

Hufford, Mary T. *Chaseworld: Foxhunting and Storytelling in New Jersey's Pine Barrens*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992. Pp. xii, 219. Notes, photographs, maps, appendices, index, \$13.95.

In *Chaseworld*, Mary T. Hufford offers a rich, thickly described ethnography of a group of foxhunters and their beloved hounds, whom they train to chase after the foxes of New Jersey's Pine Barrens—a heavily wooded space in the Lebanon State Forest. Hufford, whose monograph emerges from a decade of field research, brings with her a long-standing curiosity of how space is used and place is made in and through folklore. The Folklife Specialist at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, Hufford proposes here to analyze the relationship of these hunters to their foxhounds, demonstrating how during the chase the dogs become symbolic extensions of their owners. As they negotiate the landscape in hot pursuit of a fleeing fox, their enthusiastic barking is experienced by their masters as musical melodies. In fact, in contrast to the practice decades ago, the foxhounds are now called off before they actually consummate their pursuit by killing the fox. “Killing the fox is not their [the hunters'] aim, for within their lifetimes the fox has gone from being despised as vermin to being prized as a conductor of symphonies” (p. 23).

Hufford argues that these foxchases, an ages-old cultural formation consisting usually of several dog owners and their hounds, are indeed discursive performances in which an articulation of hunter, animal, and landscape allows for the production and performance of key cultural symbols. When these hunts occur and when the stories that construct them are uttered, she explains, a special “enclave” is conjured—or a symbolic boundary or a liminal province of meaning is crossed into—wherein hunters and their dogs each become storytellers orchestrating an alternate reality, separate from the realm of “everyday” activity. This enclave is what Hufford calls the “Chaseworld.”

This book issues from a perspective deeply embedded in symbolic anthropology, out of a Geertzian and Tumerian tradition, and throughout a textual view of culture is paramount. “Foxhunters are both authors and readers of a text they continually inscribe onto each other and their surroundings, including hounds, foxes, and landscapes lent to the Chaseworld by the Ordinary” (p. 8). Classical interpretive anthropology has become less popular in

the wake of criticisms of its elusiveness and of its obscuring the role of the human actor and the realm of history. Hufford successfully maneuvers around some of these prior pitfalls of the interpretive method, however, by insisting that meaning does not inhere in a text but rather emerges through the dialogic interaction of text and reader. She concentrates upon and argues that various spatial and temporal boundaries are constructed and maintained by the hunters and their dogs, which they can ritually cross over by enacting a hunt or by telling a hunting story.

It is during these ritual moments of the Chaseworld that, Hufford suggests, a liminalized inversion of structure unfolds in which the ordinary concerns of daily life are suspended and hunters are able to confront and reckon key symbols in their lives. For example, the fox is viewed as a complex sign incorporating both elements of nature and culture which allows hunters—almost exclusively male—an opportunity to participate in nature. She explains that women and foxes are seen as being closer to nature than men and their hounds, and that historically women—commonly associated with the domestic sphere—have been seen as having the capacity to mediate nature and culture through giving birth and cooking food. Her thesis is that within the Chaseworld, women are excluded and thus men on the hunt have privileged access to the space of nature and are able to “achieve contact with nature through the androgynous fox” (p. 135). While not grotesque structuralism, this approach does seem to rely too much upon static binary categories, and in general, the separation of the Chaseworld and the Ordinary may be over-rehearsed.

Hufford’s integration of so many disciplines and theories—from cultural geography to symbolic anthropology and from structuralism to narrative science—is exceptionally ambitious and praiseworthy. In spite of its structural elements, *Chaseworld* adopts an enlightened approach to history, which Hufford considers a provisional, localized narrative of memory, event, struggle, and time, whose meaning is always found in the social. The authors of history may even be foxhounds, as revealed in the following passage:

Unassisted by journals, hounds prompt involuntary memories through their voices, thresholds to the past that are in some ways less destructible than cabins and journals. The languages of hounds and foxes do not vary over time and space as radically as do the languages of humans. Hounds’ voices animate landscape features saturated with personal memories and meanings. Foxes and hounds careen over the landscapes, roaring out their images, lighting up scenes that were long ago emblazoned in the mind. The foxchase loosens nuggets of memory that . . . pop to the surface. (p. 33)

Moreover, the ethnography is enlivened by rich, highly personalized portraits of the principal foxhunters, and they are conceived of as human actors endowed by an agentive, creative persona.

Although she refers to the men who raise and run these hounds as “working-class” throughout, Hufford barely begins to clarify the issue in chapter three, when she claims that most American foxhunters define themselves as working class against the historical backdrop of the English foxhunting tradition and against current-day English-style hunters whom the Pine Barrens folks see as aristocratic snobs who ride horseback as they run their carefully pedigreed dogs. In contrast, these Pine Barrens men are proud of their close-to-nature approach in which *unregistered* hounds are used. Unfortunately, Hufford elides this area of analysis about how class-identity is played out in the Chaseworld, and this topic should be greatly expanded. Moreover, her portrait of these foxhunts seems occasionally to ignore conflict, incongruity, and contradiction, opting instead for a view of culture as a smooth, orderly process. On the contrary, “Culture is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony” (Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, p. 278).

Generally, *Chaseworld* is a fine example of an eclectic retooling of a broad range of diverse theories and their application to a carefully gathered array of ethnographic material. In the context of a renewed anthropological and sociological interest in integrating the human senses and experience into cultural analysis, Hufford’s project is timely, as she claims. “The actual space of a foxchase is aromatically and acoustically determined” (p. 47). While it occasionally seems overdetermined by concentration on social codes, rules, boundaries, and symbolic structures, it emerges as sound research on the basis of rigorous descriptive analysis and historical richness.

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