

Hummel, Richard. *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, Popular Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993. Pp. ii, 186. Notes, bibliography, subject index. \$18.95 pb., \$39.95 cb.

When Richard Hummel rose to address his audience in the “Hunting, Fishing, Conservation and Ecology” session at last April’s meeting of the *Popular Culture Association* in Chicago, he did not directly deal with his new book, as, presumably, many of us hoped. Rather, he spoke to the troubling problem of inclusion. Discussing two other books in the same genre, he questioned just how thoroughly a useful publication might cover its topic. This perspective, exhibiting as it does a realistic awareness of a probable audience, is an appropriate one from which to discuss Hummel’s *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, Popular Culture*.

Bowling Green State University’s press release, distributed at the book fair associated with the conference mentioned above, describes *Hunting and Fishing* as having four parts, each of which generally approaches a segment of information relevant to scholars interested in popular culture, the history of sport, and the outdoors. In addition, the press copywriters provide a typical question-cluster lead: “Why do humans continue to hunt and fish for sport, especially in the face of growing public opposition? Why are the social sciences so reluctant to investigate these popular human sporting recreations? . . .,” before, I think inappropriately, claiming that “these questions and more are answered by the author . . .” Yet, neither the thoughtful comments delivered by Hummel at the conference nor a careful consumption of *Hunting and Fishing for Sport* lead me to believe that the author assumes such questions are answerable—certainly not within the scope of his brief book.

Hummel’s intellectual focus seems to be a very cautious negotiation among a generally naive readership, a vast body of knowledge and personal

comprehension, and attention to the sorts of questions noted on the press flier. Much more than provide answers, the author seeks to define, describe, and explain some of the dimensions of such questions. His rigorously narrowed text illuminates a path for readers but does not clear it of the many natural boulders, ruts, roots, and false turnings with which it is rightfully composed. It's up to us to keep our footing on the complex terrain.

As is perhaps the case with all texts, Hummel's design is not entirely uniform. For example, his chapter six of part three (each of the four parts of this book is comprised of two or three chapters) is largely personal narrative delivered with unusual candor. This material could well touch readers much more directly via its reliance on rhetorical devices entirely different from those called to fore in the other chapters. The kind of emotional honesty offered here demands a concordant forthrightness in the consumer; no doubt not all of us are willing, or perhaps able, to muster such a receptive posture.

Richard Hummel, who is a professor of sociology at Eastern Illinois University (he teaches social stratification, public opinion, and propaganda), faced a daunting task when he deigned to create *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, Popular Culture*. Because the book is brief, less than 200 pages, each of the 10 chapters indicates a strong presence of editorial restraint. This feature, especially in the first two parts, likely makes the book handy as an introductory text while perhaps reducing its utility for readers already involved in this area. Hummel's parts three and four approach the inquiry from uncommon perspectives, while still exhibiting a parsimonious tone.

The first two sections of this book largely place the phenomena of sport hunting and fishing into a proper context. As mentioned above, they perform yeoman's work of informing a naive reader. The powerful personal narrative material is in section three. Section four, with its three chapters, deals with the portrayal of sport hunting in popular films, hunting and fishing themes in late nineteenth-century boys' books, and the commodification of hunting and fishing.

Obviously, the design concept driving *Hunting and Fishing for Sport* precludes individual chapters being crafted as exhaustive, or even entirely thorough. This reality catches the thread mentioned by Hummel at the conference: how does one budget within a vast information pool? Viewed, or maybe better said, read as a whole, *Hunting and Fishing for Sport* offers consumers a survey of relevant issues, a gloss of important questions, and a good deal of insight related to such sport participation.

The text is unblemished by jargon; readers seeking discussion teased out to the sharpness of a wheel-roughed edge will be disappointed as will those desiring a Baconian data storm.

Curiously, the sections devoted to popular culture which close the book are handled in a way that may be viewed as eccentric by literary theory or film theory readers. Hummel eschews protocols of such research which often demand that commentary place the artifact in a particular context, usually

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defined by tradition, genre, auteurist notions, and so on. For example, films are placed categorically by content; directors and scriptwriters are unnamed. Moreover, the films are not sited in oeuvre or by proximal history. This format allows a very brisk presentation of a theme but may frustrate some specialists.

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