

A Metaphor for Sport: Shakespeare's Use of Falconry in the Early Plays

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Quantitatively, there is ample evidence of the numeric, proportional significance of sport imagery in the plays by Shakespeare. Relative to five of his contemporary dramatists, he used sport imagery abundantly. The plays, in fact, reflect accurately the sporting behaviors of the Elizabethan and early Tudor era. The most beautiful and most poignant use of sport imagery in the plays is centered around the universally popular sport of falconry or hawking.

By itself, the vocabulary of the sport of falconry is powerful in terms of the richness of the images and metaphors, if understood by contemporary audiences. The concepts of manning, hoods, jesses, seeling, bells, haggard, imping, checking, pitch, mews, cadge¹ and others were examined in context. Similarly, one entire play, *The Taming of the Shrew* is constructed around falconry images. The metaphor for sport, in this case falconry, is human nature itself. Shakespeare's emphasis in the sport of falconry is upon the spirit of sport, the training, the chase and the enjoyment or pleasure taken in the pursuit rather than the outcome of sport. Such is the essence of sport and Shakespeare's lessons go far beyond merely etymological ones.