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H-France Review Vol. 22 (April 2022), No. 54

Bertrand Marquer and Eléonore Reverzy, eds., *Histoires de chasses: Traces et traques dans la littérature du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 289 pp. Notes, index nominum, chapter summaries. €32.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-11802-2.

Review by Corry Cropper, Brigham Young University.

This edited volume studies hunting as a model for reading nineteenth-century literature. Its title, *Histoires de chasse*, implies that the chapters will examine novels and short stories about hunting. A more precise title would have been something like “Cynegetic Metaphors,” a phrase used several times and in multiple chapters, or perhaps “Literary Hunting.” While the essays do look at hunting, hunting language, and hunting stories, they more frequently examine hunting as a metaphor for reading, for uncovering the hermeneutic codes authors leave in their fiction, and for tracking meaning through a narrative woodland.

The theoretical inspiration for this work is Carlo Ginzburg’s book *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (1986). Ginzburg writes: “Man has been a hunter for thousands of years. In the course of countless chases he learned to reconstruct the shapes and movements of his invisible prey from tracks on the ground, broken branches, excrement, tufts of hair, entangled feathers, stagnating odors. He learned to sniff out, record, interpret, and classify such infinitesimal traces as trails of spittle. He learned how to execute complex mental operations with lightning speed, in the depth of a forest or in a prairie with its hidden dangers... ‘To decipher’ or ‘to read’ animal tracks are metaphors.” [1] In one of the book’s essays, Isabelle Safa puts it this way: deciphering literary texts—what she calls the “paradigme indiciaire”—“remont[e] au chasseur qui, à l’aube de l’humanité, est le premier à raconter une histoire en lisant dans les traces une série cohérente d’évènements” (p. 59). As Bertrand Marquer and Eléonore Reverzy state in their introductory essay, “L’homme... pour se nourrir, pour se protéger, pour ordonner la vie du groupe, tente de repérer un sens et un ordre dans la confusion du monde ambiant. La fiction, en ce qu’elle peut restituer cette confusion, invite particulièrement à cette lecture-traque, garante d’un ordre retrouvé et d’un monde maîtrisé” (p. 11). If Ginzburg, Safa, Marquer, and Reverzy are right, that all writing is linked to hunting, to reading signs and traces in the text like a hunter “reads” a forest, to finding order in disorder and mastering the world, then the topic of “hunting” is infinitely vast. This is at once the weakness and the strength of the current work: On the one hand it feels at times like the hunting metaphor is stretched to breaking, that since any text can be viewed as an invitation to hunt, all fiction is hunting literature and all reading—indeed any interpretive act—is a hunt. On the other hand, when literary forms and techniques are tied to the hunt and explained in terms of *la chasse*, it opens up new interpretations of canonical works, and it calls readers to declare, with Sherlock Holmes, that “the game is afoot.”

One chapter, in particular, compellingly engages with the vastness of the book's topic, effectively positing the limits of the hunting metaphor. In her essay on Balzac, Marie Parmentier wonders "si la lecture d'*Une Ténébreuse affaire* obéit à un modèle cynégétique?" (p. 215) This question sets up a section of her essay titled, "La mise en question du modèle cynégétique de la lecture," where Parmentier argues that Balzac's omniscient narrator works at every turn to undermine the reader's ability to effectively decipher clues. The reader, she writes, is more spectator than detective. "Il semble que le roman mette en question le fonctionnement du paradigme indiciaire" (p. 216). This insightful remark is made possible by applying Ginzburg's reading-as-hunting model while simultaneously undermining it, thereby revealing something significant about Balzac's novel and his methods of narration.

Most of the volume's essays, however, *joue le jeu*. That is, they accept Ginzburg's theory of hunting as the origin of reading and storytelling and use his theory to propose readings of various literary texts. Following Marquer and Reverzy's opening essay and a chapter by Denis Thouard titled "L'herméneutique comme cynégétique," the book is divided into three sections: "Poétique de la chasse," "Chasses spirituelles," and "Politique de la chasse." The volume primarily treats canonical French authors such as Balzac, Zola, Maupassant, Sand, Verne, and Dumas. It also examines writings by Doyle, Turgenev, and Cooper. Eugène Chapus, whose nineteenth-century publications cemented the connection between hunting and social climbing in France, is not mentioned, nor is Dunoyer de Noirmont, whose nostalgic 1867 treatise on the grand old days of hunting during the *ancien régime* is titled *Histoire de la chasse* and explicitly describes "une littérature cynégétique."<sup>[2]</sup> And though Elzéar Blaze is referenced in passing, the volume would be stronger with a more extended analysis of his 1840 *Chroniques de la chasse* that presents humorous *histoires de chasses* rivaling those of Maupassant. Fabienne Bercegol's chapter effectively examines hunting and the works of George Sand (most notably *Indiana*, and *Mauprat*) while also addressing works by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Claire de Duras. Other female writers would have made a welcome addition: Victoire de Donnissan de La Rochejaquelein's memoirs mention hunting, for example, and Delphine de Girardin humorously narrates hunting expeditions in her *Lettres parisiennes*.

In the first section, Poétique de la chasse, Pierre Glaudes's piece on Barbey d'Aurevilly's "Le Bonheur dans le crime" and Bernard Demont's work on Maupassant deserve special attention. Glaudes examines Dr. Torty's "déchiffrement des signes" in Barbey's text, highlighting the role of the doctor and pointing ahead to other expert decipherers mentioned later in the work. Demont makes a compelling case for the importance of the hunting metaphor in Maupassant. The structure of Maupassant's short stories parallels the hunt: Clues appear throughout the narratives leading the careful reader toward or away from the prey, until the *chute* when meaning itself is captured, when the ultimate narrative game is suddenly and violently bagged.

The title of the second section, Chasses spirituelles, borrows from Henri Scepi's essay, "La Littérature comme exercice de 'chasse spirituelle,'" that in turn borrows from the title of a lost poem by Rimbaud, one that may or may not exist but that was hinted at by Verlaine. Scepi explains what he means by "chasse spirituelle" in these terms: "J'aimerais faire ici l'hypothèse que la chasse et ses rituels sont la traduction des opérations de l'esprit quand celui-ci confie à la littérature ... le soin d'exposer sans nécessairement les éclaircir les objets forcément obscurs qui s'agent à l'horizon l'œuvre et forment un vague dessin" (p. 158). The bulk of Scepi's chapter focuses on Hugo and Baudelaire who, from 1859 to 1862, "visent, en dépit des accidents du terrain et des circonstances de la traque, un même point de mire: le point de jonction...où le destin

individuel croise la transcendance et converse avec l'infini" (p. 158). Even though the connection to hunting is most tenuous in this section, Scepi's essay is interesting for its insights into the connections between Hugo and Baudelaire. Other essays in this section examine a deceptive fishing expedition in Balzac's *Les Paysans* and the idea of *vagabondage* in the works of Tristan Corbière and Gérard de Nerval.

The final section, *Politique de la chasse*, establishes connections between the hunt and various social and political ideologies in the nineteenth century from French civil war to American populism to abolition. Reverzy's compelling chapter on the *Rougon-Macquart* connects the idea of deviance in Zola's fictional family to the model of the poacher who "ne peut enfanter que des enfants à demi-animaux, des enfants-loups." (p. 243) The book's final chapter by Jean-Marie Seillan is a richly researched essay on hunting in late nineteenth-century novels by well-known authors like Verne and Rosny and largely forgotten authors like Armand Dubarry and Louis Noir set in colonial Africa. Seillan convincingly demonstrates the connection between hunting and colonial attitudes of exploitation and dehumanization.

This work represents an often fascinating meditation on the model of the hunt in a diverse range of nineteenth century fictional texts and argues that hunting, tracking, and trapping are part and parcel of the creative and interpretive process.

#### NOTES

[1] Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 102-3.

[2] Joseph-Anne-Emile-Edouard baron Dunoyer de Noirmont, *Histoire de la chasse en France depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la révolution* (Paris: Mme Ve Bouchard-Huzard, 1867), 2.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Bertrand Marquer and Eléonore Reverzy, "Introduction"

Denis Thouard, "L'herméneutique comme cynégétique: Ouverture"

Part One, Poétique de la chasse

Fabienne Bercegol, "La chasse et ses drames sous la plume des romancières du début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle"

Isabelle Safa, "De la reconstitution du passé: La chasse comme métaphore de l'enquête dans quelques romans d'A. Dumas"

Pierre Glaudes, "Torty à l'affût: Chasse et observation dans *Le Bonheur dans le crime*"

Bernard Demont, "Chasses, traques et proies maupassantiennes"

Jean-Pierre Naugrette, "Sherlock Holmes cynégétique"

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Part Two, Chasses spirituelles

Boris Lyon-Caen, “Balzac fabuliste: ‘Le tour de la loute’ (1844)”

Bertrand Marquer, “‘*Laisser courré*’: Vagabondages cynégétiques”

Henri Scepi, “De la littérature considérée comme exercice de ‘chasse spirituelle’”

Part Three, Politique de la chasse

Cécile Roudeau, “L’éloquence du moccasin: De la démocratie cynégétique en Amérique”

Victoire Feuillebois, “Engagement et désengagement du chasseur tourguéniévien”

Marie Parmentier, “La ‘ténébreuse affaire’ de la chasse chez Balzac: Réflexion sur le modèle cynégétique de la lecture”

Sylvain Ledda, “La traque et la curée: Imaginaire de la chasse et représentations romantiques de la guerre civile”

Eléonore Reverzy, “‘Ma première souche braconnier plus difficile à civiliser’: Pour une lecture braconnière des *Rougon-Macquart*”

Jean-Marie Seillan, “Le roman de chasse à l’époque de la conquête coloniale”

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ISSN 1553-9172