The Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Revisited

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Summary

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a Middle English alliterative poem, written towards the end of the fourteenth century. It has the lively descriptions of the hunt, which are undoubtedly one of the poem's attractions. In addition to this descriptive liveliness, its structural and thematic parallel with the concomitant temptations of Gawain makes its charm more irresistible, and hence many critics have examined the hunt scenes to provide a number of interpretations. Despite the variety of analyses and exegeses, this essay explores the hunt scenes in terms of the poet's representation of the hunted animals—the deer, boar and fox, and demonstrates that the descriptions of the hunt are designed to arouse our compassion for the quarries. The sympathy for the hunted serves to both clarify and highlight the direct connection between Gawain and the hunted animals.

Keywords
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Hunting Scenes,
Compassion for the Hunted Animals, Manipulation of Viewpoint,

1.

The description of the hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (henceforth *SGGK*) is one of the poem's primary attractions, not just to its medieval audience but to modern critics. Its descriptive liveliness and verisimilitude are certainly reasons for its appeal, but its structural, and probably thematic, connection with the temptation of Gawain that takes place

at the Castle Hautdesert also contributes to its charm. There have been many analyses and exegetical interpretations of the hunting scenes provided by previous scholarship that explore these links, but in this essay I would like to focus on one particular aspect of the hunting scenes, looking at the ways in which the hunted animals themselves are described: specifically, how the *Gawain* poet introduces a sympathetic attitude towards them. To substantiate the claim that the representation of the quarry in *SGGK* is unusual, even unique in medieval literature, some analogues to hunting scenes in other Middle English texts must be examined for comparison. There is scanty evidence of sympathy for animals in medieval texts, and this will help to consolidate the reading of this particular aspect of the hunting scenes in *SGGK*—that the poet deliberately structures the text to evoke our compassion for the deer, the boar, and the fox. Why this might be so forms the concluding part of this paper.

2.

It may seem quite unusual to suggest that interpretative sympathy should be applied to the hunted animals in *SGGK*, because medieval theology insisted upon animals' irrationality, and therefore humans' superiority over them. However, some critics, though very small in number, admit that we may have sympathy for the victims in the hunting scenes. W. R. J. Barron, for example, thinks it plausible that we feel compassion for the hunted animals in light of the poet's ingenious descriptive technique,[1] while Anne Rooney observes the sensitivity to the fear of the animals expressed in the language of the first-day deer hunt, even though she is sceptical of the idea of finding sentimentality in the treatment of animals.[2] Here, I would like to look at

some examples of such a medieval sympathetic attitude towards animals. There are two phenomena which made it much easier for the medieval world to treat animals like humans, and hence feel compassion for them: animal trials and pet-keeping.

Animal trials reveal the medieval popular belief that animals share some characteristics with humans. This unique phenomenon actually existed from the twelfth century to the twentieth century all over Europe, but it reached its height between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Animals were brought to court as criminals in accordance with judicial procedures, and juries gave verdicts of either guilty or not guilty upon the animals in either secular or religious courts. Esther Cohen sees some influence of the secular anthropomorphic tradition, like the 12th-century *Roman de Renart*, in these trials, together with an intellectual attitude to animals.[3] According to Cohen, secular people attributed to animals not only human qualities but also "modes of thought and of feeling" (109). Joyce E. Salisbury, however, criticises Cohen's discussion, arguing that she must prove her premise that people living in the countryside treated animals like humans.[4] Instead, Salisbury observes "the late-medieval desire to bring order in society through laws" (114) in the trials. Her reasoning, however, seems less convincing. First, Cohen distinguishes the intellectual attitude from the popular, and finds that it was the intellectual position to maintain the hierarchical relationship between men and animals.[5] Second, some trial cases bear an obvious retributive nature. In 1386, for example, a sow convicted of having torn the face and arms off a child was sentenced to be mutilated in the head and forelegs. E. P. Evans considers this case "a strict application of *lex talionis*" (140). As Philip Jamieson suggests, animal trials

can be explained as "the mere application of the *lex talionis*" (62). The trials therefore indicate, or at least hint, that the medieval majority was under the strong influence of anthropomorphism, to such an extent that people believed animals had reason and will, because retributive punishment works well only if the culprits are thought to understand its meaning.

Furthermore, Salisbury's suggestion itself paradoxically endorses Cohen's discussion. Salisbury considers that animal trials were intended to bring order to society by virtue of jurisprudence; this means that, as she argues, medieval society had no ordered hierarchy between men and beasts: it was disordered in terms of a blurred boundary between humans and animals. She admits that there was confusion in the popular perception of animals, with some people viewing animals like humans. After all, their arguments concerning the trials propose that this was a popular medieval view. This supports the argument that anthropomorphism of animals was part of the popular trend governing people's attitudes towards animals at the time.

The medieval habit of keeping pets also encouraged people to think of and treat animals like humans. The learned clergy in particular were fairly critical of keeping companion animals in the Middle Ages.[6] In spite of severe reprimands and authoritarian prohibitions, however, women and clerics were prone to keep pets within their homes,[7] and some literary works attest to their pet-keeping habits. Perhaps the most famous literary example is Geoffrey Chaucer's description of Madam Eglentine in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. It is unlikely that Chaucer's intention here was simply to draw attention to this fashion, but the reference to this prioress's practice is a good example of keeping companion animals in the Middle Ages. Another famous example is the elegy of John Skelton for a pet

sparrow, Philip. And in *Lybeaus Desconus*, a 14th-century Arthurian romance, Elyne the messenger shows her liking for a "rache" passing by on the way to Synadoun: "Þat mayde sayde, also snell, 'Ne sawe Y neuer no juell/ So lykynge to my pay./ God wold þat Y hym auȝte!'" (ll. 1024–27). This probably implies her somewhat frivolous habit of getting, and keeping, a pet. Elyne likes the small dog because of its peerless beauty, and she wonders if God will allow her to keep it. All these literary descriptions are supposed to be an indication of humans' affection, and possibly sympathy, for animals. In addition to these literary examples, Kathleen Walker-Meikle has extensively researched the phenomenon of medieval pet-keeping, and concluded that pets were the subjects of human affection, and vice versa, in the real world.[8]

These examples hopefully serve to show how medieval people treated animals like humans, and hence there was enough room for them to have sympathy for them. The quarry in the hunting scenes in *SGGK*, however, are not pets. And so, although we can say there was a basis for treating animals like human counterparts in the medieval popular mind, it would seem difficult to argue that our, or the medieval audience's, sympathy might extend to the victims of the hunt. Indeed, Salisbury asserts that the affection for animals that were not pets, like working animals, was "categorically different from feelings for humans" (116). Her contention owes to the fact that even beloved dogs were sometimes killed in certain circumstances.[9] However, I would argue that the sympathy medieval people felt extended not only to companion animals but also to working animals and even game.

For example, a medieval nun named Alfrad grieves for the death of a pregnant ass in a lament recorded in one of the 11th-century *Cambridge Songs*. Alfrad has a she-ass, and pastures the ass at that time. The ass is

attacked by a wolf in the pasture. After a long struggle, the ass dies, letting out such a loud cry that Alfrad hears it. Alfrad and her fellow nuns hurry to the scene. When they catch sight of a bloodstained wolf devouring the ass:

> Illud videntes   cuncte sorores
> crines scindebant,   pectus tundebant,
> flentes insontem   asine mortem.
>
> Denique parvum   portabat pullum;
> illum plorabat   maxime Alfrad,
> sperans exinde   prolem crevisse. (ll. 28–33)[10]

(Seeing it, all the sisters were rending their hair, beating their chests, and weeping for the innocent death of the ass. After that, she was carrying the little young animal; Alfrad was lamenting for it extremely, expecting that the offspring would have been born of that ass.)

Elsewhere in the poem, Alfrad calls her ass "Asinam caram (beloved ass)". The adjective "caram" clearly shows her attachment to the ass. The way in which these nuns lament—tearing their hair, beating their chests, and weeping—is typical of medieval people grieving for the dead. Obviously, the ass is not a pet, rather a working animal. The nuns' sympathy, though Salisbury would confidently deny it, lies with the working animal.

As the Latin poem illustrates, working animals were capable of receiving human affection and sympathy. But how about game? Hunted animals could also be rewarded with human compassion. One historian, Keith Thomas,

refers to Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* in order to testify to the medieval sensibility English people might have in responding to cruelty to animals.[11] He further mentions some poems that express sympathy with animals, claiming that these sensibilities were not alien to the medieval popular mind. One of the animals that he mentions benefited from human sympathy is a hunted hare:

Bi a forrest as I gan fare,

    Walkyng al myselven a-lone,

I hard a mornyng of an haare,

    Rouffully schew mad here mone.

Dere-worth god, how schal I leve

    And leyd my lyve in lond?

ffrov dale to doune I am I-drevfe;

    I not where I may syte or stond!

I may noþer rest nor slepe

    By no wallay þat is so derne,

Nor no couert may me kepe,

    But euer I rene fro herne to herne. (ll. 1–12)[12]

This 76-line poem begins with the narrator noticing the hare's piteous moan. The hare complains that she can neither rest, sleep, or even live on the land because she has to move from one place to another to seek refuge. As the words "mornyng" (l. 3) and "mone" (l. 4) clearly show, the hare is crying out

to such an extent that the narrator feels pity for her, which is also illustrated by the word "Rouffully" (l. 4), meaning "piteously". The subsequent lines describe how she is pursued by hunters, housewives, and gentlemen. The hare's complaint is consistently written in the first person singular, but it encompasses the misery of all hares, not just an individual hare. She says:

There is no best in þe word, I wene,
    hert, hynd, buke ne dowe,
That suffuris halfe so myche tene
    As doth þe sylly wat—go where he go. (ll. 57–60)

This might also extend our sympathy to include not only the sorrowful hare in fiction, but also all hares in the real world. Thomas admits that such medieval examples of sympathy for animals were "eccentrically tender-minded by the standard of the age" (152), and that some narratives ought to be considered as allegory; however, the poem of the hunted hare undoubtedly proves that the victims of hunting could also receive human sympathy in the Middle Ages. And we have to bear in mind all these circumstances concerning animals in the Middle Ages when we examine the hunting scenes in *SGGK*.

3.

Interpreters of the hunt scenes in *SGGK* have long attempted to read them symbolically or allegorically, particularly in relation to Gawain's role in the temptation scenes. This mode of reading was first applied to the hunting scenes by Henry L. Savage.[13] Though almost a century has passed since its

publication, his article is still well worth mentioning because of its long-standing impact on the generations of critics to come. Savage's article, published in 1928, fuelled the arguments concerning the *Gawain* poet's description of the hunt: his claim is that the attributes of the hunted—timidity, ferociousness, and wiliness—are paralleled with the nature of Gawain's behaviour in the temptation scenes. This interpretative methodology became a kind of a standard critical approach in reading the hunt scenes, and has long been adopted by many scholars of the poem, regardless of the differences in their reasoning.[14]

Rooney, however, takes a different approach: she finds that two traditional motifs—of alliterative poetry and of romance—are perfectly merged together in the hunting scenes. According to Rooney, Bertilak's hunt establishes the Pride of Life imagery, which it shares with other alliterative poems such as *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, and *Somer Soneday*.[15] This not only fits well with the theme of the poem, she claims, but also works as a catalyst for directing us to an awareness of both traditions.[16] Her argument seems persuasive and convincing, chiefly because she thoroughly scrutinizes the hunting descriptions both in contemporary hunting handbooks and literary works in order to shed light on the hunting scenes in *SGGK*, and also because her emphasis upon the theme of mortality, which hunt scenes in the alliterative tradition convey, is consonant with a theme found in the poem. However, there must still be room for further discussion of the hunting scenes. One fundamental defect of the previous scholarship is, I believe, that all of it is too anthropocentric. We have not given proper attention to the animals.

In the *Gawain* poet's hunting scenes, the primary focus in each series of

events is not on the hunters, but upon the hunted. Almost half a century ago, Marie Borroff pointed out a marked stylistic feature of *SGGK*: that animals and the inanimate objects described in the poem are introduced as "responsive agents".[17] Ad Putter re-evaluated this peculiarity and its links to its innovative use by the 12th-century Old French poet Chrétien de Troyes.[18] Sarah Stanbury also studied the *Gawain* poet's manoeuvrings of viewpoint, claiming that its shift decides "the direction of the narrative".[19] This "subjective viewpoint" is in fact present in the series of hunting descriptions. This is what we must take into serious consideration in reading the hunting scenes, and it is this characteristic that draws a clear line between the hunting descriptions of *SGGK* and those of the other poems with hunting descriptions. Any effect of these stylistic manoeuvrings is probably what the *Gawain* poet aimed at. Such descriptive practice, of relocating our subjective view, should arouse our sympathy for the animals, and it manifests another aspect of the hunting scenes in *SGGK*.

The first hunt is not a traditional one: the game is anything but harts and stags. The poet purposefully uses a hunting term, "fermysoun" (l. 1156), in order to specify what they hunt—female deer: does and hinds. The hunters behave as the routine requires, then the poet shifts his focus from the hunters to the deer:

At þe fyrst quethe of þe quest quaked þe wylde.
Der drof in þe dale, doted for drede (ll. 1150–51)[20]

The fear felt by the deer is explicitly stated with the word "quaked" (l. 1150) and the phrase "doted for drede" (l. 1151). This affective language is

paralleled by the analogues of this description of the hunt. Due to the unusual nature of the poet's choice of quarry, there are very few such analogues in Middle English literature. One of them is from *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, in which the fear the deer experience is also mentioned:

> Þen durken þe dere in þe dymme skuwes,
> And for drede of þe deth droupes þe do. (ll. 53–4)[21]

Another analogue is found in a very short poem, *Somer Soneday*:

> Denede dale and downe for dryft of þe deer in drede; (l. 15)[22]

In these analogues, which belong to the Pride of Life tradition, the fear is thus referred to only briefly. The *Gawain* poet, on the other hand, extends the description of the deer in terms of the terror they feel and the damage they suffer, illustrating their agony as the responsive agents of the hunt. At one point, the poet gives a very short account of why they are chasing only female deer on this occasion, and then the deer again become the focus of the hunting description:

> Þay let þe herttez haf þe gate, with þe hyȝe hedes,
> Þe breme bukkez also, with hor brode paumez;
> For þe fre lorde hade defende in femysoun tyme
> Þat þer schulde no mon meue to þe male dere.
> Þe hindez were halden in with 'Hay!' and 'War!'
> Þe does dryuen with gret dyn to þe depe sladez. (ll. 1154–59)

This change of subject, or shift of focus, draws our attention to the "hindez" and "does". And we encounter the torment and death of the deer:

What! þay brayen, and bleden, bi bonkkez þay deȝen (l. 1163)

The interjection "What" again calls our attention to the deer, and the word-pair "brayen, and bleden" literally conveys the death cry and the torment of the deer caused by a rain of arrows; these words strike our ears as well as our eyes. The word "deȝen" unnecessarily confirms the death of the animals. The suffering of the deer is all the more emphasized here.

This emphasis on the suffering of the quarry is much more evident if we compare it to the analogues above, in which neither the death, nor even the torment, of the quarry is mentioned at all. The *Gawain* poet does not stop describing the deer hunt, however; he refers to the deer who successfully escape from the arrows:

What wylde so atwaped wyȝes þat schotten
Watz al toraced and rent at þe resayt,
Bi þay were tened at þe hyȝe and taysed to þe wattrez, (ll. 1167–69)

Again, the poet reiterates that the deer are suffering pain and death at this hunt using more specific words like "toraced", "rent", "tened", and "taysed". Although there is an allusion to Bertilak's joy of hunting (ll. 1174–77), the focus on the deer calls our attention to the fate of the does and hinds; and the reiteration of their pain and death arouses our sympathy for the piteous victims.

The next phase of the first hunt is a detailed account of the breaking of the carcasses. It is difficult to understand the poet's intention behind writing how to dismember the deer. Its incorporation into the plot might be partly because the dismembering scene would satisfy the demands of a contemporary audience. Thus it could be merely a conventional motif in romances, reflecting the importance of hunting skills to the medieval aristocracy.[23] Ryan R. Judkins has recently claimed that the breaking scene stands as a microcosm of a medieval feudal society because of its role-assignment through venison distribution among the participants based on their social rank.[24] However, it seems easier to isolate what the poet does not intend with the inclusion of the breaking scene. First, Rooney compares the procedures, which the poet details, with the methods set out in contemporary hunting manuals, and demonstrates that each corresponds to the other.[25] But her careful scrutiny seems of less importance in understanding the reason why the poet introduces this orderly description because it only goes so far: to show how much the poet's description depends on contemporary handbooks. Rooney does not go on to examine the significance of the breaking scene in the narrative's development. So, our primary concern should not rest on how much the poet is indebted to contemporary manuals when reading the breaking scene.

Second, the breaking scene does not serve to show Bertilak's expertise in hunting rituals, like other heroes in Middle English literature. Tristrem, for example, shows this expertise by breaking the carcass of a hart when he comes across a group of hunters in a foreign land.[26] And Ipomadon also skilfully cuts up a hart he has hunted while he is at the court of the Fere in Calabria.[27] It seems clear that the authors' intention in these works was to

highlight the heroes' skill in hunting. In *SGGK*, however, Bertilak does not seem to show this sort of proficiency. Before the exhaustive account of breaking a deer starts, the hunters assemble and pile their spoils in a heap on the ground:

> Þenne fersly þay flokked in, folk, at þe laste,
>
> And quykly of þe quelled dere a querré þay maked.
>
> Þe best boȝed þerto with burnez innoghe,
>
> Gedered þe grattest of gres þat þer were,
>
> And didden hem derely vndo as þe dede askez. (ll. 1323–27)

The subject of the action is "Þe best" (l. 1325): that is to say, the nobles. At first, the word appears as a singular substantive, and we think that it should refer to Bertilak. But the verb "didden" (l. 1327) defies that reading, because the suffix -en clearly marks it as a plural. It is therefore likely that Bertilak does not involve himself in the business of dismembering the deer; or at least, the poet does not mention him as an active agent in the scene. Instead, others take part in breaking the carcass. Unlike Tristrem and Ipomadon, Bertilak never shows off his expertise here, either by dismembering the carcass himself or instructing his men how to do so. This leads us to conclude that the poet's purpose of introducing the breaking scene is not to show off Bertilak's technique for butchering hunted animals. From the start of this scene, the subject is always the third person plural, "þay", until the end of the dismemberment.

The significance of this scene is still obscure, but we can say that the *Gawain* poet did not intend to show Bertilak's expert hunting technique, or

demonstrate his own indebtedness to contemporary hunting manuals. However, the description may be partly responsible for arousing our sympathetic attitude towards the quarry. In the poem for the hunted hare quoted in the previous section, there is a passage reminiscent of breaking a hunted animal. The hare complains:

> Of all þe men þat beth a-lyue
> I am most be-hold to genttyl-men!
>
> As sone as I can ren to þe laye,
> A-non þe grey-hondys wyl me have;
> My bowels beth I-þrowe a-waye,
> And I ame bore home on a stavfe.
>
> Als son as I am come home,
> I ame I-honge hye vp-on pyne,
> With leke-worttes I am eette a-none,
> And whelpes play with my skyne! (ll. 67–76)

The disembowelling of a hare, "My bowels beth I-þrowe a-waye", seems to form an integral part of the hare's strategy to make her audience feel pity for her and her fellows. Medieval hunters were more familiar with butchering animals than modern people; the account of dismembering the deer must have been much less distasteful for the audience of the poem than it would be to us. But we should not forget the fact that there are no extant descriptions of the breaking so thorough as that in the *Gawain* poet, except

for in a few hunting manuals. Such scarcity in the literature suggests that medieval authors were likely to restrain themselves from describing dismembering scenes. If this is the case, the breaking scene in *SGGK*, which was more detailed by medieval standards and is rather grotesque to modern sensibilities, might have been incorporated into the story in order to add further weight to our sympathetic view of the animals triggered by the previous hunting description.

The second hunt in *SGGK*, whose victim is a boar, is, at least ostensibly, a typical description of a boar hunt in Middle English literature. Riding onto marshy ground, they look for the day's game; they come across "[on] þe sellokest swyn" (l. 1439) there. After that, the boar becomes the "responsive agent" in a series of events, as in the first hunt. Snarling hounds pursue him into the fierce forest, and the hunters follow after with resounding arrows. The boar is determined to resist their assaults:

> Ful oft he bydez þe baye
> And maymez þe mute innmelle.
> He hurtez of þe houndez, and þay
> Furl ӡomerly ӡaule and ӡelle.
> . . . .
> Bot quen þe dyntez hym dered of her dryӡe strokez,
> Þen, braynwod for bate, on burnez he rasez,
> Hurtez hem ful heterly þer he forth hyӡez;
> And mony arӡed þerat and on lyte droӡen. (ll. 1450–63)

The motif of describing a boar as an agent would not have seemed unfamiliar

to medieval audiences, because there are a good deal of similar descriptions of boar hunts found in other medieval romances such as *Guy of Warwick*, *The Avowing of King Arthur*, *Eglamour of Artois*, and *Partonope of Blois*. In these works, as in *SGGK*, boars often become responsive agents intending to fight against and flee from their human opponents.[28] Hunters and hounds cannot do harm to boars; on the contrary, boars become so frenzied that the assailants shudder for fear. In spite of the hunters' continuous assaults, the boars wound some members of the hunting party. It looks like a war between men and boars, rather than a hunt.

The uniqueness of this boar hunt, however, lies in the presentation of how the boar is killed. The second hunt resumes after the second-day conversation between Gawain and Lady Bertilak. The war is not over, but things gradually turn against the boar. He desperately makes a stand for so long a time that his enmity towards them strikes the hunters with terror; but he is tired from running, too exhausted to flee. He realises that he is unable to escape, and determines to fight with his back against the wall. The boar "bigynez to scrape" (l. 1571) the ground, "femed at his mouth" (l. 1572), and "whettez his whyte tuschez" (l. 1573); his preparation for the final attack deters the hunters and hounds from approaching him, but Bertilak dismounts and strides quickly towards the boar with a sword drawn in his hand. This narrative plot device is also paralleled by the contemporary works that have already been mentioned; and the fact that Bertilak uses his sword to kill the boar is quite typical in medieval romances.[29] But, in spite of its conventionality, the presentation of the boar's death is unparalleled in any other works. In *Guy of Warwick*, *The Avowing of King Arthur*, *Eglamour of Artois*, and *Partonope of Blois*, the authors give rather dull accounts of a

hunted boar's death: they tell us no more than the fact that the animal is dead.[30)] On the other hand, the *Gawain* poet draws our attention to the boar by sounding out the painful howl of the boar:

> Þe swyn settez hym out on þe segge euen,
>
> Þat burne and þe bor were boþe vpon hepez
>
> In þe wyʒtest of þe water. Þe worre hade þat oþer,
>
> For þe mon merkkez hym wel, as þay mette fyrst,
>
> Set sadly þe scharp in þe slot euen,
>
> Hit hym vp to þe hult, þat þe hert schyndered
>
> And he ʒarrande hym ʒelde and ʒedoun þe water
>
>   Ful tyt.   (ll. 1586–96)

According to Rooney, the *Gawain* poet's description resembles the style of the English hunting manuals in terms of its concentration on sound and its scarcity of visual details.[31)] Rooney's claim that the hunting scenes are difficult for the amateur of hunting to visualize is still open to question,[32)] but the poet's dependence on sound is clear here. The boar's painful howl, "ʒarrande", is alien to the hunting descriptions in other literary works. The howling of the boar effectively dramatizes his death and keeps us from setting our eyes on the hunters' actions; instead, our focus is drawn to the victim of the hunt, and our sympathy for the hunted reaches its pinnacle at his shriek on the verge of losing his life.

 More vigorous arguments have been put forward with reference to the foxhunt of the third day than to the two other hunts. Norman Davis has pointed out that the treatment of foxhunts in medieval romance is less

frequent than other types of hunt.[33] The only contemporary reference to foxhunting, in fact, is in *Ferumbras*, the Middle English translation of the Charlemagne romance. In it, Duke Naymes explains the pastimes of the French aristocracy to Lucifer, the Saracen knight: "& Summe a deer honteþ of hem þar went & some to fox and hare" (l. 2222). This scarcity, and hence this anomaly, is also the reason why scholars of *SGGK* are willing to see an allegorical connection between Gawain and the fox. Even those who do not believe the emblematic explanations of the first and second hunt do often choose to see an allegorical reciprocity between Gawain and the hunted animal.[34] This must also be due to a traditional superstitious prejudice against foxes bequeathed from antiquity,[35] and its symbolic qualities can be found in one penitential romance, *Robert of Cisyle*, in which King Robert of Sicily is punished by God for his pride and forced to wear hideous clothes "With foxes tayles many aboute" (l. 249). On the other hand, Urban Tigner Holmes Jr. comments, "The fox, too, was often hunted" in the time of Alexander Neckham (191). Foxhunting is fairly rare in the realm of literature, but it was quite usual in medieval courtly life.

The *Gawain* poet repeatedly attempts to direct our attention to the animals in the hunts, and his efforts culminate in this hunting scene. The poet assigns to the fox a personal pronoun, and depicts him as the subject of almost all the sentences, even by rendering him passive. The host and his company seek their game, as they did on the previous days, and some hounds find the trail of a fox. The hunters and hounds begin to follow him with a resounding noise of horns and cries:

And he fyskez hem byfore; þay founden hym sone.

And quen þay seghe hym with syȝt þay sued hym fast,

Wreȝande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse,

And he trantes and tornayeez þurȝ ony tene greue,

Hauilounez and herkenez bi heggez ful ofte.

At þe last bi a littel dich he lepez ouer a spenné,

Stelez out ful stilly bi a strothe rande,

Went haf wylt of þe wode, with wylez, fro þe houndes.

Þenne watz he went, er he wyst, to a wale tryster,

Þer þre þro at a þrich þrat hym at ones,

     Al graye.

  He blenched aȝayn bilyue

  And stifly start onstray.

  With alle þe wo on lyue

  To þe wod he went away.   (ll. 1704–18)

The way of describing this fox flight resembles that of the previous boar hunt; but the focus is more inclined towards the hunted than the hunters, if we compare the frequency of the poet's presenting the fox as the subject of the sentences to that of the boar. This decision to describe the fox as the subject is further underscored by the use of the passive construction. The fox's desperate flight irritates the hunters so much that they begin to jeer at him over and over again:

Here he watz halawed when haþelez hym metten,

Loude he watz ȝayned with ȝarande speche;

Þer he watz þreted and ofte 'þef' called,

And ay þe titleres at his tayl, þat tary he ne myȝt. (ll. 1723–26)

To be more precise, the fox is bitterly jeered at by the hunters: he is shouted at, snarled at, threatened, and called "thief".

The *Gawain* poet's strong intention to direct our attention to the fox becomes much clearer if we compare it with Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Even though the latter tale does not give a portrayal of foxhunting, it is well worth considering here because it does describe a fox chase of sorts:

> This sely wydwe and eek hir doghtres two
> Herden thise hennes crie and maken wo,
> And out at dores stirten they anon,
> And syen the fox toward the grove gon,
> And bar upon his bak the cok away,
> And cryden, "Out! Harrow and weylaway!
> Ha, ha! The fox!" and after hym they ran,
> And eek with staves many another man.
> Ran Colle oure dogge, and Talbot and Gerland,
> And Malkyn, with a dystaf in hir hand;
> Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
> So fered for the berkyng of the dogges
> And shoutyng of the men and wommen eeke
> They ronne so hem thoughte hir herte breeke.
> They yolleden as feendes doon in helle;
> The dokes cryden as men wolde hem quelle; (ll. 3375–90)[36]

In the pursuit of Russell the fox, Chaucer describes the people as responsive agents: the actors in this pursuit are always the pursuers. Our focus is therefore drawn not to the fox pursued but to the people pursuing. It is difficult to compare the foxhunt in *SGGK* with others in terms of rhetorical technique, because of the lack of foxhunt descriptions in other contemporary works, but Chaucer's chase serves to vividly illustrate the *Gawain* poet's plan in his foxhunt scene to manipulate our perspective to focus on the fox, and underlines its peculiarity in the portrayal of the interaction between humans and the animal.

The description of the foxhunt after the temptation scene is notably shorter than the other two hunting scenes, and the poet's stylistic manoeuvrings—representing the fox as an active subject—ceases to work because the hunt is described from the point of view of the hunters, not the animal. The fox appearing and avoiding Bertilak's blow is the only example of the poet's describing the fox as having agency:

> Renaud com richchande þurȝ a roȝe greue,
> And alle þe rabel in a res ryȝt at his helez. (ll. 1898–99)

> And he schunt for þe scharp and schulde haf arered; (l. 1902)

Accordingly, it appears that our attention is not to be devoted to the fox; and his death is obscured by the poet's manipulation of our focus, as Rooney points out.[37] However, the arresting use of an ethical dative, which Rooney dismisses as unnecessary,[38] illustrates the poet's greater awareness of the fox's death:

A rach rapes hym to, ryȝt er he myȝt,

And ryȝt bifore þe hors fete þay fel on hym alle

And woried *me* þis wyly wyth a wroth noyse. (ll. 1903–5; emphasis added)

Waldron and Andrew say that this ethical dative suggests "the involvement of the narrator" (276). Their judgment is right: by using it, the poet shows his concern for the fox's death. Though the second half of the foxhunt description is less focused on the animal, the poet's compassion for hunted animals is most elicited by this peculiar rhetoric. In addition to the ethical dative, the poet's unique expression of the sound made by the hunters highlights his concern for the victim:

Hit watz þe myriest mute þat euer mon herde,

Þe rich rurd þat þer watz raysed for Renaude saule

    With lote.   (ll. 1915–17)

The sound made by the hunters is "þe myriest mute" that men ever heard; this certainly conveys the delight of hunting, which, as Rooney demonstrates, should be the essential feature of the traditional hunting description in Middle English alliterative poetry. At the same time, it is the requiem for "Renaude saule" they have been hunting, which may remind us of the final passage of the *Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, begging us to pray not only for Beues and Josian but also Arondel, Beues's destrier.[39] This suggests that what is the most cheerful noise to the hunters is also the most mournful sound to the poet, and we are ready to share his empathy for the

hunted, thanks to his accumulative illustration of the tragedy of the hunt.

These observations show that the quarry—the deer, boar, and fox—are not only the target of the hunters, but also the goal of our sympathy. The augmented portrayal of the deer-drive emphatically illustrates the pangs of death the animals undergo more than those in the contemporary analogues do; the breaking scene then helps to emphasize the death of the deer. The boar hunt is at first conventional in its description; but the dependence on sound, which is the characteristic of contemporary hunting manuals, draws our attention to the final howling of the boar. The focus is more concentrated on the fox in the third-day hunting scene than in any other text, achieved through the poet's rhetorical manoeuvrings. The well-calculated use of the ethical dative and reference to the fox's soul add some impetus for driving the audience to feel sympathy for the victim. Although some will dispute that such sympathy, or sensibility, for animals existed in the Middle Ages, as we have already seen, there were certainly medieval expressions of such feelings, despite their rarity. The *Gawain* poet owes much to several conventions found in alliterative poetry, contemporary romances, and hunting manuals; but he did not focus on the delight of the hunters. He dedicated his eyes and heart almost entirely to the animals who suffer death behind the hunters' exhilaration.

4.

The hunting scenes in *SGGK* are structurally paralleled with the temptation scenes. This structural parallelism tempts us to read the hunting scenes allegorically or metaphorically, but such interpretations are not plausible because any animal attributes indicated by critics are not seen in

Gawain's person or behaviour in the bedroom. Dorothy Yamamoto maintains that the hunted animals and Gawain are much the same in that they both have *bodies* to "be cut, sheared through, dismembered" (130). The parallelism, however, is not so complicated, but is much more straightforward: it is as simple as its symmetrical structure.

Seeing the hunting scenes with feeling for the animals reveals a direct correspondence between Gawain and the game. The sympathy for the hunted helps us to understand their desire for life as well as their fear of death, both of which are shared by Gawain on the verge of his inevitable death at the Green Chapel. Gawain and the quarries have in common these powerful feelings.[40] Such an interpretation is possible if we have any sympathy for the deer, the boar and the fox. Our compassion for them crystalizes, and also underscores, the correspondence between Gawain and the hunted animals in their instinct, or desire, to survive. The description of the hunt, which elicits our compassion for the hunted and then the shared desire, is thus part of the *Gawain* poet's scheme for keeping us conscious of the direct connection between Gawain and the animals.

The novelty of the hunt scenes lies in the deliberate plan of the *Gawain* poet, and it is also of great significance that the hunt scenes reveal his "eccentrically tender-minded" (Thomas 152) attitude towards animals by medieval standards. They are typically conventional narrative plots intended to either amuse or warn, as exempla, the aristocratic audience, but here in our poem they are also deliberately designed to arouse our compassion for the animals. Medieval sympathy for animals in literary works, though extremely rare and sporadic, supports this reading of the hunting scenes. The poet's stylistic manipulation of our viewpoint certainly facilitates our

sympathetic response to the hunt scenes. Through them, we learn, perhaps, something about our own capacity for compassion in the face of death, a compassion later shown by the Green Knight himself. The *Gawain* poet weaves his story together in bonds of mutual sympathy, connecting us to the protagonists of the story mediated through our compassion for the hunted animals. In *SGGK*, everything is connected.

Notes

1) W.R.J. Barron, *Trawthe and Treason: The Sin of Gawain Reconsidered*, Manchester UP, 1980, p. 4.

2) Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, D.S. Brewer, 1993, p. 168.

3) Esther Cohen, *The Crossroads of Justice: Law and Culture in Late Medieval France*, Brill, 1993, pp. 132–3.

4) Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. Routledge, 2011, p. 114. Furthermore, she seems rather convinced that animals kept for labor "were treated with the same care a modern farmer will show his tractor" (114).

5) Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 130.

6) Salisbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–120.

7) Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*, The Boydell, 2012, p. 3.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 108. Salisbury confidently asserts that animal metaphors triggered medieval people to treat animals "with as much affection as a human love object" (120). But it seems difficult to isolate the impetus behind the popular affection and compassion for animals in the Middle Ages, because the pet-keeping habit cannot be confined only to this period.

9) Salisbury, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

10) Keith Sidwell, *Reading Medieval Latin*, pp. 246–8.

11) Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*, Penguin, 1983, p. 152.

12) All passages are from *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* edited by Russell Hope Robbins.

13) Henry L. Savage, "The Significance of the Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and*

the Green Knight," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 27, 1928, pp. 1–15.

14) Rooney examines almost all the critical analyses of the hunt scenes, which is very valuable and informative (159–165). Dorothy Yamamoto's criticism of some of them is also of great importance (124–5).

15) Rooney, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

16) *Ibid.*, pp. 192–3.

17) Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: *A Stylistic and Metrical Study*, Yale UP, 1962, p. 122.

18) Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, Clarendon, 1995, p. 35.

19) Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*, U of Pennsylvania P, 1991, p. 111.

20) All passages of *SGGK* are taken from the edition by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron.

21) The passage is taken from the edition by Ralph Hanna.

22) The passage is taken from the edition by Thorlac Turville-Petre.

23) Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, editors, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*: *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 5th ed., U of Exeter P, 2007, p. 256.

24) Ryan R. Judkins, "The Game of the Courtly Hunt: Chasing and Breaking Deer in Late Medieval English Literature," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 112, No. 1, 2013, pp. 70–92, pp. 80–4.

25) Rooney, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–171.

26) *Sir Tristrem*, ll. 441–517.

27) *Ipomadon*, ll. 681–6.

28) *Guy of Warwick*, ll. 6417–66; *The Avowing of King Arthur*, ll. 164–256; *Eglamour of Artois*, ll. 370–408; *Partonope of Blois*, ll. 524–562, 2227–88.

29) *Guy of Warwick*, l. 6455; *The Avowing of King Arthur*, ll. 245–6; *Eglamour of Artois*, l. 397; *Partonope of Blois*, l. 550.

30) *Guy of Warwick*, ll. 6457–59; *The Avowing of King Arthur*, ll. 251–3; *Eglamour of Artois*, ll. 406–7; *Partonope of Blois*, l. 553, l. 2274.

31) Rooney, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

32) *Ibid.*, p. 184. Cf. Alain Renoir, "Descriptive Technique in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Orbis Litterarum*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1958, pp. 126–132, pp. 131–2.

33)　J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, editors, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd ed., revised by Norman Davis, Oxford UP, 1967, pp. 118–9.

34)　J.A. Burrow, for example, doubts the symbolic connection between Gawain, the deer and the boar, but, concerning the foxhunt and the third temptation, he says the "'parallel' … is obvious" (98). Marcelle Thiébaux also links the *Gawain* poet's fox with the medieval symbolism of the fox that used to stand for the deadly sins in penitential works.

35)　Salisbury also discusses the fox in exemplar literature; although previous scholarship underlines the negative aspects of the fox in our poem, the fox is not always evil according to her argument (102–3). There is also an interesting fact that we can observe the fox's craftiness in Japanese folklore, as well as its deification.

36)　The passage is taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

37)　Rooney, *loc. cit.*

38)　*Ibid.*

39)　*Beues of Hamtoun*, ll. 4617–18.

40)　Rooney refers only to the parallels between Gawain and the fox in respect of the desire to live (191).

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