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Kerasote, Ted. *Bloodties: Nature, Culture, and the Hunt.* New York: Random House, 1993. Pp. xxii, 277. Notes. $22.

At a time when anti-hunting sentiments are popular, when gun control is high on political agendas, when the treatment of animals is a regular discussion item, and when several other blood sports have been outlawed, Kerasote provides a "catchy" and powerful title. I expected a reasoned and scholarly account of hunting similar to José Ortega y Gasset's classic, *Meditations on Hunting* (1942). However, I was somewhat disappointed.

Ted Kerasote is a naturalist and outdoor journalist who writes a column called "EcoWatch" for *Sports Afield,* one of America's largest and most widely read outdoor magazines. He lives in northwestern Wyoming where his property borders the southeast comer of Grand Teton National Park. Here, Kerasote lives, writes, and hunts. With a particular attraction and fondness for the region surrounding his home, Kerasote's joy is trying to live off the land as "my way of tasting the gravity that holds me to this place." He believes "eating from the wild entails a different relationship with the earth than does agriculture" (p. xviii).

Kerasote grew up hunting, renounced it for a time and became a vegetarian, and eventually began to hunt again. But, only certain animals. He became intrigued with the idea of a person trying to do the least harm to his environment while at the same time realizing that everyone needed to eat. He eventually wondered whether "killing for necessary food could really be acting with disharmony" (p. xx) and he decided to study people who continue to hunt.

For his research, Kerasote traveled to Greenland and lived with the Inuit, Arctic dwellers who must hunt norwhals, polar bears, and seals to survive. He also accompanied a group of American trophy hunters to Siberia to hunt snow sheep and vie for the world's highest hunting awards. Finally, he looked at himself and other hunters who could not be placed in either of the other two groups, who hunted because they believed "the practice makes them a more mindful member of their bioregion" (p. xxi). These different hunting "cultures" become the three major parts of the book and are discussed as "Food," "Trophies," and "Webs." Parts I and II have eight short chapters in each and Part III is made up of 10 short chapters. References and additional explanatory notes are listed by page number and grouped at the end of the book.

Part I, dealing with the Greenlanders, is a day-to-day account of a life dependent upon great hunters, kayakers, dogs and dogsleds, and experts with a harpoon or rifle. Kerasote found they treated the animals they hunted with respect by taking only what they needed and paying homage to the sacrifice their prey made. For example, when the first seal is killed, all of the hunters share a "communal meal of liver and blubber, eaten kneeling around the dead animal" (p. 13). In this regard, Kerasote quotes an Abnaki hunter who tells

the animal he has just killed that "I have killed you because I need your skin for my coat and your flesh for my food. I have nothing else to live on" (p. 1). He also examines other customs, ceremonies, and rules of the hunt which are understood and followed without argumentation.

Kerasote begins Part II by quoting a passage from Elgin Gates' *Trophy Hunter in Asia:*

> The true trophy hunter is a self-disciplined perfectionist seeking a single animal, the ancient patriarch well past his prime that is often an outcast from his own kind. This hunter is a mixture of sportsman and conservationist, testing his skills and resources against the crafty instincts and wariness of a wise old ram, hunting with the intent to kill the very animal he admires and respects. If successful, he will enshrine the trophy in a place of honor (p. 85).

However, after spending time visiting and hunting with some members of Safari Club International. Kerasote uncovered some questionable trophy-collecting tactics and hunting practices. In their quest to get into the record book, some hunters broke federal laws banning the importation of protected species. Others hunted from airplanes.

As in the previous parts, Part III begins with an excerpt from Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams,* which captures Kerasote's personal frustration and confrontation with the irony of killing animals while trying to live a moral life.

> No culture has yet solved the dilemma each has faced with the growth of a conscious mind: how to live a moral and compassionate existence when one is fully aware of the blood, the horror inherent in all life, when one finds darkness not only in one's own culture but within oneself. If there is a stage at which an individual life becomes truly adult, it must be when one grasps the irony in its unfolding and accepts responsibility for a life lived in the midst of such paradox (p. 173).

In dealing with his own feelings and his attempt to give more structure to the interface between nature and culture, Kerasote interviewed hunters, searched deeper into his own beliefs, read academic literature, and spent some time with representatives from The Fund for Animals. Because of the more personal nature of Part III and Kerasote's honesty, this is the best part of the book.

Kerasote found considerable substance in Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and agreed with Leopold's idea of preserving the entire "biotic community" or "bioregion" as an "ecosystem." For Kerasote, another name for these three terms was "my home." In fact, he wrote *Bloodties* "for home," and noted it on the dedication page. It is also by his standard of home that Kerasote judges hunting. He argues for "mindful participation" between people and their bioregion by eating only food from that area. If this is not done, they will become "disconnected from the place

in which they live and less likely to care for it," and lose "the foundation of an ethical relationship between people and their country, between culture and nature . . . " (p. 238). Therefore, Kerasote hunts "because it attaches me to this place and the animals I love . . . ." In hunting elk in particular, he says "they are the loved totem of my home . . . because this home makes them and leaves them free . . . and because eating them does nothing to increase the aggregate pain of the world" (p. 240).

Bloodties is strong in some areas and weak in others. In particular, early portions of the book are written more like a hunting diary whereas the latter chapters reveal a thoughtful testimony of why Kerasote hunts. He is a skilled and mature writer and he keeps you turning the pages with his craft and style. Kerasote is also good at delineating the ethical paradoxes and moral dilemmas surrounding the killing of animals for food or sport. However, in the end, I was most impressed by Kerasote's unabashed love for his home environment and his ability to put his innermost feelings into words. On this plane alone, Kerasote stands with Aldo Leopold who wrote so passionately about his "home range" and Roderick Haig-Brown *(A River Never Sleeps,* 1946) who bared all when he discussed his "home river."

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