

## Chapter 4

### *The gift*

In his study of gift-giving in various “primitive” or “backward” and “archaic” cultures,<sup>1</sup> Marcel Mauss concludes that there is no such thing as a free and disinterested exchange of goods or services in any society, that even an anonymous philanthropic donation to a charitable society can never be a true “gift,” or at least a free one. The ritual or custom of giving gifts, Mauss contends, need not be a gesture of goodwill; quite often, in fact, it is manipulative or even malicious. Whether friendly or unfriendly, gift-giving always serves practical purposes: on a personal level, it may increase the giver’s status or lower that of the recipient, or bind the donor and receiver together; on a larger level, it can cement whole societies or groups of societies whose members are perpetually indebted to each other, willingly or not.<sup>2</sup> Some societies are so dependent on the gift as a means of social cohesion that they can even be described as systems of exchanges in and of themselves.

Though the later Middle Ages is not strictly “archaic,” and it is certainly not “backward” by any measure, it, too, relied on a complex system of reciprocal exchanges which were seemingly disinterested but were ultimately intended to ensure that the society maintained intact and that its hierarchies were continually articulated and strengthened. The medieval social system as a whole was comprised of an elaborate system of gift-giving, an arrangement that Mauss would call a “system of total services.” In theory, each estate – *bellatores*, *oratores*, and *laboratores* – freely gave the unique products of its labor to the others without demanding compensation in

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<sup>1</sup> The Gift, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Compare, for example, the friendly but charged escalating gift exchange between Richard II of England and Charles VI of France at a conference held at Ardres in 1396: see Nigel Saul, Richard II (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1997) 353-358.

return. This system ensured that each party would be dependent on the others, thereby keeping the social fabric intact; furthermore, the assigning of a different obligation to each estate served to firmly delineate the differences between the social groups. (In practice, of course, the estates were not so well-defined; furthermore, the burden of obligatory “gift-giving” was always on the peasantry, who could only hope that the other groups would keep up their ends of the deal.)

Systems of exchange also formed the basis for the relationships between lords and their households and followers.<sup>3</sup> There were a number of different relationships that could exist between lords and retainers. Many retainers were supported exclusively by their superiors with money and sometimes food and drink, but those in the outer circles of influence usually were not; some received an annuity, either renewable by the year or held for life, but some only received support in wartime. Some of these transfers might be considered “payment” in the more usual sense – that is, an exchange of money or goods for services rendered – but most of them, particularly in those cases in which the retainer’s sustenance was only incompletely or sporadically provided by his superior, were clearly Maussian “gifts.” A lord gave his followers various gifts (whether money, goods, or symbolic objects) on a regular basis in order to emphasize his own superiority and remind them of their own indebtedness.

A special subset of the practice of gift-giving between lords and those within their circle of influence was the custom of giving a standardized, emblematic gift to each inferior. This gift generally took the form of a garment (“livery,” usually a robe

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<sup>3</sup> “Medieval society maintained its equilibrium because lords combined dominance with acts of patronage. The household’s internal hierarchy formed a microcosm of the whole society, in which in the great hall the lord, gentry and servants sat together and ate as a social unit, while at the same time being arranged on tables in strict ranking order. The household, in receiving guests, acted as a funnel through which the lord’s largesse could be distributed more widely, his generosity being reciprocated by feelings of respect, loyalty and deference from his inferiors” (Christopher Dyer, Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200-1500 (Cambridge, Eng.; New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 54).

but sometimes another piece of clothing indicating that its wearer was a follower of a particular lord), though it might also be a distinctive ornament or a small amount of money.<sup>4</sup> Although all of these gifts undoubtedly had worth in and of themselves, they were primarily important for their symbolic value: the transfer articulated and cemented relationships, indicating the approval and goodwill of the giver on one hand and the loyalty and indebtedness of the receiver on the other.

The cynegetical world, like the medieval world as a whole and the relationships between lords and retainers in particular, also relied on systems of exchange. These exchanges included both obligatory exchanges as well as seemingly voluntary “gifts.” This gift-giving did not merely reinforce ties and hierarchies within the hunting community proper; it also created and maintained valuable relationships between the local lord and the communities of the neighboring countryside, the Church, and even the wilderness itself. The gutting and carving of the quarry’s carcass (particularly that of the hart or stag, the royal animal) was both the central, climactic moment of the hunt itself and the hub around which the whole system of cynegetical exchange revolved.

Just as a lord was bound to provide sustenance to his closest followers because they were his followers, so each superior in the cynegetical world had an obligation to provide for his inferiors materially, according to their station and species. Thus the *seigneur* or the Master of Game was responsible not merely for paying his human

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 1, “The Forms of Relationship between Lord and Man” of J. M. W. Bean, From Lord to Patron: Lordship in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989). In earlier times, *livery* was the ceremony of transferring a token object from one person to another, thereby symbolizing the voluntary transference of a piece of property or land: in other words, it was a gift that symbolized a gift. See Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I, vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Cambridge UP, 1952) 82-90.

For an examination of the feudal fief as a “gift” from lord to vassal in exchange for the vassal’s “gift” of service to his lord, see Stephen D. White, “Service for Fiefs or Fiefs for Service: The Politics of Reciprocity,” Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange, ed. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, and Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003).

subordinates but also for feeding, clothing, and housing them, as well as providing them with such relative luxuries as clean linen (e. g. LC Prologue: 46; 44: 51-52; 38: 9-10; MG 34: 2860-2866). The *veneurs*, in their turn, were bound to provide the same for their dogs and horses (e. g. LC 22: 11-13; 23: 12-13; 44: 48-51; MG 34: 2845-2848). Furthermore, each superior was obligated to treat his inferiors with due affection and respect while always reserving the right to punish them as necessary (e. g. hunter to dogs: LC 19: 5-6; 45: 7-8, 239-240; 49: 83; hunter to horse: 45: 7-8; hunter to *valet*: 22: 7-8; 45: 7-8). Subordinates, for their part, were bound to provide their masters with loyal, diligent, and cheerful service in return.

However, the relationships between superiors and inferiors were most clearly and tellingly articulated not by the more or less obligatory exchanges of goods and services that marked the relationships between lords, huntsmen, and animals, but by highly scripted symbolic exchanges of token objects during the post-hunt *desfaire*, *brekyng*, or *undoyng* – that is, the dismembering and dressing of the slain quarry and the ritual distribution of the various parts of the animal which were known as the *droits*, *rewards*, and *fees*. In this ceremony, the chief huntsman (*maistre veneur*, *master of game*) was the focal point and the lynchpin: he gave out gifts from the body of the slain beast to both his superiors and inferiors in a ritual which had unmistakably mystical (one might even say pre-Christian) overtones. These gifts were in no sense “free,” of course: like all other exchanges within what Mauss would call the “system of total services,” they explicitly served to establish and re-emphasize the social status quo.

The hunter speared the lord’s due from the kill of the stag – the tongue, parts of the neck and its underlying structures, the *jargel* (an unspecified blood vessel in the heart), the large intestine (*franc boyau*), and the scrotum, with testicles still inside – on

a forked stick (*fourchié*). Gaston explains that this is done because “Les morsiaux dou fourchié que j’ay dit dessus sont des meilleures viandes qui soyent sus le cerf, et pour ce se mettent ou fourchié pour la bouche du seigneur” [“The ‘morsels of the forked stick’ that I have mentioned above are the best meats that are on the stag, and for this reason they go on the forked stick for the mouth of the lord”] (LC 40: 55). However, the rationalization does not really ring true, as most of these meats are hardly delicacies.<sup>5</sup> It would seem that true significance of the *morsiaux de fourchié* lies in the fact that they are representative samples of the carcass, particularly those parts which symbolize the animal’s potency, courage, and *noblesce*. The meaning of the stick itself (there is, after all, no logical reason why the parts should have to be collected on a stick, or why it must be forked) is obscure, but it is perhaps notable that the small two-pronged antler of a young male red deer was also called a *fourchié* (LC 1: 46). This flesh-and-wood sculpture, a gift presented by the hunter to his lord in acknowledgment of seigneurial power and as a token of his own obedience and indebtedness, was an abstract effigy commemorating the prowess of the hunters, the wild animal’s essence, and, by extension, the vital energy of the land.

Interestingly, the parts of the quarry that a modern hunter might consider “trophies” – the head, skin, and horns, tusks, or antlers – seemed to have no worth for

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<sup>5</sup> Terence Scully notes that the offal and giblets of animals were widely used in medieval cookery, and that the stag’s testicles “were so esteemed a delicacy that at the end of a successful hunt a sacrosanct convention reserved them for the noble hunter who (or whose hounds) had brought the animal down” (*The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: Boydell, 1995) 78-79). In the first place, this is not quite true; the testicles are reserved for the lord, not the huntsman, unless of course they happen to be the same person. More to the point, the fact that certain meats were set aside for an important person tells us nothing about whether or not they were considered to be tastier than other meats. It seems at least as likely that those meats had symbolic or ritual importance, even if the awareness of that importance had long since faded from cultural memory. Furthermore, the fact that medieval cooks made use of all parts of the animal would seem to point to thriftiness in the kitchen, as well as a remarkable culinary alchemy; it does not necessarily mean that cocks’ combs or cows’ udders or stags’ larynxes were considered the best parts.

At any rate, some admittedly unscientific research on my part reveals that testicles of certain domesticated animals taste like chicken, an observation which may or may not lend weight to Scully’s claim.

the medieval aristocratic huntsman and were sometimes conspicuously destroyed in the after-hunt rituals. Despite the fact that there was an elaborate cynegetical system of classification and vocabulary based on antler configuration, none of the authors makes any mention of the stag's rack as a prize.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the head of male deer seems to have been used only to encourage the dogs, either to whip them into a frenzy before they are fed or to train them to follow a scent.<sup>7</sup> In no case is there any indication in the manuals that the head was later displayed or put to practical use (as, for example, a source of material from which tools or decorations might be made).<sup>8</sup>

The right foot of the wolf is sometimes a good thing to save, but only because it is an ingredient in folk remedies, the efficacy of which our authors doubt anyway (LC 10: 77-78; MG 7: 1045-1047). They also mention the usefulness of the skins or hides of several animals (the chamois, wolf, fox, and badger); however, they seemingly do so only in the interest of comprehensiveness, not because they wish to advocate that their readers should put the carcasses to sartorial use. Gaston mentions that the skin of the chamois is warm and waterproof, but only peasants make clothing and shoes out of it (LC 4: 47-52); of the pelt of the wolf, Edward disdainfully says, “þe furrur þerof is nat fair, and also it stinkeþ euer but if it be wel itawed” (MG 7: 1050-1051). On the other hand, they say nothing about the clearly valuable pelts of

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<sup>6</sup> Though the medieval hunter was disinclined to preserve the head as a trophy, the modern hunter displays it with pride. I think it not uncoincidental that men sometimes refer to a well-endowed woman – that is, a prized quarry to be brought down in the love-hunt – as possessing a large “rack.”

<sup>7</sup> In the English system, the head of the stag is held in front of the dogs while the horns are blown so that they bay it just as they would bay a live animal (MG 34: 2811-2828). In the French system, the *limier*, or scent hound, is encouraged to worry the head (LC 41: 2-3, 44: 40-41); Gaston further suggests that all dogs, especially refractory ones, can benefit from this exercise (LC 45: 249-250). In addition, Gaston mentions that a fresh stag head dragged along the ground is an excellent tool for teaching a *limier* to follow a scent (LC 44: 39-40).

<sup>8</sup> In romance, on the other hand, there are several instances of parts of carcasses presented by the hunter to an honored peer, superior, or beloved; the most usual item used for this purpose is the boar's head. Thus Bevis of Hamptoun intends to give the head of a legendary killer boar to his beloved, Josian, until he is waylaid in the forest; and Bertilak displays the head of the boar he kills in the hall so that “þe hende mon hit praysted/ And let lodly þerat,” theatrically displaying their fear of the boar for Bertilak's benefit (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 1633-1634). See also John Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk (New York: St. Martin's, 1988) 7.

the rabbit, hare, lynx, or otter, as if to underline the fact that they are hunters, not furriers. At any rate, since custom dictated that the dogs should be fed off of the flayed skin of the quarry, a process that will be detailed at more length below, there was probably not much left of any of the skins after the *curee*. The only time at which a non-meat animal product seems to have any value is during the aftermath of the English bowhunt, when the skins of the deer are given to the hunters who shot them; this is something of a backhanded honor, for although the skins have inherent worth outside the context of the hunt, they are decidedly worthless within it.

Such consistent disregard for the economically useful parts of animals – whose hunts typically involved enormous outlays of money – served only to emphasize the fact that the importance of the hunt was symbolic, not practical. If it was deliberately wasteful, then it was precisely in that wastefulness that some of its deepest symbolism lay. All of the animals of the lord’s forests belonged to the lord, whether they were dead or alive, and it made no sense to hang an impressive head on the wall when there was an endlessly replenishable supply of them still running free outside.

Once the important parts of the animal were given back to their rightful owner, the forest itself was next in line to receive its share. Its “gift” took the form of a special bone of the stag’s carcass (either the pelvis or the lower end of the breastbone) known as the *os corbin* (LC 40: 49-50, 52) or *corbyn bone*.<sup>9</sup> Gaston does not mention that anything in particular should be done with this bone, and Edward declines to comment on the entire process of the *undoing*, considering it a skill fit only for a “woodman”; but other manuals remind the hunter that he must make a symbolic (and undoubtedly originally propitiatory) offering to the raven, the bird of death.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the origins and meanings of these terms, see Gunnar Tilander, *Nouveaux mélanges d’étymologie cynégétique* (Lund, C. Blom, 1961) 48-50.

Than take owt the shulderis . and slyttith a noonn  
 The baly to the syde from the corbyn bone  
 That is corbyns fee: at the deeth he will be<sup>10</sup>

However unpleasant the bird and its associations might be, the consequences of withholding its “gift” are undoubtedly more unpleasant still. The corbie must always have his fee, for, as George Gascoigne reports, “... I haue seene in some places, a Rauen so wont & accustomed to it, that she would neuer fayle to croake and cry for it, all the while you were in breaking up of the Deare, and would not depart vntill the habit.”<sup>11</sup>

Once the ritual gifts were given to the lord and to the forest, the hounds were given a symbolic share of the carcass, their *droit* (French) or *reward* (English), during a ceremony generally known as the *curee* (after the *cuir*, or leather, on which the *droit* was dished up; thus the English nonsense word *quirre*). The *droit* usually took the form of a mess of blood and meat from the slain quarry, mixed with bread and sometimes cheese and the cooked meat of livestock. Its precise composition, as well as the method of its distribution, depended on the species of the quarry, the season, the local customs, and the method of hunting.<sup>12</sup> This mixture was generally deposited on the raw side of the flayed skin, which then became a “dish” or “tablecloth” for the frenzied feeding that ensued. Sometimes the head of the animal was placed at the top (MG 34: 2807-2808), transforming the whole into a crude *sotilte* that recreated the form of the live animal, almost as if the huntsmen were serving a banquet to their own dogs.

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<sup>10</sup> Rachel Hands, *English Hawking and Hunting in The Boke of St. Albans* (London: Oxford U), 1975) 77:1775-1779.

<sup>11</sup> *The Noble art of venerie or hunting* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1611) 135, *Early English Books Online*, 22 December 2004 <<http://ezproxy.library.cornell.edu:2976/home>>.

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the dogs were allowed to eat the entire animal (LC 49: 64-66; MG 35: 2961-2971) or the choicest cuts, some of which ordinarily went to human hunters (LC 41: 4-5); sometimes, if the meat of the animal were judged unhealthy, the meat of other animals was substituted (LC 50: 85-88).

It must be emphasized that the *droit* cannot truly be considered “payment” in the sense of “disinterested compensation for labor and obedience.” The dogs were “paid” – that is, they received direct and uninflected recompense for their efforts – in the form of room and board, though they were naturally unaware of this fact. They were also regularly rewarded for their good work in a form they could readily understand: that is, with appreciation and encouragement from their masters (e. g. LC 41: 2-3, 49: 83). However, because the praise was conditional and specifically designed to encourage certain behaviors and discourage other ones, it could not be considered “payment,” either; a dog might chase all day and still not receive any praise, if it did not do well. Like verbal praise, the *droits* were given out inconsistently: not every hunt ended in a *curee* (if we can assume that Gaston deliberately omits mention of the practice in those cases in which it was not customary, not merely out of carelessness or for some other reason). In fact, a quick glance shows that the dogs must have received no such compensation after approximately half of the hunts in which they participated. Nor did every dog get to participate in the *curee*: those which did not perform well were tied up where they could watch other dogs eating without receiving any themselves (LC 45: 250).

Furthermore, and perhaps more to the point, the rough-and-tumble distribution of *droits* does not so much “pay” the dogs for their labor or even reward them for a job well done as it encourages them to behave badly (boisterously, aggressively, even violently) and then rewards them for their bad behavior. It seems to have been common practice for the dogs to have been forced to leave their feed halfway through and encouraged to fight over the guts of the animal before being allowed to finish their meal (LC 41: 13-17). The dogs, maddened by the smell of blood, must have been very unwilling to leave the carcass, and the authors do not pretend that even the best-trained animals can be called away from the *curee*: rather, they advise that the pack be beaten

away from it with sticks. On the face of it, the *droit* would seem to be a profoundly counterproductive gesture. Modern European and American hunters do not usually feed their dogs from the quarry's carcass or encourage them to rip it apart, and they would probably not be happy with their dogs' behavior during subsequent hunts if they did.

Despite its apparent uselessness and potential hazardousness, the ceremony of the *curee* served at least three important purposes, all of them connected in some way with rituals of gift-giving. First, the meat itself was a voluntary and conditional "gift" from the hunters to their dogs that was intended to reinforce two important relationships: that between human and canine, and that between dog and chase. Although the *curee* is at best an unruly affair, it is also, paradoxically, a sort of obedience trial in which the dogs must submit to their masters' desires (communicated by way of yells and physical blows) under artificially difficult circumstances. In other words, it is a ritual exchange between men and dogs in which the dogs must trade submission for food, thus vigorously re-emphasizing the cynegetical hierarchy. After the *curee*, Gaston gives his hounds another "gift" by feeding them choice tidbits in order to make the bond between dog and master even more firm and explicit and to ensure that the recipients feel bound to serve him well during the next hunt (LC 49: 73-75). Furthermore, the ritual of the *curee* did not merely bind the dog with his master but also served to intensify its enthusiasm for the activity of the hunt. A bloodthirsty<sup>13</sup> dog may be harder to control in many ways, but it is also more eager to hunt and slower to take the wrong turn out of carelessness or laziness (LC 45: 249-250).

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<sup>13</sup> In modern French, the word "*acharné*" means, variously, "embittered," "impassioned," "incorrigible," "fierce." The Old French *acharne* or *encharne*, on the other hand, meant precisely what its etymology would imply: "to be made bloodthirsty by exposure to fresh meat or carcasses." The properly trained hunting dog was *acharné* in all senses of the word.

Second, the *curee* was a distinct episode of “deep play” nested within the “deep play” of the hunt as a whole, a symbolic re-enactment of the most barbarous aspects of the hunt (the final confrontation and the death). As we have seen, the hunt was as orderly as possible. There are only two points at which it erupts into violence and chaos: at the kill, and at the *curee*. The violence of the former is inevitable, but the violence of the latter is completely contrived. The dogs are forced to bay the head, to maul the carcass, to fight over the guts of the animal – in other words, to display all of the aggressiveness that brought the animal down in the first place, all while the hunters shout, beat them, and blow the *prise*, or death-song. The ceremony thus deliberately recreates the most exciting, bloodthirsty, and chaotic final moments of the hunt. It provides a visual and kinesthetic “instant replay” of the climax, as well as providing an arena for the release of high emotions, without any of the danger that is inherent to the act of the kill. The *curee* deliberately peels back the civilized exterior of the medieval hunt to briefly expose its underlying brutality, while always keeping that brutality contained within an immutable spatial and temporal frame.

The third and final major function that the *curee* served was as a quasi-mystical ritual intended to infuse the hounds with the strength and swiftness of the wild animals that they chased. There were many possible variations on the recipe for the *droit*, but certain ingredients were always included: the guts, certain internal organs, and blood of the quarry – that is, those parts of the animal which most completely embodied its vital essence, its boldness, hardiness, and *prouesse*. In the English *quirre*, the lymers are given the shoulders, ears, and brain of the stag (MG 34: 2784-2787); in the French *curee* of the boar and the hare, the dogs are rewarded with the same organs that are the *droit* of the lord in the *chasse a force* of the stag: the tongue, heart, (LC 50: 89), and testicles (LC 43: 17-18; 50: 89). It does not take too much imagination to see that such additions are further infusions of sympathetic

magic. The hunter naturally wishes his hounds to be as wily and sharp-hearing as the stag, as swift and long-running and silent as the hare, and to have the (metaphorical) *cojones* of a boar, as well as its silent stoicism in the face of death (LC 9: 40-41). Gaston consequently disparages those who have so little foresight as to eat the parts which are the hounds' rightful due (LC 43: 17-18, 26), thus basely taking the short-term pleasure of the table (or of imbibing the magical essences oneself) over the long-term pleasure of an improved pack.

The *curees* of the fox and wolf – the two animals that were the most damaging to human concerns – were also some of the most symbolically charged. Gaston recommends that the flesh of the wolf or fox be mingled with that of several sheep or goats, along with the customary bread and cheese, and the whole put into the predator's own stomach, out of which the dogs then eat (LC 55: 87-89, 56: 34-36). The symbolism is somewhat confused (surely the hunter does not wish his dogs to eat the livestock that they are supposed to protect), but the general meaning is clear: the hunters acknowledge that such vermin as the wolf and the fox are engendered from and nourished by the domestic animals that men raise honestly and for their own benefit, and that, by hunting these beasts, the hunter is somehow regaining what mankind had lost through the depredations of nature.

There are also overtones of the Christian sacrament in the *curee*, though the symbolism is even more garbled and contradictory and, if we take it too literally, dangerously sacrilegious. Blood is mingled with flesh and bread until the individual elements are indistinguishable from each other, and the whole is served to the dogs as the wine is passed around. Later, at the after-hunt supper, the men will consume meat, bread, and wine themselves in a communal celebration of triumph. Perhaps the stag (traditionally connected with Christianity through Psalm 41:1, as well as numerous saints' legends) gives the gift of its life so that men (and its fellow deer) may live.

Perhaps, then, the master of game or the Lord of the hunt are “officiating priests” who consecrate the body and blood of the slain stag and distribute them to their “congregations.” Perhaps: but none of our authors would ever have the temerity, or the blasphemy (or even, probably, the proper distance) to make such equivalences, and so we cannot do more than flirt with speculation.

It was no less important to give gifts from the hunt to those outside the hunting community in order to ensure that they would not interfere with future endeavors of the lord, especially those having to do with the chase itself. Gaston does not explicitly mention the transfer of goods between the hunting party and those outside of it, but Edward makes it clear that it is essential to give gifts to the leaders of surrounding communities, both secular and religious. This is especially true in the case of the English royal bowhunt, which took down a large number of animals and thereby both created a large amount of disorder in the countryside and produced a large number of potential gifts.

And þan shulde þe kyng tel þe maistir of þe game what dere he wold were 3oue, and to whom. ... And þan shuld þe maistir of þe game bygynne at o row, and so forth, and tyth all þe deer right as þei lygge, rascaile and othir, and deliuere it to procurators of þe church þat owen to haue it, and þan þe deer þat þe kyng comaunded hym to deliuere. And if any of hem þat shuld haue parte of þilke deer be not þere, he shuld charge þe maistir forstere for to sende it hem. And þan he shuld deliuere a certeyn of þe remanaunt to þe forseide suers and to þe sergeaunt of þe lardere. And þe remanaunt shuld be 3oue by þe maister of þe game: som to gentillmen of þe contre, by enformacioun of þe forstere or parker as þei haue be frendely to þe baly, and þe remanaunt to officers and to hunters as hym good liketh. (MG 34: 3124-3137)

As is always the case with such gifts, those given to local authorities were clearly intended as rewards for past friendly relations and insurance against future trouble. Edward calls the deer set aside for the Church a “tithe,” but doubtless they were

intended less for the support of the Church (which had its own forests) than for the maintenance of goodwill between the secular and sacred powers. Nor did the Church, which strenuously denounced the sinfulness of hunting, apparently object to receiving the fruits of its harvest.<sup>14</sup> The physical transference of deer carcasses symbolized and reinforced alliances as well as reminding all parties concerned of the importance of maintaining those alliances in good working order. In some sense, a gift of the royal beast was a gift of the king himself, a gesture that was intended to remind its recipient of his reciprocal obligations to the crown.

Only after all other parties were gifted did the human hunters receive their *droits* or *fees*. Gaston makes only a few references to how the *droits* should be parceled out.<sup>15</sup> Whether because English hunters were more fastidious or because (as seems more likely) Edward, as master of game to two kings, was particularly concerned with the practical details of the hunt ceremony, Master of Game specifies in far more detail the *fees* that each man should receive for his part in the day's sport. Of the hart hunt *a force*, Edward says, "And if it be þe fyrst hert slayne with strength in þe sesoun, or þe last, þe sergeaunt and þe 3omen shull go on þeire officez byhalue and ax þeire fees, the which I reporte me to þe olde statutes and custumes of the kynges house" (MG 34: 2857-2860). Huntsmen were customarily rewarded with parts from the slain animal (though *fees* in other sorts of currency need not be ruled out), and the conventions governing their distribution were obviously so well established that Edward needs to do no more than refer to them in passing.

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<sup>14</sup> For regular "tithes" and isolated gifts given to ecclesiastical figures, see Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk 10-11. For numerous recorded cases of churchmen defying their own injunctions in order to hunt and even, on occasion, to poach, see Cummins 10, 262, 264.

<sup>15</sup> Gaston specifies that the shoulders and neck of the stag should generally go to the hunters and *valets* (LC 41: 5), though these should be given to the dogs instead if their own *droit* turns out to be inadequate. He also mentions that it is the custom in Gascony and Languedoc for the man who kills a boar with an *espee* and without the aid of dogs to receive the numbles of the animal as a reward (LC 43: 27-28).

Because the English royal bowhunt involved so many huntsmen and took so many animals, the rules governing the *fees* provided to the huntsmen after this hunt were even more elaborate:

And as of fees, it is to wit þat what man þat besette and smyte a deer at his tree with a dethes stroke, and he be rekeuered by þe sonne goyng doun, he shall haue þe skynne; and if he be not sette, or go fro his tree, or do othirwyse, þan is seide he shall none haue. And as of feutrers, if þei be sette, þe fyrst teysoure, and þe resceyuers þat draweth hym doun, shall parte þe skynne. Nathelesse, in oþer lordes huntynge who pyncheth fyrst and goth þerewith to þe deth, he shall haue þe skynne. And all þe deres nekkes been þe hunters; and that o schuldre and þe chyne is his þat vndothe þe deer; and þat othir shuldir is þe forsters othir þe parkers fee, þat kepeth þe baily þat is hunted. And all þe skynnes of hertes slayne with strength of þe herthoundes been þe maisters of þe herthoundes fee – þat is to say, his þat hath þe wages of xii. d. þe day for þe office. (MG 36: 3175-3186)

Each man who kills a deer must mark it, “þat he myght chalaunge his fee,” but he must not mark it falsely and the master of game must arbitrate in any disputes that may arise (MG 36: 3138-3150). The image that this passage evokes – that of the huntsmen crowding around, waiting for their meat and skins and squabbling with each other over who should receive what – might seem to be reminiscent of any group of workers waiting for their pay. However, it must be emphasized that the distribution of the *fees* to the huntsmen, like the distribution of the *droits* to the dogs, was not a simple exchange of tangible payment for labor. The huntsmen already received fixed wages based on their duties and seniority, and regardless of how many deer they were able to bring down during any given hunt.<sup>16</sup> It was furthermore impossible for every

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<sup>16</sup> Presumably room and board, as well as clothing, would also be included in many if not most cases (Gaston and Edward both refer repeatedly to the meals that the lord is bound to provide for his huntsmen), though account books do not usually record anything except for monetary payments. For the pay of the huntsmen in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. English royal household, see Richard Fitzneale, *Dialogus de scaccario: The Course of the Exchequer*, trans. Charles Johnson (New York: Oxford UP, 1950) 135. For the royal hunting accounts of King Charles VI for the year of 1398, see Cummins, *The Hound and*

hunter to have received what he fairly “earned,” for, as we have seen, many of the deer were given away to the lord’s cronies or reserved for the lord’s table. We must therefore think of these skins and cuts of meat as bonuses, gifts with ulterior motive; like a bottle of wine or a turkey at Christmas, they were intended to represent the goodwill and approval of higher-ups and instill a reciprocal sense of goodwill and obligation in the receiver, rather than to precisely compensate the huntsman for his accomplishments on any given day.

The ritualized gift-giving which marked the medieval post-hunt ceremonies physically delineated and served to strengthen the web of obligations that bound together superiors and inferiors, in turn helping to ensure that each party would continue to work for the common good. However, the most obscure yet in some ways most important ritual of gift-giving and -receiving was the ritual of the hunt itself.

A curious idea runs throughout our hunting manuals: the writers suggest, obliquely but firmly, that the fate of a lord’s body is intertwined with that of his lands. He was, of course, expected to freely give his own body (and those of his retainers, who were, after all, only extensions of himself) in order to protect his realm.<sup>17</sup> However, more obscurely but no less strongly, his moral and physical strength were also considered to be directly reflected in the fruitfulness of the earth and the creatures that were under his keeping – for, as they say, “tant vaut seigneur, tant vaut sa gent et sa terre” [“as much as the lord is worth, so much are his people and his lands worth”]

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the Hawk 250-259; for a general discussion of the hunter’s position and rights, see Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk 172-186.

<sup>17</sup> It is a notion that echoes, to some extent, the homage ceremonies of an earlier day, in which a vassal or tenant swore to trade his body and those of his followers (in military service, should it be needed) for the lands that he held from his liege lord. The lord makes his vassal the same promise; and Pollock and Maitland even refer to his granting of land as a “gift” (The History of English Law, vol. 1, 296-307). However, there does not seem to be any direct relationship between the public declarations of loyalty and indebtedness that characterize the homage ceremony and the oblique promises that lords made to their lands and people through their continuous engagement in the hunt.

(LC Prologue: 57-58). Lords fulfilled their obligations to their people and lands by maintaining and demonstrating their potency and strength through the chase. By risking death (however nominally), the lord gave his life force to his land; in consuming the *morsiaux de fourchié*, he reingested that vital essence. The animal itself gave its own life in symbolic exchange for the nourishment that it had received from the lord's potency. The chases took place in the open air so that every man, no matter how humble, could have proof that their master was no Fisher King and that their lands would never fall barren. Thus by means of these "gift" exchanges between man and nature the earth remained a closed system, with no net loss of vitality. The covenant between the lord and his people was renewed with every hunt: every time he dealt out death, he also ensured that life would continue.