

Richard Hummel, *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, Popular Culture*. **Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994.**

The treatment of hunting and fishing sports by sociologists is something of a rarity these days and this is out of all proportion to the very large numbers of people in modern societies who participate in them. This is a North American book aimed at a North American audience but it is still of interest to Australian sports historians or sociologists precisely because hunting and fishing are one of the principal participation sports here and because they are as neglected here as they are in the USA. From our point of view this book holds the promise of demonstrating the historical development of hunting sports, the parameters of modern hunting sports, its articulation with modernity, its place in contemporary ethical and environmental debates and the theoretical debates on hunting sports in modern societies. This book fulfils some of these promises but it is surprisingly silent on the last three.

At the centre of this book lies the question: why have people (mainly men) in modern societies continued to hunt and fish? Although Hummel is aware of the very special social nature of the development of hunting sports, tied as they once were to elite groups in society, this is left hanging somewhat while he pursues more psychologically-oriented questions to do with the nature of the human drives behind the hunting act. There is undoubtedly a place for this material but in the absence of the key sociological, feminist and anthropological arguments it is rendered very vulnerable.

The most interesting part of the book is the up-front admission that the author is a hunter himself: much of the book is structured

around a research project where Hummel tries to understand his own, sometimes ambivalent keenness for hunting. This project took him to several US hunting locations in pursuit of elk, black bear, deer and quail where the description at times descends to the anecdote that has very little point. There are trips to up-market grouse shoots and deer stalking in Scotland; ‘the ultimate hunting fantasy of big game hunting in Africa where he tells of wounding an Impala; and wilderness hunting/fishing in Ontario, Canada. Although this approach might have yielded some very useful in-depth participant observation material, I was disappointed by the brevity and shallowness with which it was reported. The best one can say is that it does provide insights into hunting sub-cultures and the contemporary state of commodification in the hunting market. The fishing fraternity in the US and here (who considerably outnumber hunters) are likely to be very disappointed by the ‘fishing’ content in the book. The final section of the book deals with a separate though related project that looks at the manner in which hunting is dealt with in popular culture (mainly novels and film however) from the nineteenth century on. Adult fiction, children’s books and instructional literature are covered. Again this is a potentially very interesting approach that might yield significant findings. However, much of it is merely a description of the material structured by chronological lists, there is a great deal missing from the literature and the analysis is very brief and predictable. I suspect that some of the weaknesses of the book stem from an attempt to bridge that very difficult divide between popular and academic writing. Nonetheless, there is some valuable material to be found and although its coverage of the available literature is poor, at the very least it is an introduction to North American hunting culture.

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