonnen” (ll.2648-49). “Priked” (stabbed/stitched) and “priker” (stabber, fighter / stitcher, tailor) are both double-entendres. Priamus skeptically replies to Gawain's jest that, if Arthur has such servants, then his knights must be noble indeed (l.2632), and then asks Gawain again for his name: “Whether thou be knight or knave knowe now the sooth” (l.2636). The second time, he receives the truth. Placed in the context of the knights' deadly wounds and Priamus's statement that Gawain's poisoned wound must be bandaged immediately (l.2576), Gawain's joke stands out dramatically. It shows a marked lack of concern for even his own potentially fatal wounds, and suggests that either the ethic of pleasure takes precedence over everything else in war and Gawain is performing as a good knight ought, or that Gawain is not performing at all and his wounds fail to bother him. The miraculous recovery each knight makes thanks to the holy water that Priamus carries suggests the latter. Wounds and pain possess an eerie irreality in most of the Morte; a perspective that

43 Middle English Dictionary, “priken” (v.), senses 1 and 7.
reinforces war's ludic similarity to hunting.

Even the most violent or dangerous of situations, such as Arthur's bloody "tribute" to the Romans and his battle with the giant of Mont Saint Michel, are met with a light heart and a carefree attitude, offering further evidence of the ludic nature of war. After defeating the Roman army, Arthur has the bodies of the leaders encased in lead and enclosed in chests, then sends them to Rome with two shorn survivors:

"Here are the kestes," quod the king, "kaire over the mountes, 
Mette full monee that ye have mikel yerned, 
The tax and tribute of ten score winteres 
That was teenfully tint in time of our elders; 
Say to the senatour the citee that yemes 
That I send him the sum; assay how him likes! 
But bid them never be so bold, whiles my blood regnes 
Eft for to brawl them for my brode landes, 
Ne to ask tribute ne tax by nokin title, 
But such tresure as this, whiles my time lastes." (ll.2342-51)

The king's dark joke makes light of a serious situation and, just as the other jokes already mentioned, glosses over pain and suffering in favor of humor. The absence of a recognition of human pain again stands out. The bodies in the chests here mean, it seems, no more to Arthur than his mocking message. They are symbols, means to an end, careless casualties of conflict---tokens in a game.

Arthur's battle with the Giant of Mont Saint Michel displays a similar, but even more exaggerated, juxtaposition between suffering and humor. The giant is a violent amalgam of social ills, a thirty-foot murderer, cannibal, and rapist who over seven years

had devoured more than five hundred adults and as many children and, the text emphasizes, enjoyed it (ll.844-45). When Arthur finds him, he has just captured and, as it turns out, raped and killed the Duchess of Brittany (l.978). Yet, when Arthur goes to fight him, with Kay and Bedevere as observers, he jokes that he “will pass in pilgrimage … to seeken a saint by yon salt stremes, / In Saint Michel mount, there miracles are shewed” (ll.896-99). The joke runs throughout the scene. As he approaches more closely, he tells the two knights to remain behind, stating, “I will seek this saint by myselve one … and senn shall ye offer, either after other / Menskfully at Saint Michel” (ll.937-40). In contrast to this holy image, the description of the giant dwells on his unrestrained appetite, illustrating how he dines on seven male children, and on his grotesque masculinity, relating how he takes kings' beards (a symbol of virility) for his cloak and how three maidens turn his spits (perhaps an intentional phallic image) and “bides his bedgatt, his bidding to work; / Such four sholde be fey within four houres / Ere his filth were filled that his flesh yernes” (ll.1029-32). Appropriately, Arthur “hittes / Just to the genitals and jagged them in sonder!” when he battles and kills the giant (ll.1122-23). Immediately after his victory, however, Bedevere continues the saint joke. The giant has fallen on top of Arthur and the knights are having trouble getting Arthur free, and Bedevere jokes that Arthur goes to see saints so rarely that now he refuses to let go and intends to take this one home and put him in a silver reliquary. He then wonders how God could suffer such a saint, and declares that if “all saintes be such that serves our Lord / I shall never no saint be, by my fader soul!” (ll.1162-69). The juxtaposition of the grotesque giant and the saintly joke is striking.

Noticing a ludic element in accounts of real warfare, Huizinga commented:
Above all, it is war into which people like to inject a comic element. The ridicule directed by the besieged upon their enemies is something they are sometimes made to pay for dearly. The people of Meaux put an ass on their wall to torment Henry V of England; the people of Conde declare that they are not yet able to surrender because they were still baking their Easter cakes; in Montereau the burghers standing on the walls dust off their helmets after the cannons of the besiegers fire. In the same vein, the camp of Charles the Bold at Neuss was set up like a vast country fair; the nobles have, 'par plaisir,' their tents built in the form of castles complete with galleries and gardens. All kinds of amusements are provided.45

One can readily see reflections of these real scenarios in the Alliterative Morte. While Huizinga regarded this ludic element as rather childish and representative of a limited intellect, in the Morte it serves a particular purpose and reflects an aristocratic attitude. This carefree attitude closely resembles the "deduits," the delights, of the hunt.46 The hunter's attitude is one of carefree pleasure in the exertion of the hunt and in the natural beauty that surrounds him, and that attitude is reflected in his attitude toward war and death. Significantly, the Alliterative Morte shares not only a carefree attitude toward death with hunting, but also an appreciation of natural beauty. The Duke of York, translating the Count of Foix as usual, writes:

Now schal y preue how hunters lyueth in þis world most ioyfullich of any oþer men. For whan þe hunter ariseth in þe mornyng he seeth þe swete and faire morwe and þe cler wedar and briȝt, and hereth þe song of þe smale foules, þe which singeth swetelich with grete melody and ful of loue, euerich in his langage in þe beste wise þat he may aftir þat he lereth of his owne kynde, and whanne the sunne is arise he schal se þe fressh dewe vpon þe smale twigges and grasse, and þe sunne, which, by his vertue, schal make hem shyne; and þat is gret lyking and ioye to þe hunters herte.47

A variety of different texts attest to the beauty of hunting in the same vein, typically

45 Huizinga, Autumn of the Middle Ages, 285-86.
46 As used, for instance, in Gaces de la Bugne's Roman des Deduis and Love's “Garden of Delight” in the Romance of the Rose. See also the Middle English Dictionary, “deduit” (n.).
47 Master of Game, 143-44.
describing it as “a little paradise.” In the Debat entre des deux dames sur le passetemps des chiens et oyseaux, a late poem by Guillaume Cretin, for instance, the lady arguing for the sovereignty of the chase over falconry states, paraphrased by the narrator, that the chase is “ung petit paradis” (a little paradise). She praises the beautiful sounds and sights of the hunt as she argues that the chase is more pleasurable and a better delight than flying hawks. Notably, the point for the ladies is not to argue that hunting is beautiful and pleasurable, but to debate the best form of that pleasure. This attribution was likely closely aligned with the late medieval shift in hunting parks toward an increased focus on landscapes and gardens, often as the sites for residences. As a result, hunting was a site for the appreciation of natural beauty. It was not the sole site, of course. One also reads in the Wars of Alexander of the “littill heuen” of nature. As the main leisure pursuit of the aristocracy, however, hunting was a major stimulus for natural appreciation, as one part of the broader context of the “deduits,” the joys and delights of the hunt.

Similarly, through Arthur's wars runs a constant appreciation for natural beauty, which seems startlingly unusual for a text focused on battles. When Arthur approaches Mont Saint Michel, he first rides through a natural paradise.

Then they rode by that river that runned so swithe,
There the rindes over-reches with real boughes;
The roe and the reindeer reckless there runnen,
In ranes and in rosers to riot themselven;
The frithes were flourisht with flowres full many,

49 Mileson, Parks in Medieval England, 6.
With faucons and fesauntes of ferlich hewes; 
All the fowles there flashes that flies with winges, 
For there galed the gouk on greves full loud; 
With alkine gladship they gladden themselven; 
Of the nightingale notes the noises was sweet; 
They threped with the throstels three hundreth at ones! 
That whate swowing of water and singing of birds, 
It might salve him of sore that sound was never! (ll.920-32)

This natural paradise is unusual in that it contains a large variety of animals in a complex and somewhat paradoxical natural setting: roe deer and reindeer, falcons and pheasants, all by a river and rosebushes. The two types of deer are from different habitats. The roe deer was ubiquitous in England, but the reindeer was little known, though Gaston Phébus does mention it. The falcons would have hunted the pheasants mentioned in the same line, and the reckless play of the deer contrasts with the rosebushes, which suggest a garden, or perhaps a hunting park. The emphasis on animals of venery and pleasure in this little paradise is notable. The roe deer, reindeer, and pheasant are prey animals, while the falcon is a hunting bird. The nightingales and the thrushes make the beautiful music that Edward of Norwich, the Duke of York praised. The cuckoo, for its part, is a traditional symbol of spring. As a result, this scene is not just an image of beautiful nature; it is an impossible paradise fashioned on a veneric template.

More broadly, the hunting park in fact seems to have defined idealized nature for the aristocracy. Chaucer's depiction of Nature's garden in the Parliament of Fowls closely resembles the paradise below Mont Saint Michel and it, too, is most likely a hunting park.

The Dreamer follows Scipio, his guide, and, “This forseyde Affrican me hente anon / And

[51] The Parliament of the Three Ages opens with a similar scene, ll.1-20, also in a hunting context, which includes a cookoo. Warren Ginsberg, the editor, notes that the cookoo was a traditional symbol of spring, but adds that it was also considered to be unnatural for its rejection of love (63, n. to ll.13-14). The other animals in the Parliament's scene are similarly questionable (which Ginsberg also points out), almost certainly as an implicit rejection of the poacher's trespass.
forth with hym unto a gate broughte, / Ryght of a park walled with grene ston.”

This park, like the paradise through which Arthur passes, soothes those who walk through, even, superlatively, healing them of their wounds. “Thorgh me,” the gate reads, “men gon into that blysful place / Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure.”

The Dreamer walks through the park up to a garden:

A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes
Upon a river, in a grene mede,
There as swetnesse everemore inow is,
With floures white, blewe, yelwe, and rede …
On every bow the bryddes herde I synge,
With voys of angel in ere armonye;
Some besyede hem here bryddes forth to brynge;
The litel conyes to here pley gonne hye;
And ferther al aboute I gan aspye
The dredful ro, the buk, the hert and hynde,
Squyrels, and bestes smale of gentil kynde.

Nature's garden here is less potentially violent than the one containing both the falcon and pheasant in the *Morte* (though falcons are, of course, major speakers in the poem, so they certainly are present in the garden), but the two scenes are similar in their description of the garden, its flowers, the flowing water, and the animals within it otherwise, particularly their inclusion of different types of deer. The similarities suggest that the hunting park was, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, closely associated with idealized natural aesthetics. That fact, along with the emphasis on natural beauty found in this text and in hunting texts, argues again that the poet is strongly emphasizing the influence of venery on warfare in the Alliterative *Morte*.

Later descriptions of natural beauty reinforce that emphasis, especially insofar as

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52 *Parliament of Fowls*, ll.120-23.
53 *Parliament of Fowls*, ll.127-28, cp. “might salve him of sore that sound was never” above.
54 *Parliament of Fowls*, ll.183-96.
combat takes place in or near natural paradises. When Arthur ambiguously orders Gawain and Florent to go and “forray the mountes,” the command that begins the “hunt” for enemy soldiers discussed at length above, the knights set out and then immediately come upon another natural paradise:

In the misty morning [the party] on a mede falles,
Mowen and unmade, mainovred but little,
In swathes sweppen down, full of sweet flowres;
There unbridels these bold and baites their horses,
To the gryging of the day that birdes gan sing
Whiles the sours of the sun, that sande is of Crist,
That solaces all sinful that sight has in erthe. (ll.2501-12)

The mown field and the birdsong mentioned here, along with the early morning, resemble in particular the “assembly” (Edward says that the English call it the “gathering”), the social occasion and organizational meeting that began a *par-force* hunt. Edward declares that the proper site for the assembly “shuld be in a faire mede, wele grene, where faire trees wexen all aboute, þe one fer for þat oþir; and a clere well or som rennyng brook besydes.” The fair meadow, here full of flowers and the birdsong that Edward mentions elsewhere, is the first place the knights pause on their hunt, and so both by position and by description, this meadow resembles that of the assembly. When Gawain returns to the meadow with Priamus, his return mimics a huntsman returning with fewmets and knowledge of the whereabouts of the deer. These huntsmen would return and gather around the lord during the assembly and the party would debate which of the deer that they had tracked down would provide the best hunt. Priamus has provided this knowledge of the “prey” to Gawain by telling him of the enemy party in the woods, and so, in a way,

55 *Master of Game*, 260. Withers reads this scene, and the other scenes of natural beauty, as poetic attention to the subjectivity of animal pleasure and as evidence that the poet “take[s] seriously the desires and emotional pleasures of animals,” seeing them as deeply critical of the knights’ warmongering, “Ecology of War,” 119.
he represents the fruits of Gawain's tracking. The description of the party on their return
further supports the comparison to the assembly, for “lordes lenand low on lemand
sheldes, / With loud laughters on loft for liking of birdes, / Or larkes, of linkwhites, that
lovellich sognen; / And some was sleght on sleep with slight of the pople / That sang in
the sesoun in the seen shawes” (ll.2672-76). Edward states that those in the assembly
“shuld ete syttyng, and som stondyng, som lenyng vpon here elbowes. Som shuld drink,
and som laugh; som jangle, som borde, som pley; and, shortly, do all manere disportes
and gladnes.”56 This parallel between the assembly and Gawain's meadow, along with the
paradise of venery below Mont Saint Michel suggest that the natural appreciation of
hunting influenced, indeed controlled, the description of nature present in the Morte.

The pleasure in natural beauty found during these wars in the Alliterative Morte
Arthure thus closely mirrors the courtly hunter's similar pleasure. This imitation can be
most easily accounted for by positing that the courtly hunter transferred his experiences
with hunting, which was an overt training for war, to warfare, and that he took with him
not only a structural conflation in which the literal process of war resembled hunting, but
also sensual and emotional ones in which his attitude toward suffering and death in war
resembled the unburdened ethos and the appreciation for the beauty of nature expected of
the hunter. The poet thus fashions this veneric vision of warfare so as to present the
conventional aristocratic perspective.

56 Master of Game, 260-61.
The Death of Delight

Yet despite this attitude, the knights are not invulnerable to sorrow. The poet allows the parallel to hunting to extend only so far. When Gawain's squire is killed, and when Gawain himself is slaughtered, Gawain and then Arthur lose their detached attitudes. After Gawain dies, the tone of the narrative undergoes a sea change, and war's emotional and aesthetic similarity to hunting, with its delight in risk, its jovial attitude, and its appreciation of natural beauty, disappears from the text. These deaths shock Gawain and then Arthur out of their ludic attitudes toward war, and the poet uses these moments and the grim tone of the remainder of the narrative to criticize this aristocratic vision of combat and to reveal war for what it is—a grim and savage activity, destructive of both individual bonds and broader social cohesion, and anything but a game. 57

The death of Gawain's squire, Chastelayne, is unusual in the attention it receives and the response to it. Chastelayne is run down and killed after having killed what seems to be his first and only enemy knight:

One Chastelayne, a child of the kinges chamber,
Was ward to Sir Wawain of the west marches,
Chases to Sir Cheldrik, a cheftain noble;
With a chasing-spere he shockes him through!
This check him escheved by chaunces of armes.
So they chase that child escrape may he never;
But one Swyan of Swecy, with a sword edge,
The swyers swire-bone he swappes in sonder!
He swoonand died and on the swarth lenged,
Sweltes even swiftly and swank he no more! (ll.2952-61)

The text stresses that he managed this feat only through “chaunces of armes,” and it dwells on the scene here and later. Though Kay and Bedevere are killed in combat, their

57 For criticism on this reversal, see the third note of this chapter.
deaths are treated with with little sympathy. Kay kills his murderer and declares that he would have forgiven him if he had “well delt thy dint with thy handes” rather than stabbing him from behind (l.2184), and Bedevere is stabbed through the herte, to which the narrator only states “rewthe is the more!” (l.2241). Arthur shows a bit of emotion when Sir Cador reports back that fourteen of his knights were killed in valiant action (l.1913), declaring that Cador has foolishly wasted his men. Cador defends his actions, though, and Arthur quickly assents, declaring Cador “one of the doughtiest that dubbed was ever” (l.1942). Arthur himself later buries Cador, Kay, Bedevere, and a few other knights, but does not mourn them (ll.2375-85). As a result of this treatment, these deaths all seem normal and proper, part of the typical cost of war, and they little disturb the generally light-hearted mood of the wars.

Chastelayne's death is different, though. The narrator seems to see it as a tragedy of a young man cut down before he even reached his prime, before he was entirely trained, and it breaks Gawain's mood and drives him to destructive retaliation.

For the chery child so his cheer changed  
That the chilland water on his cheekes runned!  
'Wo is me,' quod Gawain, 'that I ne witten had!  
I shall wage for that wye all that I weld” (ll.2964-67)

Gawain's entire attitude shifts, his formerly playful, teasing manner turned to chill tears and vengeance. He “dresses him drerily,” rather than jauntily, and his attitude shifts from light-hearted slaughter to grim butchery. He proceeds to kill Sir Dolphin, Sir Hardolf, and sixty others “slongen in a slade,” including the man who killed Chastelayne, running him through with his sword (ll.2969-88). This is the first moment in the text where a death has sunk in, has truly affected one of the knights, and it seems to have done so because
Chastelayne held an uncertain status as a combatant. He was not a knight, and perhaps should not truly have been in the battle, but he was eager for it anyway. One might wonder whether the squire's use of a “chasing-sphere” to kill his foe suggests that he was caught up in the conflation of hunting and war, oblivious, as many of the knights seem to be, to the grim reality that hides behind the facade of the game. The reaction suggests that Gawain cannot write off his squire's death as part of the game, as he presumably can with the deaths of others and with his own injuries, and so he feels it deeply. Chastelayne's death thus disrupts Gawain's perception of war either because Chastelayne himself did not fit into that perception (because he acted out of character) or because it forces Gawain to realize the true costs of the "game," or both. Chastelayne's death thus disrupts the conflation of war and hunting, demonstrating that the connection extends only so far as the participants perform certain roles and accept certain rules.

Similarly, when Gawain himself is killed, Arthur's own perspective shifts, and this time the shift heralds the death of the entire view of warfare as light-hearted and idealized, and, indeed, the death of the dream of Arthurian Britain. Unlike Chastelayne, Gawain was a participant in the idealization of warfare as hunting; in fact, he was the primary expression of that idealization, keeping his light-hearted, insouciant perspective even in the face of his own mortality. Gawain attacks Mordred and injures him, and they fall to the ground together; Gawain's thrust for Mordred's throat glances off his armor, and Mordred manages to stab him “high on the brain” with a dagger (l.3857). Gawain's death is powerful and the reaction revealing. “Thus Sir Gawain is gone that guied many other,” the narrator relates first, “Fro Gower to Gernesay, all the grete lordes / Of Glamour, of Galys land, these galiard knights / For glent of gloping glad be they never”
Gawain's death affects the rest of the army in the same way that Chastelayne's death had affected him, immediately breaking their mood and depressing them. Mordred's own commentary on it, explaining who Gawain was to an inquiring ally, reveals the reason:

“He was makless on molde, man, by my trewth. This was Sir Gawain the good, the gladdest of other, And the graciousest gome that under God lived, Man hardiest of hand, happiest in armes, And the hendest in hall under heven-rich, And the lordliest in leding whiles he live might, For he was lion alosed in landes ynow; Had thou knowen him, Sir King, in kith there he lenged, His cunning, his knighthood, his kindly workes, His doing, his doughtiness, his deedes of armes, Thou wolde have dole for his dede the dayes of thy life.” (ll.3875-85)

Gawain figuratively embodied a chivalric ideal that included the veneric and ludic attitude toward war, and when he dies, that attitude dies with him. He is simply too powerful, too central, too symbolic a figure for his death to be counted part of the game. He was the game. His death affects even Mordred.

Yet that traitour als tite teres let he fall, Turnes him forth tite and talkes no more, Went weepand away and weryes the stounde That ever his werdes were wrought such wandreth to work! When he thought on this thing it thirled his herte; For sake of his sib-blood sighand he rides; When that the renayed renk remembered himselfen Of reverence and riotes of the Round Table, He romed and repent him of all his rewth workes, Rode away with his rout, restes he no lenger, For rade of our rich king, rive that he sholde. (ll.3886-96)

Gawain's death is enough to make Mordred regret his actions and immediately retreat. One might wonder whether Mordred had, like the knights in the battles on the Continent,
even fully considered what he was doing before this moment. If he had not, then
Gawain's death shocks him awake, and it certainly breaks his mood and shatters his
morale. His thoughts of the “reverence and riotes of the Round Table” imply that he
recognizes that, with Gawain dead by his own hand, he has sounded the death knell for
Arthurian Britain.

Arthur's reaction to confronting Gawain's corpse and the vow he makes upon his
death signal the end of the emotional and aesthetic association between warfare and
hunting. Arthur “swafres up swiftly and sweetly him [Gawain's body] kisses / Til his
burlich berde was bloody berunnen, / Als he had bestes brittened and brought out of life”
(ll.3970-72). The imagery here is compelling. “Britten” means “to break,” the technical
term for cutting apart a deer, and the simile suggests that Arthur has broken Gawain as if
he were a deer. The image reorients the structural relationship between predator and prey
on which the conflation between warfare and hunting rests; instead of hunting and
destroying the enemy, Arthur has hunted down his own best knight. Kneeling over
Gawain's broken corpse, Arthur may realize that his own thoughtless addiction to the
chase of battle has cost him his right-hand man and fellow hunter. The scene makes
Arthur responsible for Mordred's betrayal, or at least for his response to it, and Arthur's
bloody body presages his own coming death, his own conversion to broken prey, to
victim of war.

Arthur's following vow both reinforces the connection between hunting and
warfare and rejects hunting as the pattern for it:

“Here I make mine avow,” quod the king then,
“To Messie and to Mary, the mild Queen of heven:
I shall never rivaye (go hawking by the river) ne ratchesuncouple, 
At roe ne rein-dere that runnes upon erthe, 
Never greyhound let glide, ne gossehawk let fly 
Ne never fowl see felled that flighes with wing, 
Faucon ne formel upon fist handle 
Ne yet with gerefacon rejoice me in erthe, 
Ne regne in my royneties, ne hold my Round Table, 
Til thy dede, my dere, be duly revenged!” (ll.3997-4006)

Of all the things that Arthur could swear to do, he vows to give up hunting until he has 
exacted his revenge. In context with the “broken” body of Gawain and the parallel 
between hunting and warfare as elaborated so far, Arthur's oath makes perfect sense. The 
game of the hunt has led to Arthur's practicing war as a game as well, and Arthur's vow 
rejects the overly simplistic view of inconsequential and ludic war, the fantasy of war as a 
veneric game. By giving up hunting, Arthur promises to make Gawain's death count by 
taking war seriously until he has revenged him. He fulfills that promise, and dies himself 
doing so.

With Gawain dead, the ludic attitude toward war that underlay the battles earlier 
in the text vanishes. The “laik” and the “gamen” of battle disappear. Arthur's final battle 
speech does try to rouse the men with the image of the game, asking his soldiers to 
“Layes yon laddes low by the laike end” (l.4093), but it must be pure rhetoric. Not once 
in the last part of the text is there a sign of the light hearts and cheery moods of the earlier 
game of war. Arthur's promise to reject hunting is a promise to reject joviality. The 
emotional conflation of hunting and warfare thus dissolves. In the final part of the 
narrative, the risk, pleasure, and aesthetic appreciation of nature from the hunt are no 
longer part of war. Instead, Arthur “lost had his mirthes” and declares, “Now in this 
journee all my joy endes!” (ll.4270, 4290).
Despite the loss of the emotional association, however, the structural similarity to hunting remains. The process of warfare still resembles the process of the hunt. Now “dref-ful, dredless, with droopand teres,” Arthur:

   Kaires into Cornwall with care at his herte;
   The trace of the traitour he trines full even,
   And turnes in by the Trentis the traitour to seek,
   Findes him in a forest the Friday there-after. (ll.4053-57)

Arthur still tracks Mordred as if he were tracking a beast, finding him, appropriately, hiding out in a forest. The final battle takes place there in the woods:

   Til a forest they (the enemy) fled and fell in the greves,
   And fers fghtand folk followes them after,
   Huntes and hewes down the hethen tikes,
   Murtheres in the mountaines Sir Mordred knightes;
   There chapped never no child, cheftain ne other,
   But choppes them down in the chase; it charges but little! (ll.4256-61)

There is nothing here in the final battle of the mirth or insouciance of the earlier scenes. Even so, Arthur “tracks” Mordred down and with his men “hunts” the enemy in the woods and “choppes them down in the chase.”

This situation argues for two complementary ideas. First, it argues that the structural conflation between the two activities is nearly inseparable in the aristocratic imagination. Even the abrupt breaks in the “rules” of the game of war and the stark confrontation with the reality of death that disrupt the ludic parallels do not much effect it. Second, this continued structural parallel suggests that the poet is implying that, while real warfare is not a game, it does resemble hunting in the bloody deaths it produces. His shift in tone thus attempts to revise the conventional aristocratic perspective on warfare by criticizing its ludic element.
Conclusion

The text thus moves from a close parallel between combat and hunting in which the two share structural, emotional, and aesthetic elements to one in which they merely share a similar structure. In its textual context, the move suggests that the poet is highly critical of the notion that war is a beautiful game and instead views it as grim and socially disruptive butchery. His critique of this viewpoint provides a critical perspective on a conventional aristocratic vision of warfare. One takes away from it a thorough-going knowledge of the connection between warfare and hunting within the aristocratic imagination and a detailed understanding of the medieval parallels drawn between the two. The poet was not alone in appealing to an aristocratic audience in this way. Many writers sought to appeal to an aristocratic sensibility by employing the figurative language of venery or by couching their material in terms of textual hunts. The Pearl-poet uses hunting metaphors in both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* to appeal to his aristocratic audience.⁵⁸ Gace de la Bugne chose falconry to educate a French prince in ethics, at his father's request.⁵⁹ Chaucer takes the same tack with venery and love, as the previous chapter illustrated. These rhetorical performances were due to the vigorous role venery played in the aristocratic imagination. Immediately comprehensible, richly allusive, and deeply affecting for the aristocracy, venery offered a rich thematic and semantic space that authors could manipulate for their own ends.

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Pearl*, ll. 181-84, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002 [1978]).
⁵⁹ Falconry is the major topic of Gace de la Bugne's *Le Roman des Deduis*. 185
Conclusion: “Tales of Hunting to Tell”

The preceding chapters demonstrate the importance of venery as an expression of aristocratic culture, one that deserves to be given credit, along with chivalry and love, as one of the three major noble ideals. Hunting was the major leisure pursuit of the aristocracy throughout the Middle Ages and a major component of noble education; as a result, it was a central training ground for the aristocratic self and a wellspring for the aristocratic imagination. The first part of this work laid out how the earliest courtly manuals entwined chivalry, love, and venery, and demonstrated how venery underlay their audiences' comprehension of the other two pursuits. It went on to illustrate how a wide range of literature idealized venery as an instruction in noble and courtly ethics and a marker of status and legitimacy, with a glance toward the literary history of hunting manuals as expressions of courtly propaganda that attempted to regulate the meaning of the game. The second part narrowed in on the courtly par-force hunt and argued that it portrayed a nostalgic feudal metaphor that shifted over time in response to a dynamic cultural scenario, and it particularly elaborated on the ceremonial nature and meaning of the breaking of the hart as a social microcosm. In order to gain a deeper insight into the
aristocratic imagination, the third and fourth parts took up a study of the rhetorical use of hunting metaphors in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and investigated how the authors' choices of metaphors both expose and influence their audiences' assumptions. The former illustrated that the late medieval nobility understood love through a series of conflicting metaphorical patterns, many drawn from venery, and that Chaucer suggests that the falconer-and-falcon metaphor for courtship more accurately reflected gender relationships in his day. The latter examined how the Alliterative *Morte* illustrates a conventional connection between warfare and hunting in the aristocratic imagination, one in which combat took on the characteristics of the hunt. The poem complicates that connection and attempts to urge its audience to take war seriously; in the process, it reveals the deeply ingrained place of venery in the aristocratic imagination and the potentially dramatic effects of that fact. In sum, this work defines venery, illustrates its place in the aristocratic imagination, and gives venery far more credit as a force in aristocratic culture than scholars, particularly literary scholars, have done to date.

This thesis attempts to achieve that effect by taking a different approach than its critical forerunners. Anne Rooney's *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (1993) was the first scholarly work to consider English hunting practices and literature in particular. Rooney set out to investigate hunting in order to provide scholars with a better way to understand the numerous literary references to the pursuit; to that end, she identified and discussed several hunting-related themes that run across a variety of works, before turning to examine the *Book of the Duchess* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There are many things to admire about her volume: the effort itself is a noble one (and in fact I
have sought to build upon it); her command of the literature is deep and steady; and her
knowledge of the classical origins of the themes she outlines is impressive. Yet when she
brought her volume to a close, she seems to have thrown up her hands in frustration:

The hunt is an important element or motif in a wide range of literature, yet
often it takes a peripheral place, cedes its place to another interest rapidly,
or stands only to be renounced or put in its place. This non-central position
explains why the hunt has attracted so little critical attention in the past.
Perhaps it also explains one other gap in the corpus of medieval literature.
At the end of the Monk's Tale, the listeners object to his tales of woe and
tragedy, hoping for something less miserable instead. The Host asks him to
'sey somewhat of huntyng', but he will not be drawn to tell another tale;
perhaps there simply are no tales of hunting to tell.¹

Yet, this suggestion is easily refuted. In the first place, there were plenty of tales of
hunting to tell. To name only the most significant, the Tristan legends would have been
ripe for Chaucerian adaptation had he wished to do so. In the second place, the comment
misinterprets Chaucer's scene. The pilgrims associate hunting with cheerfulness. The
Host declares of his first topic that “therinne is ther no desport ne game,” and a tale about
hunting comes to him as the obvious solution: “If any thyng shal wel reported be / Sir,
sey somwhat of huntyng, I yow preye.” The Monk, however, has “no lust to pleye.”²

These comments create a general potrait of the audience's expectations for a hunting tale,
of which they must have heard many. The pilgrims ask the morose Monk for a hunting
tale then because they think that, as an avid hunter himself, he will have a good hunting
story to tell. In his portrait, Chaucer describes him as “an outridere, that loved venerie”
and who “yaf nat of that text a pulled hen, / That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men.”³

¹ Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature, 199.
² The Canterbury Tales, Nun's Priest's Prologue, ll. 2791, 2804-06.
³ The Canterbury Tales, General Prologue, ll.166, 177-78. On the latter lines, see Rudolph Willard,
209-51.
This remarkable suggestion arises more, I think, from Rooney's approach than from her source texts. By trying to forge broad thematic connections across works, Rooney abandoned the complex and subtle signification of hunting within individual texts and left herself with only the barest outline of what hunting might mean. Moreover, while she briefly touches on English practices with regard to venery, she mostly avoids the cultural milieu. Yet it is precisely within the subtle interplay of rhetoric and metaphor that one unveils the meaning of venery for the aristocracy and its effect on the aristocratic imagination, and it is the cultural milieu that produces venery, absorbs it, and renders it meaningful. To grasp the meaning of venery, one must see veneric texts as a bridge to complex cultural forces. The only other work on hunting in English literature, Marvin's *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (2006), does something of this and is the more successful for it, especially in his nuanced view of hunting literature as dynamic and responsive to cultural concerns. His focus on a constant tension between those allowed to hunt and those forbidden, however, at times reduces the situation to an restrictive binary. As Chapter Two demonstrated, the *par-force* hunt imagined society as a reciprocal feudal hierarchy, not as a combat between classes.

Taking all of these points together, I trust that it is not too much to claim that this thesis has demonstrated how venery functioned “centrally and vitally in the very core of power.”
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