INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

CALLED SHOTS:
BASEBALL AS MODERN AMERICAN FICTION

by

David McGimpsey

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August, 1997

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled "Called Shots: Baseball as Modern American Fiction"

by David Andrew McGimpsey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dated: August 22, 1997

External Examiner

Research Supervisor

Examining Committee

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: Aug. 22 1997

AUTHOR: David McGimpsey

TITLE: Called Shots:
Baseball as Modern American Fiction

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: ENGLISH

DEGREE: PhD CONVOCATION: Oct. 18 YEAR: 1997

Permission is herewith granted to Dalhousie University to circulate and to have copied for non-commercial purposes, at its discretion, the above title upon the request of individuals or institutions.

Signature of Author

to my parents, John & Mary McGimpsey

Called Shots: Baseball as Modern American Fiction.

Table of Contents

Called Shots: Baseball as Modern American Fiction.

Abstract:

Since the turn of the century, baseball has been a reliable source of inspiration for American authors. More recently, however, baseball has emerged as a dependable product in more upscale sections of the literary marketplace. From bestselling novels turned into strong box-office movies, from PBS documentaries to op-ed pieces in *The New York Review of Books*, from anthologies of baseball literature to doctoral dissertations, baseball has laid claim to a "literary" identity no other sport and few other products of mass-culture enjoy. Within the borders of this outgrowth, the baseball novel in particular has been shaped into a uniquely self-sustaining companion to the popular sport.

At first glance, the baseball novel tends to have a simple function; the game is used as a nostalgic locator for simpler times, more coherent passions, and healthy, patriotic fun. But on closer examination, baseball fiction, like the game it depends upon for its appeal, is defined by its conflicts: the perfect game is played by imperfect people; an imagined pastoral game takes shelter under the big-city dome; "America's game" closes its ranks to a select few; the idea of a game "for the kids" is pressured by the anxious restructuring of the American family. The very idea of "baseball literature" itself is conflicted as the cultured assurances of its identity as a bona fide literary art are articulated in and around a constituency with strong anti-intellectual traditions.

The most common tropes in baseball fiction (baseball as aesthetically and spiritually faultless, baseball as pastoral, baseball as meritocracy, baseball as father and son reunion) would not appear as often as they do if these claims were self-evidently true. When an author chooses to use a baseball setting in some way he or she will end up advancing, interrogating and / or condemning these tropes. (Unlike baseball players, baseball-novelists are in full control of the outcomes of their "games.") While baseball fiction finally eludes a simple, generic classification, taken as a whole it offers a well-contained, evocative, metonymic critique of the conflicts inherent in the ideas of America at play. Understood as a cultural product, baseball fiction offers a unique perspective on the entertainment industry, literary trends, and the state of the nation in the Reagan / Bush era.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the following people for their valued insights and encouragements during the completion of this manuscript: Ronda Arab, Gail August, Arjun Basu, John Bennett, Alicia Boutilier, April Bulmer, Marcella Bungay, Meredith Dellandrea, Len Diepeveen, Kevin Flynn, John Fraser, Bruce Greenfield, Michael Holmes, Don Johnson, Pnina Kass, Mike Klug, Nick Lolordo, Scott Macdonald, Karen Massey, David McNeil, Dick Miller, Nick and Bernadette Mount, Laurie Near, Lyle Olsen, Elaine Ostry, Malcolm Ross, Nick and Heather Van Herk, Jennifer Wain and Andy Wainwright. I would also like to thank everybody at noon hour ball at the Dalplex, all my softball teammates, and the Sports Literature Association. Special gratitude to Doug, Heather, Lynn, Jim and Mary Crosbie; to my loving wife (and Halifax's greatest bookseller) Carol for all her invaluable wisdom about the book industry and all her understanding support, to my sister Janice, my brother Johnny and his family, and to my brother Mike for all our baseball summers.

Called Shots: Baseball as Modern American Fiction.

David McGimpsey

ONE

The Great Escape:
Introducing Baseball Literature

"A Baseball Player! What could be more American?"
-from Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe*

"Fanaticism? No. Writing is exciting
and baseball is like writing.
You can never tell with either
how it will go
or what you will do"
-Marianne Moore *Baseball and Writing*

What is Baseball Literature?

That baseball has become a celebrated literary metaphor for America is already old news. The efficacy of the metaphor is debatable but the broad base of its appeal is solid. The constant attention the sport and its metaphorical province have received from prominent authors has, over the years, helped establish "baseball literature" as a fairly recognizable cultural product: baseball literature extends beyond the collected writing about the game and into popular theories and shared musings about the game's social, cultural, political and aesthetic significance. When called to imagine something called "baseball literature" one may as likely come up with a composite picture which includes George Will editorials, Ken Burns' PBS fundraiser, and Kevin Costner films as well as Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel.* The idea that there actually is something known as "baseball literature" is a testament to the feeling that the popular sport says something *important* about America and Americans. While taken as a whole this cultural product often articulates the political conservatism and patriotism of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the meanings of the individual texts of baseball literature just as often escape ready identification. Like the game it comments upon, baseball literature is defined by its competing ideologies.

The establishment of baseball literature as a dependable product in the literary marketplace probably has less to do with the elasticity of the metaphor than with the commercial appeal of the primary subject. And the assumptions which have been successfully targeted to help secure baseball's "literary" identity are now not an insignificant element in organized baseball's self-promotions. Following the respected tradition of American sports writing and sports reading, sports books are obviously appealing to publishers as they attempt to engage a known, dependable readership. So, it happens every spring: publishing houses flood the market with baseball books as the alleged lark of "summer reading" has become one of the book industry's great cash cows.[1] Over the years, as the market for baseball books has become increasingly sophisticated and demanding, a wide range of baseball books have separated themselves from typical jock biographies and recollections of what it must have been like to be Vince DiMaggio. Sports pulp still is a large part of the market, but baseball books have become increasingly upscale and are demographically targeted for the summer reading dollar of college-educated Americans.

---

[1] In bookselling there are generally two retail seasons: Fall-Winter, which tends to focus on books as gifts; and Spring-Summer, which usually emphasizes light reading.

A more discernably high brow "literary" appeal is now an element of baseball's public image, particularly as the sport attempts to define itself in a competitive market where it no longer is the most popular American sport. Casting competitors as low-brow, or as insubstantial, baseball advertising strategies will sometimes spin on its historically-imbued "poetry" to appeal to the all-important book or ticket buyer. This is not a boardroom plot, but a marketing consideration based upon the general acceptance that baseball can be a "serious" subject and, more importantly, that the aging center of baseball's fan base is interested in more than the crossword puzzle in *Baseball Digest.*

While baseball was not always thought of as an appropriate subject for serious literature it now enjoys a literary identity unique among products of popular culture. Not only are Pulitzer Prize winning authors like Donald Hall and David Halberstam writing poetry and prose on the subject, many literary presses are shoring up their frontlists with baseball titles, while colleges and universities are devoting courses to baseball literature and awarding degrees based upon a literary pursuit of baseball. (Although one should never underestimate traditional resistance to the study of popular culture, in the course of completing this manuscript I've never met any real indignation toward the concept of *baseball literature.* The common acceptance that such a thing as baseball literature actually exists is, I think, well established.) It comes as no surprise then to see something like the combined University Press listing *The Scholar's Bookshelf* save space for "Baseball History and Reference," a distinction which is not granted to any other sport, or even to sport itself.

Other sports may lay claim to distinctive books and scholarly articles about them (boxing, golf and football in particular), but, for a variety of reasons, they have not established themselves as self-sustaining cultural products. Once, boxing was *the* sportswriter's sport, but the violence of the pastime has somewhat discredited its appeal. Golf, although sharing many of baseball's beloved physical properties, and the subject of countless books, is often cast as too exclusive for the kind of popular philosophy baseball enthusiasts like to embrace. Football, arguably the most popular sport in the United States, will time and time again be condemned by the baseball writer for its imagined vulgar sins.[2] Actually, baseball's literati will often speak of a special relationship the game of baseball has to the art of writing. The belief that baseball has a unique literary claim which no other

---

[2] Quite often, accrediting baseball's perfection is accomplished by discrediting the aesthetics of other professional sports, in particular the incredibly popular NFL. Football has thus become an important signifier in baseball literature. Where baseball is sanctified and tempered, football is baseball's evil cousin: violent, TV-driven, clock-enslaved, and muscle bound.

sport may declare has in some ways problematized the critical project of sports literature as the overwhelming interest in baseball often divides the sports-lit field into "baseball" and "non-baseball" writing. Whatever authentic merits this claim to the literary distinctiveness of baseball may have, there is no denying the popular success of the notion that baseball is, as Canadian author George Bowering put it, "the poet's game" (115).

Baseball poets and fiction writers in fact now have several literary journals to submit their work about baseball to. What is surprising about publications like *The Fan*, *Spitball*, *Dug Out* and *Elysian Fields* is not that they actually receive submissions but that they do a fair job in avoiding mere fanzine doggerel, celebratory jingles or simple nostalgia. These small journals provide a place where, in the words of *Spitball's* Mike Shannon, "the editors might not disqualify a poem or a story because it was about baseball, but where the use of baseball as a subject matter was the first consideration" (13). And it may be in part due to the front-line success of journals like *Spitball* (which is the most successful and sophisticated of these journals) that such baseball disqualifications do not now really exist in the mainstream; both *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* have published their fair share of serious baseball literature.

Roger Angell's regular baseball roundups in *The New Yorker*, Thomas Boswell's articles for *The Washington Post* and Stephen Jay Gould's pieces for *The New York Review of Books* have done much to reify baseball's pre-eminence among literary sports. The writerly identity that emerges from this kind of op-ed discourse is perhaps one that is best embodied by the narrative authority given to the talking heads of Ken Burns' television documentary *Baseball* (1994). It is a discourse which is often highly intellectualized, full of grand similes, and usually with an affirmative spin; baseball, it is said, is part of what makes America great. In the course of developing this discourse, with baseball's spokespersons' inveterate mooning over the great teams of Boston and New York, as typified in the public television special, it was perhaps inevitable that baseball literature would take on a largely East Coast and academic uniform. And thus dressed, baseball lit often casts the West Coast as the television and entertainment obsessed, Dodger-stealing villains.

In Hollywood, however, the baseball movie is also a reliable summer staple. And, as is the case in many bookselling windfalls, the box-office success of any given baseball film becomes an important catalyst in fomenting a baseball literature "canon." For example, while Stephen King novels did well before films of his novels became box-office hits, the Stephen King literary industry -- including his scores of imitators -- only began after the product was proven *au cinema*. The success of movies like *Bull Durham*, *Field of Dreams*, and *A League of Their Own*, has done as much as anything to assert the

intellectual legitimacy of baseball as a metaphor. (Certainly one reason why people are not surprised by the idea of baseball literature is that practically everybody is familiar with popular baseball films like *The Natural*, *Bang the Drum Slowly* or, at the very least, *The Bad News Bears*.) For obvious reasons, the success of baseball movies makes writing original material about baseball quite tempting: the possibility of film-rights big bucks is certainly not an insignificant consideration.

Television is in many ways a more obvious reservoir for baseball literature's cultivation than are literary antecedents. Televised broadcasts of baseball games are the most dependable medium for a contemporary understanding of the sport. While some baseball literature has a Luddite-like fear of technology and a hostility to television in particular, the "shared history" of baseball is often rooted in television nostalgia. The dramatic images of shared baseball history -- Willie Mays' catch, Carlton Fisk's home run, -- are also television moments, and the surviving videos of these moments serve as a kind of general proof of authenticity. Following the market developments initiated by radio and newspapers (media which are still constitutive elements of baseball's popularity) television helps preserve professional baseball's "national" identity and dramatically extends the shared history that is so important to baseball's literary artifacts. It's significant then that the eighteen and a half hour Ken Burns documentary, finally skewed with a sense that television was a source of baseball's spiritual doom, was itself a commercially ambitious recognition of television's unique authority to represent baseball.

While not nearly as lucrative, the emergence of literary criticism about baseball is not as far removed from Hollywood baseball as one might imagine. While the critical response to baseball literature is varied enough to inhibit a simplistic characterization, the fact that the literary metaphor is being unpacked and discussed in a serious academic way is also a sure sign of the depth of the impression the cultural product has left (i.e. more blockbusters like *Field of Dreams*, more essays on baseball as an important metaphor). The existence of polished academic journals like *Aethlon* and the more recent *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy Perspective*, helps students and teachers understand the critical issues of the game, and each is another log in the fire, adding credibility to the very idea of baseball literature. Essays like "Running the Basepaths: Baseball and Jane Austen," which get published in lit-crit journals may have little traffic with the ordinary fan, but the same ordinary fan is also assailed by the "high brow" marketing techniques which are borne out of the same *gestalt*, the same era of baseball literature.

The working class roots of the fan base for the game and the popular appeal of baseball make it a likely study in the generalities of Americana, but this reality also causes a

palpable friction with the more high brow aims of baseball literature. One of the main characteristics of the literary study for baseball is its very quest for credibility, its tortured apologies and its claim on an audience who may appreciate the metaphor, but do not have a taste for the historical complexities and trivia of its subject. It sometimes seems like every good book about baseball has a blurb meant to assure the potential reader that "even if you're not a baseball fan, you'll like. . . ." So, in the face of the voluminous trivia of the sports fan, baseball literature expresses a considerable anxiety. This anxiety is understandable considering the indefatigable argumentations of trivia, but odd when measured against more stable objects of literary study. Imagine if every book about Melville were prefaced with assurances that there will be no "whaling trivia" and entreaties that "even if you don't like sea stories. . . ."[3] Ultimately, the production of baseball literature is less concerned with the scores of actual baseball games than with how baseball tropes engage the reader's sense of what is right and what is wrong with the sport.

In his essay *Baseball: Our Game*, John Thorn writes, "Baseball is not a conventional industry. It belongs neither to the players nor management, but to all of us. It is our national pastime, our national symbol, and our national treasure" (52). This is the kind of statement that abounds in baseball literature, a testimonial perennially repackaged and articulated as the space demands, whether it be in *The Times*, on a movie screen or in a speech from Washington. Neither completely hokum nor self-evidently true, this kind of statement energizes baseball literature as having something to talk about besides batting averages or low and away curves. It claims baseball can be about more than its games and that it can warm-up the whole country in its feel-good embrace. Roger Angell, criticizing what he calls the "hyperglycemic" readings of the game found in the contemporary cinema, asks something that goes to the very heart of baseball literature as a cultural product, and can be used to interrogate even the "anti-glycemic" readings:

> I like baseball, the game and the games, but I can't understand why it's so hard to look at the game with a clear gaze. We seem to want to go on sweetening it up, frosting the flakes, because we want it to say things about ourselves that probably aren't true. (*Once More Around the Park* 345)

---

[3] I will try not to make similar apologies or second guess the knowledgability of my readers. My basic feeling is that no matter what one says some people just will not read a book if the genre or subgenre does not appeal to them. Some will just not read a detective novel, a science fiction novel, or whatever, even if you assure them it could be the greatest book of all time.

It doesn't sound too nutritious, but the meal you are about to receive in this manuscript is almost "pure frosting." That is, by definition, baseball literature is not the real thing. Literary representations of arts that are not literary, like music, art, or dance, must lose something in the translation but may also create their own literary systems and generic imperatives in the process of representing the non-literary art. In other words, the frosting can taste really good -- sometimes it is even better than the flakes.

Frosting the flake is what baseball literature must do. What remains in question, however, even in the case of Angell, is the taste of the frosting. And that is still pretty much open to interpretation. The metaphor of baseball *qua* America can mean just about anything to anyone, and trying to impose a generic structure or a literary history to baseball literature is both premature and suspect to the partisan humors of the enthusiast. What is important to ask, however, is why baseball literature and why now? In the course of this book I aim to look at the main areas of contestation in baseball literature by paying specific attention (and giving proper context) to the dominant tropes in baseball fiction, and in so doing arrive at a sense of how baseball literature has been able to assert itself as a compelling cultural product. This is also an opportunity to question baseball literature beyond its claim to existence, to take its critical reception to a different stage, to test the longevity of baseball's claims to literary specialness and finally, to ask how the concerns of baseball literature mesh with the concerns of average baseball fans like me.

Here is a brief list of the most common tropes and assertions found in baseball literature:

> -Baseball is perfect and God-given. (But, nonetheless, vulnerable to the worst in human beings.)
>
> -Baseball is the best sport and "naturally" amenable to literary representation.
>
> -Baseball's setting is more important than its outcomes.
>
> -Baseball is America at its best: a non-violent America where all are judged on merit that can be quantified.
>
> -It's about the kids. It's about fathers and sons.
>
> -Modern baseball is a failure.

These assertions are not unambiguously stated; and they appear repeatedly because they are at the contested centre of what baseball as a metaphor might signify. That is to say, baseball fiction, like all baseball literature, is defined by conflict.

What About *Baseball Fiction*?

Baseball literature is far too expansive and varied to be thought of as a single, historical unit. And with some deference to the volumes written about the sport, I will be limiting my analysis, for the most part, to baseball fiction and particularly to baseball novels. But even so, baseball fiction is not a unified, comprehensive collection of works. According to the R. Plapinger catalogue (the most dependable resource for baseball book orders) there are nearly 600 baseball fiction titles, with more to be rediscovered and more on the way. My discussion of baseball fiction then is not meant to be comprehensive or even to serve as a historical overview of a genre or a subgenre. Rather, I've selected some of the most popular baseball novels of all time, a few of the less popular, and few of the more recent baseball novels to expose and contextualize the internal controversies and limitations of their repeated tropes. And in so doing, I hope to develop a fuller account of the contemporary interest in the baseball novel.

The baseball novel has also become a dependable product in the literary marketplace. Baseball literature's retail products exist in a segmented market, where upscale products like *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* are distinguished from (yet sold side-by-side with) traditional products like *Felipe Alou . . . My Life and Baseball*, and baseball fiction has benefited from a successful targeting of the upscale segment. Given the intensification of niche-marketing in the bookselling world, the success of baseball movies, the growth in attendance in professional baseball's major leagues and the aging, largely male demographic target -- it is not surprising baseball novels would become a recognizable feature in publisher's front lists. (Looking at the fact that baseball fiction and poetry is often sold in the sports rather than the fiction or poetry sections of bookstores, the importance of the sport as a marketing strategy becomes obvious.) However, rather than develop a recognizable generic pattern, in the way one might think of formula fiction, the baseball novel has remained stylistically diverse. There are still very few fiction writers who write about baseball more than once; often the very good baseball novels are the result of a very good author's single attempt to explore the game's metaphorical potential. Furthermore, the definition of a baseball novel is not one without vague borders: we can define it as any novel that uses baseball as its "controlling metaphor" (Candelaria 14), but the firmness of this "control" when the metaphor is engaged is always debatable. But, in baseball novels, the use of this particular "controlling metaphor" might attract a certain interest that would be missing if the author chose to use a less culturally entrenched metaphor. In other words, *The Natural* could be about a

preternaturally gifted javelin tosser, but the text would probably not interest as many readers.

The literary history of baseball fiction has its hits and misses, its hot and cold streaks. The earliest mentions of baseball in literature -- or some variant called "base ball" -- appear in works by canonical authors like Jane Austen, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Walt Whitman.[4] These brief literary engagements of the game, particularly Whitman's line about "It's our game -- the American game" (Folsom 73), are repeated over and over in recapitulations of the sport's literary pedigree, most often not to examine the import of the authors' statements but to demonstrate the intellectual respectability of the game. Of course, considering the burst of popularity the game experienced in the late nineteenth century in America, it's odd that *more* writers did not write about the summer pastime. Even taking into account Twain's and Whitman's brief comments upon baseball, for most of the great American authors of the 19th century, baseball did not quite exist.

The list of 20th Century American literature standard bearers who have said *something* about the game *in passim* is lengthy. And in the course of this chapter I will be specifically looking at the significance of statements made by William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams as a way of introducing the issues that constitute the defining antagonisms of baseball literature. Still, the only author who was writing serious adult fiction about (or around) the game before the 1950s was Ring Lardner (1885-1933) -- and Lardner is rarely considered on the A-list of great American authors. In truth, Lardner's use of baseball as a main theme was often cited by his contemporaries (like F. Scott Fitzgerald) as evidence of his status as a mere entertainer on the B-list.

There are examples of baseball fiction throughout the twentieth century, but the baseball novel starts to resemble its current form in the 1970s. While a discussion of the concept of the baseball novel often starts with acknowledging the tradition of juvenile sports fiction, there is a danger of overestimating just how much of this tradition can be said to survive in a collection of modern books so varied in narrative strategies. (The "quest for the pennant" motif, or the diary of the championship season, common in juvenile sports fiction, is also a common narrative device for adult baseball fictions, but this strikes me as a common sense strategy that follows the natural shape of the season, more than it harkens to the formulas of juvenile sports fiction -- books the authors of adult baseball fictions may or *may not* have read.) Gil Patten's (Burt L. Standish) Frank Merriwell

---

[4] Each one of these asides-from-the-Great-Books comments on baseball as participatory exercise rather than a spectacle (Goodman and Bauer 226-7).

novels (1899-1910) about a heroic Yale ballplayer and John R. Tunis's baseball books for young men undoubtedly left an impression on the generation of American readers weaned on their immensely popular adventures. And, of course, the Frank Merriwell figure is significantly distilled in the contemporary paradigms of the American sports hero. The literary heritage of these juvenile novels is perhaps more in how they have influenced popular sentiments about the kind of "character" it takes to make a great ballplayer. Merriwell's shadow covers space in mainstream sports fiction, but treating contemporary adult literary baseball products as a late response to the forms of the juvenile sports novel asserts a generic continuity that cannot be demonstrated.

Although a few (now generally unavailable) adult baseball novels were written before the Second World War, modern baseball fiction usually stakes its literary claim with Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952) and Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956).[5] Interestingly, a contemporary's review of *Bang the Drum* praised the novel as "a fine baseball novel" rather than just a "fine novel," which acknowledges that baseball novels have a stigma that "fine novels" are thought to overcome. *The Natural*'s interest in using baseball as a way to recast ancient myths and *Bang the Drum's* plainspeaking memories of real guys, remain two distinct streams in baseball fiction. And although it would be untrue to categorize either *The Natural* or *Bang the Drum* as unqualified critical and commercial successes in their time, they began to address the ideals and realities in baseball and leave their mark in establishing baseball as a setting for adult American fiction.

That the 1960s did not follow these baseball "classics" with an explosion in baseball fiction says little about the elasticity of Malamud or Harris's use of the metaphor and perhaps something about the status of baseball in that decade. Baseball itself was not selling that well in the sixties. According to John Thorn, "despite the addition of four new clubs in 1961-62, attendance in 1968 was only 3 million more than it had been in 1960. Critics charged that baseball was a geriatric vestige of an America that had vanished, a game too slow for a nation that was rushing toward the moon" (42). While the sixties were full of popular *square* entertainment (*Bonanza* was the decade's most successful television show) baseball still suffered in a decade of political and social upheaval. The dispersal of the Dodgers and Giants from New York to the West Coast in 1957 was in itself probably enough to sour many in the East Coast literary establishment on baseball for at least a decade. (Both *The Natural* and *Bang the Drum Slowly* are set within the ranks of fictional

---

[5] Cordelia Candelaria gives a brief overview of some of these texts (31f) in her book *Seeking the Perfect Game: Baseball in American Literature.*

New York teams, and many of the game's laureates are fans of the great New York teams.) Perhaps then it is fitting that the decade's standout baseball novel is Robert Coover's dark and brilliant *The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), which questions the limits of the baseball metaphor as an introduction to fiction.

Professional baseball's fortunes improved in the 1970s as the game began to market and promote itself in a more aggressive and "modern" fashion. Bigger stadiums, brighter uniforms, astroturf, free agency, the mustachioed Oakland A's, all helped revitalize the game in the mainstream of a very seventies *zeitgeist*. The sports novel also broke through in the seventies and defined a style of sports fiction that is still imitated and exploited. And it was the publication of a washed-up pitcher's diary of his comeback attempt that changed everything.

By today's standards, Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970) may not seem so outrageous, but in its time it was a scandal: the first real baseball tell-all to hit the stands. The revelations of drunken players, stingy owners and bullpens full of men infatuated with juvenile antics and sexual conquests, broke a longstanding sports biography code: only the *on-field* accomplishments and disgraces of the players were open for discussion. *Ball Four*'s frankness may have provoked many of the game's higher-ups to moan, but the product sold, remaining on the *Times* bestseller list throughout the summer of 1970. The spirited nature of Bouton's memoir -- its congenial comic tone, its fearless unveilings of racial and political tensions in the clubhouse, its celebration of the sexual revolution -- have since become characteristic features of many sports novels and movies. The *Ball Four* strategy immediately began to appear in sports fiction: Dan Jenkins' raunchy tell-all style football novel *Semi-Tough* (1972) was perhaps the most influential sports novel of its time. The popular styling of *Semi-Tough* is not only echoed in the publication of seventies baseball fictions like *Bingo Long and His Travelling All-Stars And Motor Kings* (1973), *All G.O.D.'s Children* (1975), *Pride of the Bimbos* (1975), and *Breaking Balls* (1979) but in the more prominent baseball novels from the seventies, like Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973), and from the eighties, like Daniel Carkeet's sharply funny *The Greatest Slump of All Time* (1984). The *Ball Four / Semi-Tough* spirit is particularly acute in big and small screen representations: it is felt in the ostensibly juvenile *The Bad News Bears* (1976), seen aging in the character of Sam Malone in *Cheers* (1982-92) and debated in the liberal banter of *Bull Durham* (1988).

From Lardner to *Semi-Tough*, the popular sports novel established itself primarily as humorous fiction. It is in the 1980s -- particularly in the latter half of the decade -- that the "serious" identity of baseball lit emerges, and the more familiar, reflective and nostalgic gloss becomes associated with its dominant style of representation. Eric Rolfe Greenberg's

finely textured historical novel *The Celebrant* (1983), for example, eschews broad humor for a strong statement about the potential for virtue and the positive force of American integration in the face of capitalism's demands. While the hope that baseball is a metaphor for the positive old-fashioned values of the USA is not an invention of the Reagan-Bush era (in Frank Capra's rouser *Meet John Doe* (1941), John Doe / Gary Cooper 's past as a "bush league" ballplayer helps establish him as the perfect object to *sell* to the ever faithful middle America,) it is in the late eighties / early nineties when the production of baseball literature weighs in earnestly and most impressively. More than ever now, there is a philosophic and poetic interest in the "timeless" essences of the game. The general discourse of the fiction begins to gravitate towards more sombre, nostalgic memories; to the patriotic themes of coming together at the old ball park, to the pastoral idyll, to a non-violent world with historical integrity, to racial and ethnic harmony, to uncomplicated true heroes, to the father and son playing a game of catch.

As writers like Roger Angell, Stephen J. Gould, George Will, and Thomas Boswell have established themselves as reliable sources for non-fiction baseball exegesis, W.P. Kinsella has made a similarly dependable career out of baseball fiction. Since the publication of the idealistic *Shoeless Joe* (1982), which was the basis for the movie *Field of Dreams* (1989), baseball has become Kinsella's signature and his regular trip to the bank. So far, Kinsella has produced three baseball novels and three collections of short baseball fiction, all of which have their fans. Though it can be said Kinsella's work with baseball has an unacknowledged *range*, it is his light-hearted sentimentalism vis-a-vis the mythic associations of the game which forms the basis of his works' appeal. Given the unabashedly patriotic tone to *Field of Dreams* it's perhaps ironic that Kinsella is a Canadian author, but it is also a sign of how the articles of baseball sentiment are there to be manipulated and evoked by the literary artist regardless of his or her country of origin.

Even with a Kinsella-like fascination with the baseball metaphor, by the eighties baseball fiction usually invites a critique of contemporary sports in America. The most celebratory fictions are often dependent on rebukes of the excesses of professional baseball, of its myriad corruptions which give meaning to pictures of a sweet time when it was all, supposedly, "just a game." Imagining a perfect, unspoiled, essential game, must also attend fictional reifications of baseball's expulsion from Eden. Thus, the notorious Black Sox scandal of 1919 has become a location for this look back to an American paradise and the way the greed associated with American commerce has forever compromised it. The theme of the 1919 scandal is central to Malamud's *The Natural*, Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* and is the subject of Harry Stein's historical novel *Hoopla* (1983). Eliot Asinof's seminal history of the big fix, *Eight Men Out* (1963), was also restructured

in John Sayles' big screen release of the same name in 1988. Renewed interest in the story led to the publication of Donald Gropman's *Say It Ain't So, Joe: The True Story of Shoeless Joe Jackson* -- a book written in the seventies but released in 1992. The story of "the fall" becomes so central to baseball myth it is not surprising that Brendan Boyd's novel *Blue Ruin* (1991), in a Miltonic gesture, finally tells the story from the fixers' point of view.

From 1988-94 there is continued growth in the baseball marketplace. Television revenues skyrocket, new ballparks appealing to the public's yearning for the past are erected, the use of logos in consumer merchandise expands and literary baseball books are being published like never before. (Of the books that are discussed in this study about half of the titles are from this period.) These books lock into the same dialogues that appear in earlier baseball novels: Eden versus the Fix, the Pasture versus the Astrodome, "America's game" versus the American elite's game, the Kid's game versus the Financier's game *etc.*, but they also branch out with new stylistic adventures as the feasability of the subject matter becomes more secure. The *baseball detective novel* emerges as a recognizable adult formula; social theories are tested on the fictional ballyard, while postmodern narratives, like Don DeLillo's novella *Pafko at the Wall* (1992), test baseball's standard conceits by capturing the sense that a baseball game, even a fictional one, is never contained by one narrative.

While baseball books are still being published at a fair enough clip, the time frame of this study ends for the most part with the Ken Burns' television series *Baseball* (1994) and with the players strike of 1994 which cancelled the World Series of the same year. The coterminancy of these events (*Baseball* aired just before the 1994 World Series should have started) I think combined to put something of a hold on the rise of baseball's cultural capital. The Burns special in partcular may have used up some of the good will of fans towards baseball's *literati*, as many of our most literate fans were left with the feeling that Burns's enthusiasts had overstated their case for the perfections of the game. Moreover, the taint of the players' strike was felt not only in attendance at Major League parks but even more severely in the secondary and tertiary industries built around the game, including its cultural ones. While it may sound unflattering to those who, like me, really enjoy reading baseball books, baseball literature as a material product is not remarkably different from the other souvenir products which the primary industry has fostered.[6] Though there

---

6 This is not to reduce the efforts to give thoughtful readings of baseball to the most banal acts of consumerism, but to link patterns of consumption. My personal experiences with baseball-lit fans have (at least anecdotally) convinced me we're all likely great consumers of

are still good new titles every spring, there is every reason to believe baseball literature suffered a significant blow when the popular main industry stopped short of the Fall classic.

Critical Response

Baseball has a long, celebrated history of record keeping, statistical enumeration and analysis and literary accompaniment for its proceedings. Throughout the 1850's and 60's the efforts of sportswriter Henry Chadwick to see to it that league games were documented so baseball could establish a sense of its own history (Goldstein 69) have proven to be more important to the popularization of the game than the development of the curve ball. Baseball's quantified records were used dramatically to demonstrate the pre-eminence of the particular sport (and its dominant professional institutions) and were a way of de-legitimizing pastimes with less developed *books*. The creation of baseball statistics was a crucial inroad to creating an active fan discourse through the media, as Harold Seymour writes in his detailed history *Baseball: The Early Years*:

> A more direct boon to baseball than the railroad was newspaper publicity. The interaction between the game and the sporting pages was apparent by the 1850's. Baseball news sold newspapers, newspapers sold baseball. This mutual relationship was to continue on an ever-widening scale. . . . If it were not for the sports page, spectator interest would be only a phantom of what it is, and ballplayers would not receive the fabulous salaries many of them get. (Seymour 33)

The recording of baseball games has never been limited to mere statistics. Earlier newspaper reconstructions of baseball games in particular would often rely on poetry, song lyrics or fictional matrixes (like Lardner's epistolary columns) to tell the story of what happened in the big game. This literary playfulness -- almost entirely absent from today's sports pages -- is in some ways being recaptured by today's baseball poets and novelists. Today's baseball fiction must often step out of the demands of statistical scholarship -- of the "noise" of analytical chatter -- and into the more general philosophic or spiritual realms concerning baseball in American society.

The development of baseball in American culture has been studied in sociology departments for a long time, but more recently there is an energetic and emerging critical

---

professional baseball and I'd probably be embarrassed to admit how much I've spent on tickets, hats, books, concessions *etc.* in my lifetime.

reaction to baseball literature and baseball fiction from literary scholars. This response, not without its own discontents, is still young and opening up the parameters of meaning in sports lit. However, caught up in the struggle to assert its legitimate existence, the critical response to baseball fiction has often been Chadwickesque (so to speak) insofar as its most characteristic gambit is to authorize the viability of the subject. Hence the innumerable proleptic assertions of baseball's special cultural value; it's not just for beer-bellies; it's not the same as writing about lacrosse.

By-passing the numerous newspaper or magazine articles which have tried to shorthand literary ball's expansion, scholarly efforts to account for baseball literature often cut and paste the available works so they might resemble a genre or subgenre of American literature. And in the scheme of things, there really isn't much scholarly criticism, mostly essays concerning individual novels or stories, particularly the ones by authors famous for writing books that are not about baseball. There are many essays in sport-centered publications like the Sports Literature Association's invaluable publication *Aethlon*; a few essays on the subject in more general fiction journals, several unpublished doctoral dissertations on the subject (*i.e.* "Baseball's Complex Pastoralism," "Baseball Fiction in Children's Periodicals," "Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* and Other Oedipal Analogs in Baseball Fiction") and more essays and books coming. Leveritt T. Smith Jr.'s *The American Dream and the National Game* (1970) looks at the game as a symbol for America with specific attention to literary works, Robert J. Higgs' *Laurel and Thorn: The Athlete in American Literature* (1981) offers a stable analysis of a wide range of sports literature as it relates to the Hellenic archetypes of Adonis and Apollo, while Christian K. Messenger's *Sport and the Spirit of Play in American Fiction* (1981) looks specifically at sport to elaborate on the work of canonical American authors.

The recent publication of Deeanne Westbrook's *Ground Rules: Baseball and Myth* (1996) and Timothy Morris's *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction* (1997), both in the Univerity of Illinois' "Sport and Society Series," not only adds to the critical apparatus for baseball fiction, but offers further evidence of baseball fiction's increased q-factor in the literary world. Westbrook's analysis centers on what she sees as the "common linguistic enterprise" (9) of baseball fiction, presenting through a variety of literary forms, a "mythicity" of baseball's place in American language and literature. Morris's book strategically traces the generic relationships between juvenile baseball fiction and adult mainstream fiction, and then offers a "resistant" reading of the patterns he observes, extending a "critique of the ideologies of patriarchal functionalism" (7). Morris finds in baseball fiction's numerous "team play" messages codes of enforcement for inequitable American norms: the exclusivity of English as the country's only possible

language, the homoerotic sphere of male-only play as a guarantee of heterosexuality.[7] More is being done, but I would like to call specific notice to one particular study, as it was, to my knowledge, the first book-length survey of baseball-lit: Cordelia Candelaria's *Seeking the Perfect Game: Baseball in American Literature* (1989).

Seeking the Perfect Game is a fair primary source for the critical inquiry of baseball fiction. It's a focussed text which does not belabor the obvious and makes a coherent analysis of the baseball metaphor in American fiction. Candelaria does not attempt to finalize the significance of baseball itself and does acknowledge the complex nature of its cultural meanings: "Clearly, the multifariousness of baseball fiction makes it elusive of neat conceptual categories. . . . Still, the more elusive the pitch, the more certain must be the batter's eye and swing" (2). The aim of her study is to delineate the literary history of baseball fiction and to formulate it in more generic terms:

> baseball fiction discloses a movement from the allegory and romanticism of its earliest forms to the realism and solipsism of its contemporary readings. . . . As a subgenre of American literature, baseball fiction has continually progressed to increasingly complex levels of literary abstraction, a progression that itself mirrors baseball's metamorphosis from the primitive fact of ritual to the stylized realm of (meta)fiction. (2)

Seeing the literary history of baseball in terms of "progression," Candelaria fits it into the mold of a popular understanding of the development of sports and games, "from ritual to record" (Guttman): the strong belief that contemporary patterns of sports can be traced to the patterns of ancient rites. *Seeking the Perfect Game* has been an important resource for my study, and I agree with much of its research, particularly its assertions that meanings in these texts "can only be dialectical" (1) and that an attempt to find in baseball an idealized form, the "paradigm of perfection" (117) is important throughout the sport's literature, a paradigm I will be discussing at greater length in the second chapter. Though I will not be continually setting-up Candelaria's text to motivate dissimilar points in my own research, I do think that there are (keeping in the tradition of *baseballese* now) enough significant overthrows in her approach to necessitate a different look.

---

[7] Although both *Ground Rules* and *Making the Team* offer significant and original claims about baseball fiction, their very recent publication has prevented me from offering a more detailed engagement beyond this brief overview and a few other comments about their place in the study of baseball fiction. It's particularly disappointing that I did not have more time and space to talk of Morris's book, as his book addresses baseball's claim to a "meritocracy" (111-147) -- the concern I also address in my fourth chapter.

First of all, Candelaria's study predates an important rise in popularity of baseball literature as a normative cultural product in the late 1980s, and the types of fictions that emerge from 1988 to 1994 also pose a serious challenge to Candelaria's notion of generic development or continuity. The argument that baseball fiction is marching towards a metafictional apotheosis is far-fetched and dependent on a rather narrow definition of stylistic change. Particularly for a literary phenomena with such strong roots in the popular tradition and populism, the progress of literary history, as it may occasionally be understood in the academy, is not always in evidence in successful baseball fiction. That is, when looking at the popular novel in America the influences of modernism or postmodernism *etc.* are not irrelevant, but they also remain inside-the-beltway arguments as the popular tradition continues without concern to the "progress" of literary movements. Or, to put it another way, John Grisham's next book will probably do well, no matter how theoretical arguments about the function of literary progress are standing.

In her tracing of a formal evolution for baseball lit, Candelaria also locates the recognizable dichotomies in baseball fiction but chooses to divide this problem as a function of different-minded authors who fall into separate teams of "ironists" vs. "pastoralists." There is a proper emphasis in this cleavage, but it oversimplifies the baseball metaphor and suggests the discords of the metaphor can be controlled. But looking at the evocations of baseball fiction, it is not at all uncommon to see intense moments of cynical irony in pieces that started out as lyrical paeans or to see touching moments of pastoral innocence in the most apocalyptic tell-all. Despite the confidence and skill of the author, the baseball metaphor still (mis)behaves like a knuckleball.

As it is unlikely anybody would write baseball books if they were not fans of the game, Candelaria gets into the fairly common and precious form of baseball-lit celebration by announcing her belief that baseball has a *specialness* which makes it uniquely suited for the writer's art. Her insight that "(t)he rules and object of the game, coupled with its rich social texture, make it especially servicable as literary subject"(2), are repeated throughout baseball literature's critical appreciations. It is often declared that the game's leisurely pace, its open timing, and its "fecund pauses"(Boswell 9) have naturally attracted those with literary or verbal skills. In many ways this is the Doubleday myth of baseball lit: -- something said so often it has, regardless of its shortcomings in truth, become a constitutive element of the mythology and thus part of the real truth. I will be dealing in more depth with the specific claim of "literary suitability" in the next chapter, but my point is simple: there is nothing about the sport of baseball itself that makes it uniquely amenable to literary representations. There is nothing to say that a novel about curling or the Canadian Football League could not be every bit, or even *more* artistically successful, than

a novel about baseball. There is nothing to say a nightingale is a better subject for an ode than a grecian urn. Literary representation is capable of capturing the worlds of fast sports, slow sports, stupid sports and spoiled sports with equal accuracy and flair. The literary imagination is not limited to the leisurely or the purely temporal. What baseball literature does have, that other sports do not, is the tradition of *baseball literature.* My argument here may sound frustratingly circular, but what I mean is that baseball's longstanding popularity, its constancy on the American scene, its standing as popular culture -- and not its so-called inherent poetic properties which can always be found in other sports -- is the source of its literary enrichment. Say what you will about the poet's game, after all, there probably won't be a Kevin Costner movie about curling next summer, but if "the faith of fifty million people" were invested in curling you should expect to see *Bonspiel of Dreams* at a theatre near you. Baseball has a good market: I suspect Donald Hall's publisher wouldn't be overjoyed to hear the famous poet has prepared a book of essays on the joys of playing jai alai for money.

Connected to Candelaria's faith in the specialness of baseball are her more strenuous assertions that baseball literature is connected to the progress of the game itself from its ritual roots. Claiming anthropological imperatives about the connection of ball-and-stick games to fertility rites (2), Candelaria is scornful of those who would deny this ancient connection as "sycophants" of the current professional baseball cartel. And while the anthropological insight into the development of sports from ritual has its importance, what I think is debatable (and overstated in Candelaria's case) is how much of that ritual survives in what we know as baseball or any form of spectator sport for that matter. The discovery of ritual pasts may also tempt back-formations which imagine the current popularity of sport as part of an essential, prehistoric drama. Acting out ancient rites can be claimed as the source of Tim Allen's humor or why one likes backyard barbecues, but the real sources for these entertainments may also be closer at hand and less implicated in the paleolithic. Obviously, sport appeals to many authors because sport *can* be seen as an intricate ritual where social and moral dilemmas are brought to a head through mythic physical assertions. But this is a proposition rather than an empirical fact, ever assailable by equally strong, competing propositions.

This study will be less interested in the imposition of a generic, developmental pattern on baseball fiction and more engaged with the conflicts inherent in the literature's most often repeated tropes, keeping in mind how these conflicts function in an atmosphere where baseball literature is a material reality. (One thing I will be particularly interested in is how the product of baseball literature exists in a marketplace where entertainment industries are more vertically integrated.) Of course, baseball literature is a genre as much

as "science fiction" or "Chicano fiction" can be said to be a *genre*, but like science or Chicano fiction and, despite its own mercantile dimensions, baseball fiction is not reducible to *formula fiction.*

I come to this critical project because I too am a baseball fan and believe baseball is a beautiful thing to watch. And I've come to this study typically: reading and collecting baseball books has long been a source of real enjoyment. (The significance of *book-collecting* in the study of sports literature should not be minimized: many worthwhile texts have not been collected or catalogued by libraries and institutions, many are long out of print. In fact, every time I have the pleasure of meeting other enthusiasts of sports fiction, I have always come away with the names of a few long-gone titles I hadn't heard of before.) And, like most fans, what I most want to hear is that my sport, my team, is actually the most worthy sport and the most worthy team. And this feeling is the bulwark of professional sports' commercial success: *fan loyalty.* Most people attend baseball games not to meditate on the beauty of the fields of green, but to see their team win. Baseball books, like baseball games themselves, are commercial products -- and their success relies on somebody buying into them. (The authors of baseball books are sometimes described on bookjackets and contributor lists not just by their previous publications, awards and place of employment, but by what professional franchise they cheer for.) Of course, good books can be successful in terms unrelated to hearty money-making, just as good ball teams can be located in Pittsburgh or Montreal. And the fan-loyalty I like to believe I've developed as a reader and critic of baseball fiction looks towards what is good rather than what is merely servicable, casually observing the distances between the engagement of the literary metaphor and the sales pitch.

Concerned with the relationship between two commercial products (baseball games and baseball books) I am not out to limit their meanings as points of reference in a hermeneutic study of corporate power. In the course of discussing baseball fiction's antithetical claims I hope to draw attention to the aesthetic delights of the fiction, the intentions of the artists and how the critical issues fit into the context of familiar baseball issues. And in so doing, I will often introduce the literary issues with the "on-field" issues from baseball's history.

Transcendental Ideal & Escapism

On June 25, 1876 the Pittsburgh Alleghenys took 13 innings to beat the St. Louis Reds 5-4. On June 28, 1914 Walter "Big Train" Johnson won a 4-2 decision over the Philadelphia Athletics. (Although the Senators' first baseman was thrown out of the game for throwing

the ball at the umpire, it was an improvement over the June 27 game which was forfeited due to fights.) On September 1, 1939 it was Ladies' Day at Ebbets Field where the Dodgers split a double-header with the Cubs. (Paid attendance: 16,317; ladies, 3,519.) On May 4, 1970 Jim Bouton pitched a six-hitter for the Houston Astros, who won 7-2 over Chicago.[8]

Encapsulated in these games is a small, quaint history of the United States. Players, teams and games have always been strong mnemonic devices and names like the "Pittsburgh Alleghenys" and the "St. Louis Reds" suggests a time of mustachioed players in starched collars, before the establishment of the World Series, before the Black Sox scandal. "Walter Johnson" brings back memories of the first baseball *superstars*. Johnson's legendary fastball, something referred to often in baseball writing, like the Bambino's swing, is firmly entrenched in the continuity of baseball's historical imagination. "Ebbets Field" is a powerful reminder of the aspirations of multiethnic Brooklynites and as the site of many noble failures, while an event like "Ladies' Day" is equally recognizable as a symbol of the gender differences prevalent within society not so long ago. "Jim Bouton" is a signal to the age of the new sports media hero; the author of *Ball Four* had more of a career as a flake author and talk-show guest than he did as a pitcher. And the "Houston Astros," finally, puts us in mind of expansion teams, the Astrodome and astroturf and the synthetic packaging of baseball for big television audiences.

This list, however, also shows how baseball, or any other sport, with its continuous internal history, offers an opportunity to escape or forget the larger framework of "real" historical events which have influenced social or political life. The dates of these games coincide with the day after Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn, the day Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, the day Hitler invaded Poland, and the day the U.S. National Guard opened fire and killed four students at Kent State University. The pattern of simultaneously trying to articulate an ideal America while trying to escape the pain of its "real" history is a recurring paradigm for interpreting themes in American literature. And this interpretive strategy is an important formulation when considering the expressions which frequently occur in baseball fiction. The interest in baseball throughout American history makes it one of the few stable cultural objects to contrast against the more dramatic changes in society. The extrication of baseball from the harsher lessons of the past can usher in a static image of the game, because, except in the most obvious instances

---

[8] All the information about these games has been cribbed from boxscores and columns in the *New York Times*.

such as Jackie Robinson's entry into the major leagues, baseball history is rarely recognizable as authentic or significant American history.

Whether one is transcending or escaping the pains of American history can sound like potáto / potàto, but the differentiations are important because they engage the issue of quality. Is baseball escapist entertainment or is it edifying art? Is baseball a likely manifestation of divinity, or is it just the methadone of the masses? As we'll see in baseball fiction, the presentation of baseball's history can form an ideal picture of a country at play with secure institutions *and* form a dystopic picture of a corrupt industry happy to see the public confusing trivia for importance. The issue of quality is also very important to those who want to see baseball fiction as a meaningful product insofar as assertions of the game's historical integrity and transcendental hopes pre-emptively attempt to quell the doubts of those who are skeptical of popular culture's ability to produce anything of real quality.

It is not at all unexpected that the trivia of popular entertainment can be dismissed as escapist, but what is extraordinary about baseball is how its specific systems of trivia have gained a historical and philosophical respectability which other entertainments are not favored with. (For some writers baseball's quantifying shibboleths, like *three strikes, nine innings*, or *ninety feet*, form an almost mystic numerology which attest to the game's spiritual qualities.) Baseball's problematic historicity, statistically precise and uncertain in narrative, relies heavily on anecdotal appeal and partisan determinations to defend its authenticity. The pastime's seemingly endless data and tall tales document all the changes and tragedies associated with the sport, but this expanding collection is always evolving as patriots present their competing interpretative versions of what the truth is. (*i.e.* Who was better -- Cobb or Ruth? Was it Mays, Mantle or Snider? Why did McNamara leave Buckner in the defensive line up for the bottom of the ninth in the sixth game of the 1986 World Series? *etc.*) Nonethless, the game itself is constant and has survived in its current form (more or less) for over 150 years -- and as such is deserving of its rounds of trivia. The traditional side-taking arguments of sports buffs are critical dialogues which shape an understanding of sports history. And no matter what happens in baseball history, the game itself is never at fault: the arguments themselves remain inside the articles of baseball history.

Despite the metaphorical possibilites in baseball, baseball's actual discourse, unlike other forms of popular entertainment, is overwhelmingly self-referential. It is difficult to extend baseball matters into non-baseball issues. The detachment of sports news from real news is culturally institutionalized and encouraged as necessary in the sportsworld's special place in the entertainment industries. When sports-related stories crossover from the self-

referential into the real news, it is rarely a good day for the image of the sports industry. For example, consider the Pete Rose banishment, the escapades of the Dallas Cowboys and, above all, the O.J. Simpson trial. A closed, formalist reading is the preferred and operating critical approach to sports history. In the framework of this containment begins the picture of the harmonic baseball world, the perfect game set in a perfect America where difference of birth is irrelevant and all are judged on verifiable, quantifiable merit. And this is not just a component of fiction: people all over the world often start communicating past their potential differences and embarrassments with conversations about sports.[9] This pattern of conversation, for better or worse, familiar as part of the *ethos* of what has become known as male-bonding, makes the self-referentiality of sports news unthreatening. As critic George Weigel puts it, "I can happily talk baseball with people I find otherwise obnoxious, and with whom I agree on virtually nothing else" (and) "as long there is baseball, millions of Americans will know how to tell a story" (47).[10]

Baseball talk is strategically placed as bonding in Ernest Hemingway's short story *Three Day Blow* (1925), where Nick Adams and his friend Bill are stranded in a cottage during a wind storm. Passing time, they have a conversation about sports over the newspaper.

> "What did the Cards do?"
> "Dropped a double header to the Giants."
> "That ought to cinch it for them."
> "It's a gift," Bill said. "As long as McGraw can buy every good ball player in the league there's nothing to it."
> "He can't buy them all," Nick said.(40-41)

There's nothing extraordinary about their insights. In fact, one may note how the disgust over the mercenary nature of professional baseball is at the fore of their "Golden Age" conversation. Discussing the relative merits of third baseman Heinie Zimmerman, they come to a more crucial realization:

---

9 Two legendary instances of the power of "talking sports" to bring together different Americans use football as a bridge between hippies and conservatives: Hunter S. Thompson's alleged conversation with Richard Nixon ("Whatever else might be said about Nixon -- and there is still serious doubt that he could pass for Human -- he is a goddamn stone fanatic on every facet of pro football" (61).) And, of course, Frank Gifford's interview with John Lennon -- a story told every year on *Monday Night Football.*

10 Tellingly, in the "men's movement" groups inspired in part by the popularity of Robert Bly's *Iron John*, men are often prohibited from talking about sports.

> "There's always more to it than we know about," Nick said. "Of course. But we've got pretty good dope for being so far away." (41)

How much "dope" they have out in the sticks is not just a sign of their macho insights into baseball but into the scope of the popularity of the game as well. (Now, a house in the woods can have a satellite dish.) The subtext of the story, and the assumption behind its mood, is the unexpressed story of Nick's failed love affair, furtively referred to as the "Marge business" (46). This interior story comes without good "dope," and its details are studiously avoided. The evasion of relationship-talk in favor of sports-talk has of course become a staple in he said / she said sitcoms, but Hemingway doesn't play this distinction for laughs or merely to validate his characters' references. "The Marge business" becomes an actively suppressed story as Nick and Bill complain about how married men become "bitched"(46), but their sports-talk (especially their baseball talk) allows for no real transcendence, no ideal space – just a way of killing time during the storm .

By the end of "Three Day Blow" Nick and Bill turn away from baseball:

> "Fishing," Nick said. "That's what we drink to."
> "It's better than baseball," Bill said.
> "There isn't any comparison," said Nick. "How did we ever get talking about baseball?"
> "It was a mistake," Bill said. "Baseball is a game for louts." (45)

In Hemingway's world, fishing has a more obvious appeal. (Literature's most recognizable sportsman, Hemingway was more interested in individual sportsmanship than in professional team sports.) Where baseball is directly American and intellectually tied to its volumes of "dope," fishing is universal and potently charged with the themes of sustenance and religious rebirth. It is ironic then that in *The Old Man and The Sea*, (1952) Joe Dimaggio becomes a saint-like animus for Hemingway's heroic fisherman.[11] Fishing or bullfighting or boxing are more interesting for Hemingway, not only because of their primalism, but because Hemingway doesn't want to lose the interior emotion of the character to complex jargon.

The "dope" brings valuable contexts to baseball history but can also arrest the affirmative idealism so appealing to the game's poets. While baseball may offer a chance for partisans to sublimate their differences on a cultural plain, annihilation under a mountain

---

[11] In the course of his struggle, Santiago practically prays to the figure of the great Yankee centerfielder: "I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of a bone spur in his heels" (68).

of facts is just as likely. Hart Crane's poem, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," places the newspaper scores as part of a daily assault of informational noise:

> The mind has shown itself at times
> Too much the baked and labeled dough
> Divided by accepted multitudes.
> Across the partitions of the day --
> Across the memoranda, baseball scores,(27)

The assault of details -- or the threat of being numbed by details -- is still a considerable problem for the baseball writer. While the writer may assume a certain core knowledge on the part of the reader, there is always the possibility of alienating the reader with too much trivia. Also, the fictional world has an unresolved relationship with baseball history as the familar players and reliable statistical imperatives may not be playing side-by side with the fictional athletes. Hence, baseball fiction (as it often appears by the late 1980s) more often than not eschews the prospect of detail to "simplify, simplify" in favor of a more static image of the ballyard, forever green. Whatever celebration there is of the statistical and anecdotal richness of the game, most baseball fiction avoids serious appraisals of the "dope." The reliance on "dope" and on the shenanigans of McGraw-types makes baseball for "louts," but *removing* the dope in favor of the vision of an everlasting, unchanging *American game* has made baseball as reliable as Norman Rockwell or Lawrence Welk to locate the nostalgic feelings of middle America.

Of course "Norman Rockwell" and "Lawrence Welk" are also cultural products which extend beyond the work of the famous illustrator and the music of the famous polkateer. In tandem Rockwell and Welk represent a formidable tag-team of middle and modern American sentimentalism, both providing nostalgic images of a country that never quite existed but is profoundly missed nonetheless. Likewise, baseball (a favorite subject for Rockwell) is often transformed to validate a nostalgic idealism, and it gravitates toward these transformations, as Welk and Rockwell do, in a relatively unselfconscious way. Baseball's nostalgic idealism is similarly politically conservative and deeply suspicious of contemporary popular culture. And as long as baseball's "dope" increases along with its dramatic relocations and outrageous salaries there will be a contingency yearning for a time "when it was still a game" just as *The Lawrence Welk Show* continues to be in demand, long after the death of the maestro.

From *Walden* to *The Waltons*, popularized cultural texts often take on ideologies that connotatively outdistance their textual realities. (*i.e.* when one is talking of *The Waltons* one is usually talking about positive family values, not the episode where Mary Ellen gets hooked on drugs.) This is true about baseball fiction as well. The numerous

articulations of idealized baseball: baseball is good; baseball is the game for philosophers; baseball is played in the sun; baseball is played by innocent children; baseball is played throughout America; baseball is one of the great American creations, are obviously more appealing than Harold Seymour's cool declaration that "Baseball in America is many things. But, contrary to widespread belief, baseball is not a sport. It is a commercialized amusement business"(*Baseball: The Early Years* 3). However, the greed associated with professional baseball, which has become an immutable complaint of the modern fan, is always part of the most idealized texts. Even in W.P. Kinsella's baseball fictions, which are the closest thing baseball fiction has to Norman Rockwell, the restoring meditations on immaculate baseball Edens are predicated by recognitions of crass modernities. The faith in baseball as a kind of untainted *essence* must accompany a strong belief in its corrupted form on earth.

After the Civil War, when baseball really began to take hold in the populace, Walt Whitman wrote,

> I see great things in baseball; it's our game -- the American game. It will take our people out of doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set, repair these losses and be a blessing to us. (Folsom 73)

The sandlot enthusiasm of Whitman's proclamation is a bonus to scholars of baseball literature, but the fact that it was said by *Walt Whitman* has often meant more to them. (The tid-bit has served as the authenticating prologue to Ken Burns' *Baseball* and as the epilogue to *Bull Durham.*) Certainly the ironic contrast between Whitman's participatory vision and the realities of spectatorship has never been sufficiently highlighted: a modern fan is more likely to be filled with stadium nachos than oxygen. Less celebrated as well are Whitman's more earth-bound doubts about the game. In his essay "America's 'Hurrah Game': Baseball and Walt Whitman" Lowell Folsom writes of how by the 1870's Whitman became distressed over the rule changes that allowed pitchers to throw the ball as they wished, not just underhand (74). That is to say, Whitman opposed *pitching*: "Whitman . . . was not impressed with this new skill and saw the rule change as endemic of the deception and lack of openness he saw creeping everywhere into America" (74). And so, Whitman's romantic "I believe in all that -- in baseball, in picnics" stresses the *ludic* aspects of the game but denies the *agonistic* desires of its competitors. Taking baseball to strategy and dope, and away from the picnic grounds is, for Whitman, bad news, but the threat makes the sunshine on his frolicsome sport just a little brighter. Baseball's long line of historical "transgressions": the rabbit ball, nightgames, double-knit polyester uniforms,

million dollar salaries, lights in Wrigley Field, Astroturf, the designated hitter, the SkyDome, etc., continue to demand a soothing, "less fragmentary, cool" vision to further sublimate baseball's transcendental prayers.

Fields of Green

In Richard Scheinin's chronicle of baseball's long history of fixes and scandals, *Field of Screams*, he writes of baseball's greatest lie:

> Baseball was not invented in a cow pasture in Cooperstown in 1839 by General Abner Doubleday. That's totally false, a concoction of Albert G. Spalding, one of baseball's first pitching stars and later the founder of the famous sporting goods company. . . . In 1904, he formed a blue ribbon committee to inquire into baseball's origins. . . . Working from a clean slate, the committee issued a report describing the game's Immaculate Conception in Small Town USA. This set the stage for Cooperstown to become baseball's Bethelehem and established the proper tone for the marketing of the game. (30)

While the Cooperstown theory has been completely disproved, its hold on the consciousness of popular history has been harder to shake. Like the story of Washington and the cherry tree, denying it only reintroduces its pleasant details where those who care to attack the myth might be seen as pedantic spoilsports and unwittingly reinforces the details of the untruth. Baseball historian Warren Goldstein makes an interesting point about this *impasse*:

> No historian is entirely immune to the temptation to correct clear falsehood in the name of truth but we do need to recognize that *competing versions* of baseball history have been part of the way the game has been played, watched and thought about ever since its earliest years. (11 emphasis mine.)

To a certain extent baseball *was* invented by Abner Doubleday as sure as Columbus "discovered" America. The corrections of the present, no matter how true, cannot displace the narratives predicated by founding myths.[12]

---

12 This is complicated by how baseball's myths are protected by its professional leagues' business interests. Curt Flood, whose unsuccessful suit against Major League Baseball in 1970 *eventually* established free agency, said in his enlightening autobiography *The Way It Is*, "To challenge the sanctity of organized baseball was to question one of the primary myths of the American culture. . . . The proprietors and publicists of baseball could be depended on to revile me in print as a destroyer, a fanatic, a dupe" (5).

Cooperstown, the home of baseball's Hall of Fame, still does not care to emphasize baseball's real history and tacitly approves its birthright through the Doubleday story. The lasting legacy of the myth is less in the historical particulars (the belief in Doubleday as inventor) than in the entrenchment of "Small Town USA" as baseball's spiritual home. Around "Small Town USA" we are led into the pastures and cornfields of America, and this idyllic setting continues to frame cultural affirmations of baseball. The Hall of Fame, responding to the discredited Doubleday myth, still insists on country roots by officially declaring "if baseball was not actually first played here in Cooperstown in 1839, it undoubtedly originated about that time in a similar rural setting" (Carroll 17). The demand for a rural place of origin has brought the conventions of pastoralism to baseball's literature. The artificial demands of a pastoral setting complicates some of baseball fiction's most notable texts: in Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952) the central character is plagued by the expectations the setting inspires; in Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956) small town prayers are cruelly unanswered; in Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association Inc. J. Henry Waugh Prop.* (1968) the implications of the fictional setting and framework for the game are mythologized into an overwhelming ritual.

Despite its green field and its long summer schedule, baseball is actually an urban game whose real ancestral home is in the boroughs of New York City. Moreover, the clubs that first formulated the rules of the game were not comprised of country boys but were middle class fraternal organizations whose attentions to order and detail made the game's transition into big business quite seamless. Baseball is a social game: it takes at least eighteen people to put a game together -- something not easily managed around the farm. For example, the lonely subject of Robert Frost's poem *Birches* (1916) is simply "too far from town to learn baseball" (89), and must take his pleasures in solitary fantasies. Yet, lonely farmboys are iconographically pasted throughout baseball's mythology. There are obvious internal reasons for this, as infielder Dick Allen counters "You ever wonder why baseball loves big, dumb farm boys? Well, big, dumb farm boys don't say very much" (Kiersh 199). But there are less obvious reasons which connect baseball fiction with the literary conventions of the pastoral.

Of course nobody reads Marvell's pastoral poetry because they want to learn about sheep. The pastoral form of baseball fiction is likewise a highly artificial one where shepherds / ballplayers can present their sensual poetry of peaceful fields of green to a receptive urban audience. Like traditional pastoral poetry, baseball's pastoral / postcard settings are imbued with *et in arcadia ego* nostalgia and a faith that the real world (the city) is eminently worth retreating from. Furthermore, baseball's attraction to the poetry of its seasons (starting with "Spring training" and ending with the "Fall classic") has flowed into

poetic constructions of the sport as "the Summer Game, played by the Boys of Summer, an ongoing celebratory dance in the golden season" (Grella 551). And these evocations of the verdant Elysian Fields of baseball become more and more pronounced as the real game is played at night and, increasingly, under the lights of the big city dome.

In the city, fans follow their professional team (even in the country fans may be as likely to follow the city team on TV as see the locals go at it) and these city teams are conscious of appealing to the rural small town nostalgia associated with the game. According to sports scholar Richard C. Crepeau, in stressing the game's alleged rural roots "baseball tied itself to one of the most historically enduring and powerful myths in American culture" and intiated conflicts which "could be a straight forward city versus country; old versus new; East versus West; or as in the case of religion, modernist versus fundamentalist" (315). Today, images of the idyllic baseball pastoral, consistently harkening to peaceful afternoons of sunshine and green grass, poeticize the reality of night games, astroturf and cable TV games and metaphorically brings Small Town USA's virtue to the big city. But the contemporary affection for "olde style" promotional items speaks volumes for a contemporary dissatisfaction with current realities, like most forms of pastoral nostalgia, offering an inherent critique of the flux of the present. The ball*park* plays out as the pastoral settings of Shakespeare's romances do: an idealized green space where rustics play and, most importantly, city people go and return to the city feeling restored.

"The Fix"

As I was saying before, most baseball books are written by fans of the game. It is a painfully obvious statement but an important consideration when evaluating the celebratory assertions and interrogatory disappointments that commonly occur in baseball writing. The ideal game's transcendental perfections and peaceful green pastures are not spelled out because the authors don't have their own dope. Full awareness of the less than idealistic facts of baseball inform its wholesome mythology. Evocations of the game's perfection or of baseball's Arcady are invariably compromised by revelations of *the fix*. "The fix" then has become one of the most important measures in the study of sports literature and is often acknowledged by scholars as a conventional epiphany in sports fiction .

The litany of baseball's sacraments -- from the distance of the base paths, the number of players, the open time frame of play, its green green fields, its "momentary grace of order" (Hall 51), used to evoke the game's supposed artistic pre-eminence, also has its anterior lists of bedevilments. No matter how much interest is expressed in the

timeless, metaphorical essences of baseball, it is *professional baseball* which is almost exclusively the favorite subject of baseball literature. It is pro baseball that Americans are most interested in. *The New Yorker's* Roger Angell has the insight to admit that "It is foolish and childish, on the face of it, to affiliate ourselves with anything so insignificant and patently contrived and commercially exploitative as a professional sports team"(*Red Sox Reader* 129), but he is also smart enough to admit it is Major League baseball which he can't help but really love. It is in baseball's history as a money driven big-business where the signals of *the fix* are abundant. That baseball is a commercial business cannot be denied. Even in the most Capraesque fantasies about the game the presence of monopolistic corruption often provides the spooky background music. Revelations of baseball's commercial design, its indefatigable greed and self-promotional bunk, are among the most recognizable discoveries in baseball fiction.

Perhaps the most famous revelation of *the fix* occurs in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). At dinner with Gatsby, Nick meets Meyer Wolfsheim, the man who is alleged to have bankrolled the fixing of the 1919 World Series. Learning of the plot, Nick claims,

> The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely *happened*, the end of an inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one could start to play with the faith of fifty million people -- with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe. (74)

Nick's surprise comes out of no interest in baseball: the phony World Series is just an introduction to the grave duplicities and backstage fixings that characterize *Gatsby*. But the sporting life is important in *Gatsby's* America as the win / lose proposition of games satisfies democratic notions of rewarding merit, and baseball, because of its popular appeal, is a dramatic key to the heart of the country. Baseball is an unlikely skill for a socialite but crucial for Gatsby's studied All-Americaness; in his ambitious self-improving diaries Gatsby even vows to devote a half hour a day to "baseball and sports" (174).

Cheating is unethical, yet it is incrementally tempting (from going faster than the speed limit, to fixing America's beloved games) in a culture where the rewards for success are so great and where the stigma of failure is absolute. While sports scholars like to speak of how the *ludic* (the playful) and *agonistic* (competitive) aspects of sports form a kind of yin and yang harmony, in an entrepreneurial America the *agonistic* is often overwhelming. Given the kinds of innocence that America wants to believe in (playing for the love of the game) one might ask whether the fixers then might possess a heightened consciousness

about the way of the world? Wolfsheim's World Series fixing is not far removed from "the incurably dishonest"(58) Jordan Baker's cheating at golf. Both get away with it, and in some ways Jordan's "cute" cheating is less excusable as she has no claim to the limitations which ethnicity presents for the Wolfschiem character.

Abe Rothstein, the real-life "big bankroll" who was the model for Fitzgerald's Wolfschiem, was not even indicted in the 1920 conspiracy trial of the ballplayers and gamblers who were accused of throwing the series. Crucial to the defense's case was the legal argument that there was no law against fixing baseball games just as there were no specific laws in the 1950s saying you can't fix television game shows and no law today saying you can't fix professional wrestling bouts.[13] The legal argument presents the idea that you are a sucker ever to believe otherwise.

The fixing of the 1919 World Series has become one of baseball's most fascinating stories: the scandal of the Black Sox fix is played out over and over in baseball fiction, often rendered as baseball's original sin or fall from grace. As Candelaria says, "the Black Sox motif recurs throughout baseball fiction as a reminder of the frail, imperfect human context that produced the sport" (12). The insistence in baseball literature on the use of this specific scandal also romanticizes pre-Black Sox baseball as if all spectators were as innocent as Nick Carraway pretends to be and that before 1919 Americans couldn't possibly *conceive* of wide scale fraud. Using the Black Sox scandal as a marker for baseball's ethical status not only eulogizes a mythically uncorruptible past but sets in place the moral imperatives which try to restore baseball to its rightful place in society.

Trying to pinpoint the moment where "America lost its innocence" is itself a favorite pastime for American artists: the first Thanksgiving, the Revolution, the Civil War, the Great Depression, Vietnam and Watergate have all been seriously cited as the events which finally matured or soured the country. The crestfallen boy's apocryphal lament "Say, it ain't so Joe" condenses the need to recast the scene of America's degeneration within the frame of a transparent paradigm. And popular interest in professional baseball has increased the need for faith in baseball's more innocent forms; the more athletes are paid the more we will hear about how ballplayers should be "positive role models."

---

13 The Black Sox nine were acquitted in criminal court but banished from professional baseball by its own corporate authority. In his closing arguments, defense attorney Ben Short offered, "There may have been an agreement entered by the defendants to take the gamblers' money, but it has not been shown that the players had any intention of defrauding the public or of bringing the game into ill repute. They believed any arrangement they may have made was a secret one and would, therefore, reflect no discredit on the national pastime or injure the business of their employer as it would never be detected" (Asinof 268-9).

If representations of baseball embody the conflicts between its transcendental and pastoral ideals versus the machinations of *the fix*, it is not really a question of one side or the other winning out for the ultimate prize; this conflict can never be resolved in baseball as one extreme invariably defines the other. So when New England poet Baron Wormser claims, in an idealistic poem "In Baseball, . . . there is no such thing as a beggared day / Achievement can be neither created nor feigned"(14) we can hear the Nick Carraway voice, indulging in a naive fantasy in the face of the staggering shocks this kind of faith will inevitably suffer.

Talking Baseball

> Lisa:
> I can't think of a better place to spend a balmy summer's night than the old ballyard. There's just the green grass of the outfield, the crushed brick of the infield and the white chalk lines that separate the man from the little boy.
>
> Homer:
> Lisa, honey, you're forgetting the beer! It comes in 72 ounce tubs.
>
> from *The Simpsons*

Baseball games are not representations of contests, they are actual contests. The unpredictability of games and the evanescent nature of one-at-a-time performances is what the thrill is all about. The live performance of the game brings into question the reliability of all its artistic representations. (Video records with their instant replays have naturally become the most dependable form of baseball representation.) Marianne Moore makes the poetic equation "baseball is like is writing / You can never tell with either / how it will go / or what you will do" (221) which has become a satisfying comparison for those looking to establish baseball's literary pre-eminence; however, the statement itself is problematic. Baseball is absolutely not like writing because the author has a definite control over his or her text (the option of re-writing) which is most unlike the nature of athletic or gaming performances.[14] Baseball writing is all *called shots*. And as the author can tell how the game is going to turn out, how he or she decides to *talk baseball* becomes more important.

---

[14] Moore's obsessive re-working of her own poetry is perhaps more craft than performance driven. But Moore also was an ardent admirer of the game and her poem "Hometown Piece for Messrs. Alston and Reese" is notable for its hometown boosterism, "Zest: they've zest." " 'Hope springs eternal in the Brooklyn Breast' " (182). (Note the double reference to Alexander Pope and "Casey at the Bat.) Marianne Moore is not, after all, interested in the thrill of the grass, or the rapacity of the crowd -- she is, like most of us, interested in the success of her team. But this does not make her poetry easy to understand. Moore's poetic appreciation of baseball is not likely to be reproduced on the

Further complicated by traditional anti-intellectualism among fans as well as participants, the status of the literary representation is beset with anxieties about who the literary audience is. On one hand, the populist tradition of devaluing and mocking the language of the elite is particularly strong in sports writing. As the authors search to authenticate voices of modestly educated ballplayers, they begin to derive authority from replicating working-class diction and behaviours. On the other hand, the edifying tradition of finding timeless philosophical value in America's common metaphors is also strong in sports writing. In this case contemporary baseball books may appeal to an advanced readership who want more sophisticated analysis and who studiously avoid the timbres of dumbing-down.

The diction of baseball's literature is a prominent signifier of its relationship to the actual game and its audience. From Whitman's effusiveness to Hemingway's evasive reconstructions of the dope; from op-ed patter to locker-room vulgarity; from Vin Scully's detailed play-by-play details to a rookie's inappropriate clichés -- how baseball is linguistically reproduced is often more important and revealing than the details of the stories.

Robert Penn Warren's poem "He was Formidable" begins,

> He was formidable, he was, the little booger
> As he spat in his hands and picked up the Louisville Slugger
> And at that bat-crack
> Around those bases he could sure ball the jack
> And if from the outfield the peg had beat him home
> He would slide in slick, like a knife in a nigger. (47)

"Little booger," "ball the jack," "peg" and the racist sobriquet are meant to idomatically approximate the linguistic-field of this "formidable" player and the fans who acknowledge him as such. The diction is narrowed toward a poetic-type familiar in baseball fiction. The bumpkin "other" becomes the site where the unusual, indelicate words can be accessed by the refined author. But despite the initiation of a local color *verité*, Penn Warren's poem is quite formal, careful in both rhyme and alliteration. The conflation of diction in the piece makes it interesting; it acknowledges the unresolved tension between sophisticated analysis and the occasionally vulgar *logos* of ballplayers. This tension is present throughout

---

Jumbotron where we can follow the bouncing ball and sing along: "Mickey Mantle. (Grazed a Yankee! / My baby pitcher, Montejo!"/ With some pedagogy,/ you'll be tough, premature prodigy " (222).)

baseball fiction as the author may discover the literary mind is not always welcome in a locker-room which may pride itself on a macho, working class disdain for bookishness.

Locker-room vulgarity is not the complete discourse of professional ballplayers, but its strong presence is unsettled in the course of replicating baseball language, particularly as censoring profanity in cultural products has been a standard procedure for a long time. Radio and television's ban on profanity and the Major League's legal control over its taped reproductions helps make the real chatter on the field remain something of a mystery. A recast version of Tommy Lasorda's chatter (with pitcher Doug Rau) reads, "I don't give a bleep, Doug. I'm the bleepin' manager of this bleepin' team and I'll make the bleepin' decisions" (Johnstone 92), gives us enough room to get beyond the written "bleeps," but is also a reminder that honestly replicated on-field language may irk the guardians of baseball's family-friendly image. The narrator of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), sees baseball primarily as a way to make money, noting that "the first public game would certainly draw fifty thousand people" (371), but also acknowledges a problem of representation when he complains of the foul language of the "first ladies and gentlemen of England," ironically noting, "Suppose Sir Walter, instead of putting the conversations into the mouths of his characters, had allowed the characters to speak for themselves?" (62).

The refining sensibilities of its chroniclers have made the language of baseball less harsh than it might be if the players were allowed to speak for themselves. While the novels of the 1970s began to comedically test the boundaries of decency with newfound freedoms of expression, the repopularization of baseball literature in the late eighties becomes more stablized in "family" forms and finds a sanctuary for the baseball metaphor as a "classy" literary project for literary people who might want to steer clear of a more threatening jock talk. As Dan Jenkins indelicately puts it,

> As ironies go . . . none is more baffling to the grizzled sportswriter than the alarming number of Literary People who think of baseball as not just a game but an intellectual pursuit. This seems to be so even though a majority of Literary People do not generally use the word cunt in polite conversation, which is something baseball players do as regularly as they fondle their nuts in public. ("Literary Ball" 40)

Of course, the literary person might be as likely as anyone to be attracted to people who say things that aren't said in polite society, as sure as they were / are attracted to Yogi Berra or Dizzy Dean. But, to a certain extent, the vulgarians of the seventies have gone underground as a certain kind of men's writing has been less favored in the contemporary literary marketplace. The potential for sexist commentary and racist words (even in works

that aren't sexist or racist) is certainly threatening to a more fashionable image of baseball as a harmonic spectacle of America "coming together."[15] A good deal of modern baseball literature then takes seriously the identity of the sport as essentially pacifist and clean, with equal determination, asserts that the real vulgar traditions belong to other American pastimes; with NFL football, which has usurped baseball as the country's most popular professional sport, being singled out for specific abuse. The "booger" type created, in part, to replicate the uneducated discourse of the ballfield, is finely distilled in baseball's fictional characters. The reliable bumpkin whose malapropisms rarely include scandalously profane remarks and whose loveable simpleness invites affection is a stock voice-characterization when talking baseball.

Some of baseball's most beloved literary creations are the refined portraits of the actual people who have been involved in the game. The personalities of Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Christy Matthewson, Sandy Koufax, Leo Durocher and Jackie Robinson, to name a few, are dependable exits from a purely formal critique of a baseball game. In the heroic tradition, victory can often be spelled as evidence of the power of personality. Particularly beloved as literary devices are baseball's "characters" who are always rewarding sportswriters with good copy. The "characters" are usually played as innocent quipmeisters who are just this side of being dumb but who are, at heart, baseball-loving good guys. (Former Philadelphia Phillie John Kruk recently became a talk show staple and the basis of how he projected the loveable image of the softballer within the ranks of the overpaid major leaguers was defined by his quip to a sportswriter, "I ain't an athlete, Lady, I'm a ballplayer.") The pre-eminent "character" in baseball's literary history is, of course, Yankees catcher Yogi Berra, who is alleged to have coined such immortal phrases as "it ain't over till it's over," "90% of this game is half mental" and "nobody goes there because it's too crowded." *Yogisms* have become chapter and verse in baseball writing, and as David Halberstam writes, are "frequently quoted by important fellow Americans, including those running for President of the United States" (310). Even Berra's protests against the apocryphal cataloguing of his malapropisms becomes the classic: "I didn't say all the things I said." Even in Berra's pulp biography his fictional characteristics are gleefully exposed as the former catcher is introduced as "the kid Ring Lardner missed" (Trimble 14).

Another influential "character" and master of the malapropism was Cardinals right-hander Dizzy Dean. A gifted hot dog of a player, Dean was no less flamboyant later on in his career as a radio announcer. Dean's grammatical adventurism -- saying things like

---

[15] The pointedly anti-racist *All in the Family*'s representations of the bigot might seem harsh and racist to a contemporary TV-audience weaned on "positive messages."

"*slud* into third" -- his Arkansan mannerisms, and his "voice marinated in chicken fried gravy"(Gregory 387) helped define color-commentary in a way which still resonates in contemporary radio and television sports broadcasts. The more Dean talked, the more loved he was by the sportsworld, the more attractive he is to writers. It was a complete character package: as the woeful main character in Paul Auster's short story "Dizzy"(1994) says, "People loved him for his brashness and talent, his crazy manglings of the English language, his brawling, boyish antics and fuck-you pizzazz, and I loved him too, loved him as much as anyone in the world" (220). In Dean's Hollywood biopic *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952), the conflict between big-child Dean and the severe old-lady-protectors-of-the-English-Language is the defining moment in the movie's affirmative characterization of Dean. Low brow talk is further established as real, American talk as grammarians become marginalized as Ladies Auxiliary stormtroopers. The vernacular tradition of *Huckleberry Finn*, which keeps the innocent enthusiasm of play alive with idiomatic innocence, thrives in baseball's many quotable, country, good-guy "characters."

Syndicated columnist and television commentator George Will, a self-proclaimed "serious baseball fan," protests the establishment of a character like Dizzy Dean at the centre of baseball's discourse. In *Men at Work* he says;

> Dean was one of baseball's cartoon characters, a caricature sent up from central casting, a Ring Lardner creation come to life. And certainly Dean bore no resemblance to most of the men who rise to the top of today's baseball and stay there for awhile.(3)[16]

While Will is sincere in his desire to relieve baseball of hick romanticism, he supplants it with another representational discourse; the sophisticated language of the op-ed. (And in the process, Will has become a less-loveable figure from central casting himself.) Arguing for a serious consideration of the professionalism of ballplayers and the "Cartesian" process of the National League, Will's detailed analysis of the game can be as cartoonish as anything coming out of Yogi Berra's mouth. And Will invites mocking by studiously insisting on the high seriousness of the game's enterprise, making dubious claims like "a baseball game is an orderly experience -- perhaps too orderly for the episodic mentalities of television babies" (324).

Episodic television babies skewered George Will's discourse in a skit on *Saturday Night Live*. The skit featured impressionist Dana Carvey as Will, serving as host of a

---

16 The comparison is itself a cliché. Sportswriter Heywood Broun is also credited with the line "Dizzy wasn't born, Ring Lardner invented him" (Higgs 23).

game show called *The George Will Sports' Machine*, where "as always, the questions focus on baseball: the only game that transcends the boundary between fury and repose." The game's contestants are Tommy LaSorda (played by Jon Lovitz) and Mike Schmidt (as himself.) Will / Carvey asks them "The precarious balance between infield and outfield suggests a perfect symmetry, for fifty dollars, identify that symmetry . . ." The ballplayers are, of course, dumbfounded and do not respond. A buzzer finally sounds and Will / Carvey says "Sorry, the answer is "the exhilarating tension between being and becoming. *Being* and *Becoming*!"

The joke is on Will but it is achieved by highlighting the chasm between baseball players and baseball writers. The Will character's verbal pomposity serves for punchlines, but the LaSorda and Schmidt characters' failure to understand makes it funny. The distance between the "normal American" ballplayer and the overeducated writer is part of baseball's literary world. Naturally, many fans want and like a level of analysis that the players cannot provide themselves, (certainly not a bizarre phenomena for any student of literary criticism who is faced with shotcomings in interviews with the author). Will's vulnerability to parody fictionalizes him as well -- to a certain extent the legend of Will's verbal effluvium is as apocryphal as Berra's zen spoonerisms. The irony is, in Lardner's work it is the rube who is mocked and lampooned, but now it is the rube who is the measure against which the mocking of the eggheaded Will starts.

To propose the emergence of a literary synthesis of the dictions of George Will and Dizzy Dean would be a likely claim, but there isn't much evidence to suggest such a thing is happening. There is not so much synthesis in baseball's dialectical structures: its conflicts retain their combative hostility to each other and do not resolve themselves to alterior visions or to harmonic convergences.

Hi-Lo

Henry David Thoreau said "a stereotypical but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind" (11). The amusement of baseball, after all, has not always been celebrated by prominent American intellectuals and continues to be suspect to those who believe such entertainments are agents of social enthrallment. The working-class base of fan support, what Sylvia Plath fearfully called the "peanut crunching crowd" (245), can be a force of terror to those who want to go against the crowd. And to the traditional fan base, the intellectual can be a force of humiliation, an authority which points out the shortcomings of the common man or woman.

Part of William Carlos Williams's poem "Spring and All" starts

The crowd at the ball game
is moved uniformly

by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them (39)

While the description is, I think, inaccurate (crowds at ball games are moved "uniformly" only from a far distance), Williams is at least interested in the delight of the crowd, and the "uselessness" is a potentially calming spirit: possibly wresting away the crowd from the beehive of the "usefulness" of capitalism and advancement. Yet the words themselves are unflattering: the viewers are recognized as "fed" consumers; their uneducated aesthetic response is not challenged and, through sensational patterns of repetition, are compelled to consume the same product again and again. The crowd is ultimately,

to be warned against

saluted and defied --
It is alive, venomous

it smiles grimly
its words cut --

The flashy female with her
mother, gets it --

The Jew gets it straight -- it
is deadly, terrifying --

It is the Inquisition. (39)

The connection between sports and mob mentality is certainly not an outrageous or anti-democratic one to make. Considering all the paeans to the gentleness of a day at the ballpark, Williams' poem stands out for its insight into the dark potential within large gatherings. (And Williams brings a sharp historical perspective to the many notes in baseball fiction where "the fans" come out as an undifferentiated, ignorant, alcoholic group notable mostly for their unfair jeering and desire to "kill the umpire!")

In the course of naturalist novels, the tawdryness of American popular culture often is an inherent factor in the misery that besets average Americans and helps render them powerless. For example, in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) vaudeville success is not worthy of reward, and in Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust* (1939) Hollywood becomes the center of corruption, the fault line for an eventual cultural destruction. American popular

culture has tended to be read materially, emphasizing the art's integration with commercial interests and within a concentration of power. In Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922) the middle American is transformed into a stand-up vulgarian -- a prototype for Archie Bunker -- whose expressions of power speak of the mediocrity of his popular culture. In *Babbitt*, the celebration of baseball is not at all admirable and is used to illustrate the ignorance of Babbitt and his cronies: "they were of eternal importance, like baseball or the Republican party" (11) or in the announcement "that Babe Ruth the eminent player of baseball was a noble man" (48). The failure of America to produce a genuine nobility of the classically-educated leaders Jefferson imagined, allows not only the success of Babbitt but the ascension of a man like Herbert Hoover to the presidency and a galoot like Ruth to America's "nobility."[17] For Babbitt, the populist language of baseball is part of a culturally validated anti-intellectual squelch, where ignorance can be articulated as national pride. When a Yale graduate claims he speaks three languages, Babbitt responds "So do I -- American, baseball and poker" (87). The *lingua franca* of professional sports has become entrenched within in the seemingly "honest" discourse of a just-folks America. Or put another way, if you wanted to run for high office today, you won't being quoting Thoreau's thoughts on games.

Written in 1888, Ernest Thayer's poem "Casey at the Bat" is one of the most popular American poems ever written, yet it is rarely included in the kinds of literary anthologies (like the *Norton Anthology of American Literature)* which are usually prescribed to college freshmen to detail the literary history of the United States. That the poem is any worse than Longfellow's perennially anthologized "Seaweed" is debatable, but it is undeniable that the fame *Casey* has accrued over the years has pushed the poem into the territory of Disney-like *kitsch.* The exclusion of *Casey* from literary anthologies is no aesthetic crime, but it is also not a mere oversight. To include the poem would somehow challenge the loose but operative definitions between *Hi* and *Lo* culture. *Casey*'s junior-high lit class familiarity may also be an embarrassment to the purveyors of baseball literature who want their passion to look more "respectable." So when George Grella, in his essay "Baseball and the American Dream," writes "Baseball is a game for poets and priests, philosophers and scholars, worthy of contemplation and rich in wonder" (550) he

---

[17] Baseball's cherished anecdote of how Babe Ruth, when questioned about the fact that he made more money than President Hoover spouted "Why not? I had a better year than he did!"(Creamer 351) is perhaps enough evidence of America's need to believe there isn't a national aristocracy and in professional sports as the most likely exit from the lower classes.

is making a case for baseball to be relieved of lowbrow connotations, distancing baseball literature from the memorable phrase "there was no joy in Mudville."

There can be no comprehensive definition of what popular culture is or what high culture is in contrast, no reliable boundary to tell us where *Hi* ends and where *Lo* begins. Yet the distinction is a normative device in any study of American literature. Distinguishing between *art* and *trash* can be half the fun, but developing a certain system of descrimination is impossible. The persistence of a current sense of a schism between elite cultural products and popular culture products is rooted in deeply-felt class divisions and how these divisions are tested in the social projects of cultural "betterment." Certainly Melville's *Moby Dick* has, by now, reached a larger audience than, say, the latest album by Porno for Pyros; yet, the modestly successful album is more securely recognized as "popular culture." All cultural institutions -- city orchestras, ballteams, universities, record companies, network affiliates -- have financial bottom lines to consider, and Hi and Lo products are working in the same consumer industry. (They still aren't giving away copies of *Moby Dick.*) Differentiating between a *mass culture* as opposed to *popular culture* has gained some currency, but the distinction is still primarily class-based (like the assertions which separate "quality TV" from "TV") and aesthetically reassuring in a superficial way. (*I* like popular culture; *you* like mass culture.)

Hostile resistance to the study of popular culture certainly exists, but it seems to me that often the greatest harm to this on-going study comes from the overly earnest and defensive apologies from students of popular culture. The constant efforts to systematize the generic functions of pop forms unfortunately ends up reasserting the idea that "one is pretty much like the next" and avoids making individuated aesthetic judgements about the complex and inconsistent objects which popular culture creates. Baseball fiction exists as surely as gangsta rap does, but it is premature to defend either in whole as having closed generic functions. And obviously, baseball literature conceptually works both ends of a highly politicized Hi-Lo cultural debate. Like "rock opera" or "cowboy poetry" it nominally marries a low-brow, macho vigor to what may be described as an intellectual and effeminate art form. Baseball fiction is excitably caught-up in this conflict, letting George Will and Dizzy Dean fight to call the game in intervals.

Anyone Can Play. (Except You)

David Halberstam wrote that baseball is "the sport that a foreigner is least likely to take to" (*Baseball: Wit and Wisdom* 52). And while Canadians, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Guatamalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Costa Ricans, Panamanians, Cubans,

Dominicans, Venezuelans, Philipinos, Taiwanese, Koreans and Japanese may react with hostility to the obvious Amerocentrism of such a remark, we still know what Halberstam means. Baseball is American. Despite the game's roots in the English game of rounders, despite the impassioned flag-waving of the fans of the Toronto Blue Jays, most representations of the game do not stray far from the *a priori* mythopoeic Americaness of the game. Whether it serves as a ring-a-ding flag-waver or a morality tale about greed, baseball *meaning* for American baseball writers is usually limited within the boundaries of their own country.

Despite the efforts of A.G. Spalding and baseball's early enthusiasts, baseball never did catch on in Europe and only recently was accepted as a medal sport in the Olympics. While American professional baseball's championship showcase is oddly referred to as the *World* Series, baseball is a very American product, not unlike Coca Cola, and its presence in other countries is often associated with American colonial domination.[18] Just as cricket can be a metonymic device to identify a certain kind of English colonial presence in Commonwealth countries like Jamaica or Pakistan, baseball too has become identified with distinctly national values. Since it became a noticeable pastime, the "Americaness" of baseball has been advocated as an essential element of the game's play. Continually, intellectuals and politicians have followed Walt Whitman's patriotic cheerleading, asking crowds to applaud how "our game" embodies American virtue.

That baseball would be said to embody national character is not surprising. Particular sports are often adopted by nation states to announce the pride of their citizens. The creators of the modern Olympic movement hoped the international games would, in part, channel the threatening nationalism of nineteenth century Europe into the sublimated sporting event and help contribute to a more peaceful world. Of course, the rhetoric of international world peace is still part of the Olympic package but the competitions themselves invariably exacerbate national differences and bring in huge TV audiences because of the promise of an *us* vs. *them* match-up. Locating the ancient Greek games as the spiritual home of *civilized* competition has brought competitive sports into the fold of

---

18 In his essay "The Toronto Blue Jays: Colonialism, Civility, and the Idea of a National Team" Mark Kingwell imagines the coast-to-coast Canadian celebration of the World Series victory by Toronto in 1992 was partly motivated by a national desire to "shame the colonizers, to show them the precise shape and limits of their acts of imperial domination" (224).

Classic Hellenic authorization.[19] Spectator sports were, in effect, brought to the modern leisure classes along with approval (so to speak) from Plato and Aristotle. While the ancient Greek games may have advanced the place of sports in civilized societies it is important to recognize the classical contribution is mostly a re-interpreted history meant to favor the reinvention of the Olympics.[20] Organized sport has no birthplace. Sport, like baseball, is vaguely delineated in its genesis and the resulting foundation theories are notoriously suspect to back-formations as various national interests become embodied in theories of play.

Baseball's absence from an Olympic or world stage has, in part, retained it for America where it need not seriously face the claims of other countries. In Japan, for example, baseball or *besuboru* is said to be "as clear an expression of the Japanese character as one could find" (Whiting *Wah* 49), and the style of American athletes ("Gaijin") is often seen as an affront to the "inherent" properties of the game. But this claim is never taken seriously in the U.S. and makes no impression on the American identity of baseball. American exceptionalism explains much of how baseball's closed borders are erected even in the face of significant international interest. Historical narcissism in America has created a discourse about sport where only the American version of baseball seems important. Momentarily Europe disappears and other versions of the pastime, while sociologically interesting insofar as they comment on *American* baseball, patronizingly reconfirm American pre-eminence. Put more simply, there is no evidence to suggest that Americans are interested in games where they are not the best.

That baseball writing abounds with meretricious clichés about America is not exactly news. (You can give it 110%, but if you are talking about baseball you will eventually utter a cliché.)[21] The heart-tugging James Earl Jones voice-over sermon from

---

19 While there is still not that much known about the nature of the ancient games they can be dated back to c.776 BC. "The Olympic peace or *ekecheria* was proclaimed to last for about three months before the Games (which themselves lasted for five days) and long enough after them for the competitors to enjoy a safe passage back to their homes" (McWhittier 9).

20 The neo-classical worship of sports was adopted by the Nazis, and the new nationalism of the "ancient games" informed the theories of racial superiority the Berlin Olympics of 1936 were meant to showcase. Though these perverse theories were heroically defied by Jessie Owens, the informing nationalism of the games is still intact (cf. Hoberman 164).

21 While it is easy to be dismissive of clichés (and acknowledging sports clichés is itself a stock cliché of American humor) they are inseparable from the dialectics of baseball's history. Getting away for a moment from the particular cliché *Baseball as America*, the abundance of baseball clichés in popular speech ("thrown a curve," "getting to first base," etc.) and baseball analysis ("a behind-in-the-count hitter") indicate how popular the

Field of Dreams (1988) which boldly announces "Baseball -- everything that once was *good* about this country" never sounds as unexpected as it should. Somewhere with apple pie and rugged individualism, baseball has sponsored its own distinctive series of patriotic hooks which underwrites the *Field of Dreams* project. The idea is that baseball *is* America, however compromised or oscillating, and the game is always working toward its essential goodness. On the good field there'll be a "coming together" which perfectly demonstrates the wisdom of the American political and social experience.

In the Ken Burns TV-series, former New York Governor Mario Cuomo said "whenever we learned to cooperate with one another and did the right thing, we won -- that's what baseball is "(*Baseball*, Pt.9). Cuomo wasn't talking about the 1977 New York Yankees as much as he was trying to capture the political hope that baseball says something good about America, and that its goodnesses are compatible with the aims of the Democratic Party. "Coming together" is baseball's coherent political dream: a group of Americans who are judged on performance rather than birthright, where the merit in the performance is quantifiable. Baseball's meritocracy is not a disembodied spiel; the idea and practise of this paradigm has been inspirational to American minority groups who have played the game or have seen their integration in American society dramatized by a group member's performance on the field. In the context of more recent discussions about multi-culturalism as social policy, baseball's history has become a reliable measure of the progress (or lack of progress) in the establishment of a melting pot society.

Baseball games are not usually played as explicit contests between identifiable minority groups. Within the boundaries of the United States professional baseball games are contested by mercenaries under civic / regional banners. This system is the most commercially versatile way to encourage fan loyalty to particular teams and form the foundation of the game's longstanding success. The rivalry between American cities is often felt and can of course be sublimated in the ballgames; in baseball lit, civic or regional difference may be expressed as "warring Greeks" (Wormser 14) met on the non-violent Olympic field. The social cohesion of the ballyard is limited to the team as opposed to the sport as a whole: *we come together, we defeat them.*

---

language of baseball is. Sports commentary depends upon explaining predictabilities, so while it's not original to be "looking for a fastball" on a 3-2 count it is still wise. Clichés are often matters of expression rather than content: George Will's declaration that "the best baseball people are [...] Cartesians" (324) is a stylish reworking of the classic "it's a game of inches." Noted baseball essayist Thomas Boswell's line that "Baseball's true secret is that, for those who appreciate and value it, it has no secrets" (78) is another way of saying "you could look it up." What continues to be interesting in baseball are the expressive possibilities within the expanse of its tested maxims.

In William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) Jason Compson's sense of place is sublimated in his assessment of the 1928 baseball season:

> "I reckon you've got your money on the Yankees this year."
> "What for?" I says.
> "The Pennant," he says. "Not anything in the league can beat them."
> "Like hell there's not," I says. "They're shot," I says. "You think a team can be that lucky forever?"
> "I don't call it luck," Mac says.
> "I wouldn't bet on any team that fellow Ruth played on," I says. "Even if I knew it was going to win."
> "Yes?" Mac says.
> "I can name you a dozen men in either league who're more valuable than he is," I says.
> "What have you got against Ruth?" Mac says.
> "Nothing," I says. "I haven't got anything against him. I don't even like to look at his picture." (314)

Faulkner works Jason's despair of the Yankees and Ruth into an obvious commentary about *The Yankees* -- the "lucky" team once compared to U.S. Steel.[22] In refusing to acknowledge the power of the baseball Yankees, Jason stubbornly attempts to deny the triumph of those other Yankees to maintain the illusion of place in the postbellum South.[23] For Jason, baseball chit-chat is not a common language that transcends regional or social difference, it annoyingly reasserts the outcome of the Civil War. His recusancy is passionately rebellious, but against *The Sound and the Fury*'s backdrop of decay it is also foolishly doomed.

Regional hostilities in professional baseball's fan base have been greatly diminished by the use of mercenaries. As teams are comprised of players who don't necessarily come from the city they play in, fan loyalty is less aggravated than it might be otherwise. (Considering the civic-pride subtext in the rise of hooliganism in England, or the riots

---

22 The '28 the Yankees would dominate baseball as few teams have. Interesting in light of Jason's predictions, the '28 Yankees would eventually sweep the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. The Cardinals were the Major League team most Southeners and Westerners would have supported in 1928.

23 Jason's distaste for Ruth may also be a sign of his vituperative racism. According to Robert Creamer "Ruth was called nigger so often that many people assumed he was indeed partly black and that at some point in time he, or an immediate ancestor, had managed to cross the color line" (Creamer 185). The irony of Ruth going on to hit .625 in the 1928 World Series is further proof that Faulkner gave this exchange particularly detailed attention.

associated in big cities after pro sports championships, it is probably not a bad thing the mercenary system is in place.) But the mercenary system is incomplete and teams invariably try to appeal to the characteristics of their fan base. The Montreal Expos will always covet French Canadian players more than the Seattle Mariners, and the Texas Rangers will more likely stock their team with Hispanic players than, say, the Milwaukee Brewers. The process of inclusion within the mercenary system follows more than an unconscious acceptance of the idea of the melting pot. Fan identification with teams is a complex process and many baseball teams have courted interest from minority groups by signing a same-group star. Many African-Americans were (and still are) devoted to the Brooklyn / Los Angeles Dodgers franchise as a legacy of Jackie Robinson's break of baseball's color line; today, many Japanese-Americans are being drawn to the ballpark to see L.A. Dodgers pitcher Hideo Nomo.

However, does baseball actually deserve its conferred reputation as a positive agent of integration? In baseball fiction, the relationship between baseball and minorities is a hot topic because baseball and sport is often cast as the normative agent of American assimilation. The ability to see *what baseball should be*, the willingness to believe it doesn't matter what your background is, makes the sport-setting a likely place to test the limits of the outsider. While everyone wants to participate, the institutionalized system of play as we know it may also enforce its attendant corrupting values. Integration itself may be a pyrrhic victory and the work of American professional sports a stultifyingly closed endeavour. Though baseball's lit often celebrates the game's inclusiveness, for many on the outside, the Major Leagues' system of male exclusivity, which is still in place, is based on a harmful locker-room mystique that may be terminally misogynist and stalled in an adolescent homosexual panic.

In contrast to the NFL, professional baseball's promoters use its non-violent, less macho image as a strategy to draw more female spectators. For poet Mary Leary baseball is "not like football, where they'd eat you for breakfast and really / mean it, or work awful hard to, / that's a sport for men" (128-9). The issue of male heterosexual exclusivity for baseball is more of a "live" issue than its historicized tests of ethnic and racial inclusion. As the notion of appreciable differences in gender perceptions of baseball is undoubtedly based on problematic generalizations and stereotypes, thematic differences in men's and women's baseball writing nonetheless do occur. While the incredible popularity of the movie *A League of Their Own* (1992) may have revived the idea among some beer companies in starting women's teams, and despite Mary Leary's poem, there are still no more women playing Major League baseball than there are women in the NFL. Baseball literature, like baseball itself, is predominantly male. And this connects baseball to the

significant discourse which poses, as feminist critic Judith Fetterley puts it, "American Literature is male. . . . Though exceptions may be found here and there -- a Dickinson poem, a Wharton novel -- these exceptions usually function to obscure and confuse the issue: American Literature is male" (xii). Similarly, there is no resolute correction of, or alibi for, the gender imbalance in baseball literature's reality. Suffice to say, while baseball writing is full of apologies, the women who do write about baseball are often found apologizing twice.

Baseball novels are usually written by dedicated spectators rather than participants of the game, and this is just as true in women's baseball texts. Female writers on baseball are often saying the same things the men are; taken as a whole there are the same points about literary suitability, transcendence, summer rituals, pastoral idealism, meritocracy and the threatened joys of childhood. Baseball becomes more of a political issue when sex difference is directly engaged vis-a-vis baseball's reputation for mainstreaming the identities of minorities in America. In chapter four of this manuscript I will be looking closely at this particular issue in the context of the success of the fiction *A League of Their Own*; giving particular focus to the difficulties of expressing difference given the myriad of sexist, macho, boyish, and gentlemanly postures that inform the popular identities for baseball. As assimilation into baseball-superstardom is unlikely for women, alternative, nonconformist perspectives in representing baseball become more sharply realized.

Even though most of women's writing on baseball is celebratory, it is interesting to realize how the American woman's easier access to an "I hate sports" rap -- something which could be seen as sour grapes when coming from a male author -- often brings a tighter sarcasm and cynicism to women's sports writing and has formed a beachhead in a popular, stand-up commentary about the emotional deficiencies of the American male. Further, the epistemological significance of the male locker-room is more significantly adjudicated in gender-conscious baseball texts as a considerable source for male authority and exclusivity, and this source in women's baseball writing is alternately petitioned, replicated, ignored and feared.

Some women's texts also significantly introduce the erotic identity and sex appeal of male ballplayers as a part of the fan's dialogue.[24] Even slight indications like "Jim Palmer is cute" momentarily relieves baseball writing of the ethereal sexlessness of its idealized and formal presentations. Sure, the gross / funny spectacle of Philip Roth's

---

24 In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) there's the erotic pathos of Robert LeBrun's "little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth" (135) -- calling Edna Pointillier to, uh, straighten the fallen symbol of his youthful vigor.

Portnoy masturbating in a baseball glove may not be readily collected in patriotic baseball writings, but this outrageous conflation of images reminds us that even the great game can't transcend desire. Acknowledging the erotic also helps push baseball rhetoric beyond the traditional taboos of a straight male audience. Particularly as the appeal of the human body forms such a large measure of appreciation of athletics, the acknowledgment of looks and of sexual desire is not insignificant. The restrictions on erotic commentary (however slight) often leaves baseball writing with the stamp of male *baseball talk* -- "inside dope" as a retreat from the pressures of *real talk*.

When baseball is used as a formal device of avoidance, as it is in Hemingway's "Three Day Blow," it is usually a male heterosexual gesture. Given the Rip Van Winkle paradigm -- the *flight from women* as a standard tool for interpreting the maleness of American fiction -- baseball fictions often can't help but be very Rip Van Winklesque and, by their omissions, be expressive of a deep conflict betweeen American men and women. Finding respite from the company of women on an all-male team who goes out on a seasonal trip with strange characters is already familiar to readers of *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Delineating this paradigm Leslie Fiedler writes,

> There is finally no heterosexual solution which the American psyche finds completely satisfactory, no imagined or real consumation between man and woman found worthy of standing in our fiction for the healing of the breach between consciousness and unconsciousness, reason and impulse, society and nature. Yet in no nation in the world are those cleavages more deeply felt, declared, indeed in the very pattern of historical life, visibly represented by the frontier. And in no nation is the need to heal such divisions more passionately recognized. (*Love and Death* 339)

If "innocent homosexual relationships" are reproduced as the most worthwhile relationships in American literature -- to say nothing of the even more discernably *male* baseball literature -- articulations of real homosexual feelings, calls into question how "innocent" this paradigm really is.

The role of homophobia in the dynamics of the locker-room has a complex socializing authority, but it is a phenomenon that also has a popular understanding (as opposed to popular approval.) In women's sports, the spectre of lesbianism has become a notorious way of dissuading female participation in athletics. In men's sports the presence of homosexuals on a team is often imagined as a kind of apocalypse as ballplayers dramatically locate themselves "in the shower." While there have undoubtedly been several gay ballplayers, to my knowledge there has not been one to publically come out as his career was in progress. However, fictional stories about the first *outed* players have

become a common trope in literary-ball. These stories are not just rants against homophobic rednecks at the game; the baseball setting not only brings the easy-to-imagine intensity of fan reactions but the All-American normalcy-test of the old ballgame. *The Gay Jackie Robinson* looks for acceptance: to *play*, as well as to *sing* America, but such a proposition is understood to be a volatile one as the assumptions behind the locker-room are brought to light.

Greedy Little Bastards

The Ken Burns TV-special is a reasonable historical terminus for my inquiry into baseball literature; the series aired just before Major League baseball cancelled the 1994 World Series because of the lockout--strike--*whatever*. The coterminancy of these events makes a nice contrast between the contemporary artistic representations of baseball and the dominant structures of the business of what we often think of as baseball itself. The after effects of the strike on the fan base may have also had a somewhat chilling effect on baseball publishing. The strike's legacy to the financial health of baseball may be shortlived but the secondary and tertiary industries around baseball were more seriously wounded (*i.e.* ticket sales are down, but cap and t-shirt sales are way down.) Of course, authors will still be interested in exploring the baseball metaphor, and discontent over today's lot of millionaires increases the lustre of its nostalgic figures, but it will probably be difficult to establish wider audiences if most people don't even want *hear* about baseball. Where so much of baseball literature practically glides on the power of its positive word-associations, post-strike, the mention of "baseball" may as likely connote *greed.*

In the wake of the 1994 strike, there were quixotic discussions about the notion of *fans-rights* to combat the increased nausea over greedy baseball players and baseball owners. The fans, of course, already have all the rights in the world in this matter. To resort to another Yogiism: "If the people don't want to come to the park nobody's going to stop them" (*Voices of Baseball* 62). Understanding the commercial nature of the game, however, does not (nor should it) bring a dispassionate acceptance of a perceived commercial abasement. A business doesn't have to be a bad business. Because its appreciative fans consider this commercial product a "national heirloom," it is not just another flavor of Diet Squirt. The good-will or positive feelings the fans have about the game are honestly felt and, I believe, earned. The perception of inconsiderate greed at the top, however, reinforces the consumer's sense of powerlessness; professional baseball is a constitutionally protected monopoly, and if you don't like it there is nowhere else to go.

The tried and true metaphorical remedy for the discovery of rank greed is to make a claim that what we have to do is return the game to "the kids." Even in the course of the 1994 strike, it wasn't uncommon to read in the press owners asking their players to consider what they will say to the disappointed kids who used to want their autographs or to read of players claiming they were on strike to preserve their liberty for their kids and all the kids of America. Officially, baseball is for the kids. (The image of kids playing the game is the final image in Burns's *Baseball.*) In baseball's literary domain the kid, from the perceptive brat who allegedly said "say it ain't so Joe," to the sick kid Babe Ruth cured with a timely dinger, is a baseball staple whose brash innocence, attending on heroism, usually represents the desires of the adult fans.

In 1915 an issue of *The Sporting News* printed the following poem:

What Constitutes the Game?

I asked a magnate great
In wealth and power and ease
He said "in brief I'll state
The game is mainly these --
My turnstile clicking around
My bankroll gaining heft
While thousands leave my grounds
With not a nickel left.

I asked a big league star
Of fame and great reknown
He stopped his motor car
And looked benignly down.
"I'll take it that the game"
He said with some hauteur
"Is signing up your name
For thirty thousand per."

I asked a ragged kid
He stared in blank surprise
The wonder that he had
Shown in contemptuous eyes;
"De game? A big lot -- see?
A gluv, a bat, a ball;
Yer gang, my gang and me
An den -- some scrap -- dat's all."
(Seymour *Golden Age* 20)

The poem's caricatures set up a clearly delineated chain of command for blame in the commodification of baseball. (The players may have moved up the ranks in recent years.) From the kid's perspective, the greed of the owners and players constitutes an ethical

breach from the "dat's all" purity of the baseball contest. The stylized language of the kid, reminiscent of all honest-speaking Hucks, is the ethical voice of the fan; demanding the essence of the game, playing to win and not for the money. The poem itself is quite articulate about the structure of baseball as an industry, and that structure -- with the moral authority of the kid as well -- is still intact. Naturally, for every Huck there must be a Pap, and the kid's assertion of the essential purity of the game could not exist without its companionate visions of "the fix."

The kid's vision of baseball is itself a fix, fated to be disappointed by the accommodations of adult lies. This fixing of the kid's authoritative innocence is manifest in an episode from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) where Holden writes an essay about his kid brother Allie's baseball mitt. Allie -- the ultimate object of Holden's protective narcissism -- is described as having written poems all over his baseball mitt "In green ink . . . so that he'd have have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat" (38). It's a striking image that marries literature and baseball within the pathos of doomed youth. Though it is possible Holden is making up the image, he is expressing his own faith in an essential innocence. That the subject of Holden's essay ("a goddam *base*ball glove"[41]) is ridiculed by a "phony" prep suggests the game is always a credible link to a world uncomplicated by adults.

The association of baseball with youth is deeply felt in many aspects of the sport's acculturation. Childlike expressions from the fans themselves are understandably welcome releases in the midst of serious and difficult workdays. What Roger Angell calls "Naivete -- the infantile and ignoble joy that sends a grown man or woman to dancing and shouting with joy in the middle of the night over the haphazardous flight of a distant ball"(*Once More* 83) is a critical paradigm for the enthusiast. (Or, to put it another way, this seems like a reasonable explanation as to why I'd wear an old tri-colored Montreal Expos hat in public.) But the game of the grown man or woman is hardly for children any more: high ticket prices admit few "dirty-faced" kids, late night games make all but the Sunday afternoon game unapproachable for youngsters, and baseball games have simply become *too long*. There's an honest but less poetic reaction from actual fans: children at baseball games, like children sitting beside you on a long flight, can become a nuisance.

However, one of the strongest images entrenched in recent baseball fiction -- through the game's association with youth -- is the reconciliation of father and son in a primal "game of catch." One may immediately think of the resolving images of the films *The Natural* and *Field of Dreams*, which both show a peaceful, patrilinear game of catch. Poet Donald Hall in his book of essays titled *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons* writes, "Baseball is fathers and sons. Football is brothers beating each other up in the backyard,

violent and superficial. Baseball is the generations" (30). The insistence on the "game of catch" image does speak of a real and pleasant experience for many American men and is worthy of recognition. But it is also an anxious image as most fathers and sons have complex relationships which outdistance their pleasant harmonies. Poetic versions of this "game of catch" may then prelude many a John Bradshaw moment, where the "adult child" actively resents the absence of this image in real life. What I will be arguing in the fifth chapter of this study is that the recent insistence on father-son restorations probably has less to do with the so-called "generations" of baseball and more to do with an increased anxiety about the state of contemporary father and son relationships. What is at stake now is the image's legitimacy. Where the old pulp bio *Joe DiMaggio: His Golden Year* closes with, "What he did as well as what he was -- the noble American folk hero -- will be remembered and talked about and passed on from father to son for as long as they play this game of ours called baseball"(216) we are left with a feeling that today, junior is more interested in Nintendo than the legacy of Joltin' Joe. The nostalgic image of an American past where father allegedly knew best is increasingly lamented and used to illustrate the failures of liberalism and the MTV generation.

The conservative sentiments of baseball often connect the changes of the sixties and the seventies with the particular sin of wedging fathers from sons. The neo-conservatism of the late eighties, broadly characterized by rapid corporate expansion and nostalgia for old fashioned values, often expresses its hopes in looking backward to the supposedly "uncomplicated" 1950s. And baseball in particular can be a compellingly detailed fictive leap over all the divisiveness associated with Vietnam, Watergate, Women's Lib, Marijuana and urban flight, back into the bosom of the old ballparks and the great, long gone New York teams.

Don Delillo's ambitious novella *Pafko at the Wall* (1993) retreats to the fifties to what may be the most dissected moment in baseball history (the "Miracle of Coogan's Bluff") to set up a complex statement about the power of this sport to hold generations of Americans together. Set in the Polo Grounds in 1951, *Pafko at the Wall* ties Russ Hodges, the radio announcer behind the tag, "The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!" to this embracing conceit:

> Russ thinks this is another kind of history. He thinks they will carry something out of here that joins them all in a rare way that binds them to a memory with protective power. . . . Isn't it possible that this midcentury moment enters the skin more lastingly than the fast shaping strategies of eminent leaders, generals steely in their sunglasses -- the mapped visions that pierce our dreams? Russ wants to believe a thing like this keeps us safe

> in some determined way. . . . This is the people's history and it has flesh and breath that quicken to the force of this old safe game of ours. (70)

This careful articulation of a shared, comforting popular history is not without its obvious truths and acknowledged variables, but looking at the particular conceit (the Thompson home run), it is typical that the object of this insight would come in the early nineties about a legendary baseball moment from the "old, safe" fifties. Far more people actually saw the 1994 Super Bowl between the San Francisco 49ers and San Diego Chargers than the legendary "Miracle on Coogan's Bluff," but one hopes that that particular football game will never metastasize as a literary conceit for shared history. It takes a long time before everybody has seen the games that bind us together. (And even in the end, not everybody does. Not everybody likes baseball, and there is nothing wrong with this: millions of Americans happily do without.) While technology and television are often cast as the mustache-twirling villains in baseball texts -- turning the kid's game into a lazy millionaire's industry -- it is through technology and television that we have been able to "read" and "re-read" anthologies of baseball's canonical moments collectively, and this textual resource reconfirms the defining moments and recontextualizes the palpable dramas. Or, because we've shared the video clips, it's easier to believe in DeLillo's Hodges' insight.

To a certain extent, baseball literature is also a baby boomer thing. Children of the fifties have found a stability in a cultural product that has survived, relatively unchanged, through the dramatic cultural changes of the last three decades. (Alas, to some, the whole idea of literary ball sounds more like a discourse for post-feminist boomer guys who don't want to offend and who need to assure us they did indeed go to college.) The hero of the contemporary baseball novel may not be the Ruthian slugger, but the son who was distanced from his father in adolescence, who went on to live in the greedy world just the same, and who expresses his *mea culpa* in an figurative game of catch. This is the exact plot of *Field of Dreams* (whose mantra "build it and they will come" is the baseball version of the *trickle-down theory*) and it is the spiritual plot for many baseball texts. The issues of resolution between father and son are complex and drawn-out in the baseball novels I will be discussing in chapter five, but they are grounded in the cultural expansions of baseball and official nostalgia of the Reagan / Bush years.

Called Shots

Trying to explain a random sample of baseball books, professor Stephen Jay Gould writes "how could the game mean such radically different things at the same time?" (44) This

study attempts to answer this question but does so without knowing any simple answer. Given the overly bold headline temptations in sports writing, trying to contain all the various strains of conflict and dialogue within a slogan I think should be suspect. For example, suggesting *Green / Greed* as the totalizing yin-yang of baseball, while properly suggestive, is too entrenched in a genre-formula reading of the literature. With analysis of the best and most popular baseball novels, and maintaining an interest in the cultural issues they entertain, I have structured my discussion around the four conflicted tropes which are most common in baseball fiction:

-The declaration of spiritual perfection vs. discoveries of *the fix.*

-The vision of a pastoral setting as a strategy for baseball's narrative escapes from its city home.

-The pure meritocracy of baseball *vis-a-vis* the texts by and about people from identifiable minority groups who also want to "play America."

-Reconciling the image of father and son with the divisive realities of the late 1980s / early 1990s.

Conceiving the debates thematically is slightly problematic insofar as the themes intertwine in several books (e.g. *Shoeless Joe / Field of Dreams* could be a reasonable illustration for all these points) but the thematic organization is, I think, useful in articulating what is characteristic about baseball fiction. It is also impossible to attempt a comprehensive overview of the complete body of baseball fiction, as it seems that every other week I'm made aware of the title of another book, long out of print, that may have some worthwhile baseball angle in it. Nonetheless, my analysis is representative of the established canonical baseball texts and is still, I believe, fairly comprehensive with regard to what's been happening in the contemporary fiction.

Speculating on the cultural production of baseball-lit, my analysis will also bring the literary-themes in line with baseball's place in the entertainment industry. Considering that members of the New York Mets are credited with writing more books than the Bloomsbury circle, some negative assumptions about popular taste may be confirmed, but it is wrong I think to provide an alibi for baseball literature by imagining "serious" baseball lit has nothing to do with the sales of Lenny Dykstra's memoirs or with the recent efforts of TV networks to attract younger viewers to the game.

The production of literary baseball takes place within the cultural production of American professional baseball rather than safely outside. The literary representations of the game, because they are all called shots (absent of the crucial unpredictability of the

game), hit their marks with a limited series of tropes that are nonetheless unfinished and vigorously contested. The conflict in baseball literature is not a Manichean rift between two teams of authors but is a conflict inherent in the very idea of *baseball literature*.

TWO

In the Big Inning:
Baseball's Spiritual Fix.

"It isnt whether you win or lose,
but how you
play the game."
In baseball
this is how you say
the meek shall inherit
the earth.

-from *Baseball, a poem in the magic number 9* by George Bowering

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said the boy impetuously. "I'll make good for you. I've failed trying to make a living. Baseball is the only thing they taught me at college that I'm good at, and when I read that you needed a third baseman I --"

"College man, eh?" asked Clancy quickly. Well, I won't hold that against you or tip it off."

-from *Jimmy Kirkland and the Plot for a Pennant* by Hugh S. Fullerton.

The Rose / Giamatti Metaphor and The Perfect Game's Troubles

Of all the literary prophets of baseball's philosophical and spiritual beauty, few have been better equipped than A. Bartlett Giamatti. While Giamatti is remembered by casual fans of the game as the eloquent League commissioner who banned superstar Pete Rose from the game, he was also well known in the academy as a respected Renaissance scholar and, to a lesser extent, as the former president of Yale University. His run-in with the legendary and inelegant Charlie Hustle over allegations of cheating not only highlights the metaphorical conflict between an idealized baseball game and a corrupted fixed game, it also speaks to the contradictions inherent in representing baseball. The question of who was right in the Rose-Giamatti case was not only a hot-button issue for sports call-in shows of its day it remains a strong introduction to the dialectics of baseball idealism.

Giamatti's pedigree as an East Coast / Ivy League intellectual and woebegotten Boston Red Sox fan made him something of a role model to baseball's philosophical and literary contingent. And while this pedigree left him vulnerable to an anti-intellectual backlash Giamatti is not a clichéd academic figure who is just compulsively reading too much into the game. Giamatti's insights into the game are serious, contemplative, conscious of limitations, based on goodwill and (sometimes) fun.

When asked if he was an idealist Giamatti's studied response was always to say "I hope so." In his baseball writings, Giamatti brings his hopefulness to the foregrounding of what is good about baseball, and his detailed partisanship for the BoSox is moved into the less-threatening background. Giamatti's only real baseball book, a pamphlet published posthumously called *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games* (1989), is the closest thing there is to a primer for baseball literature's idealistic discourse. Although Giamatti's cultured way of speaking gives his pamphlet an aristocratic authority -- *Take Time* reads more like a lecture for the Young Aristoteleans Society than an address to ballplayers -- the points he makes are few and certain. Giamatti hits his marks: he articulates the vision of the Edenic wonders of the ballyard with conviction and grace. He is a traditionalist, stridently anti-television and he claims the designated hitter "violates a fundamental principle of a liberal education" (Valerio 85). In baseball he sees the perfect meritocratic form where essentially virtuous Americans can assert their freedom in an irreplacable expression of *e pluribus unum*:

> Baseball fulfills the promise America made itself to cherish the individual while recognizing claims of the group. It sends its players out in order to return again, allowing all the freedom to accomplish great things in a dangerous world. So baseball restates a vision of America's promise every

> time it is played. The playing of the game is a reinstatement of the promises that we can all be free, that we can all succeed. (*Take Time* 103-4)

Giamatti's faith in baseball's "promise" was not just color-commentary; it would guide him through his difficult decision in the Rose case with his belief that "no individual is superior to the game" (Valerio 83). His decision to ban Rose came from an idealism that, rather than being mere pie-in-the-sky, was carefully delineated and poetically attuned to a passionate faith in baseball:

> however vestigal the remnants of our best hopes, we can still find, if we wish to, a moment called a game, when those best hopes, those memories for the future, have life; when each of us, those who are in and those who are out, has a chance to gather, in a green place around home. (Valerio 29)

"Green" and "Home" have become the most dependable words in baseball's literary products. They are repeated in Giamatti's work -- and in the work of other baseball idealists – in the way "change" is repeated in a Bill Clinton speech or "smooth" is repeated in a cigarette ad. While Giamatti is not cynically trying to calculate sell-words for ticket holders, he is placing baseball, and not any other American sport, for its own level in the Platonic forms.[1] Invoking Eden as a metaphorical source for the game enmeshes the language of its representations in high style and also engages a moral responsibility to God's great creation. Giamatti says "This is a special world, baseball, and it certainly has its snakes in the garden" (Valerio 84), which acknowledges the *fallen* state of baseball and looks for a language of faith to help keep the sinners at bay.

Summing up Giamatti's idealism, sportswriter Frank DeFord enumerates Giamatti's lexicon of faith by printing up this dream line-up card.

> Green, CF
> History, 1B
> Park, RF
> Civility, 3B
> Individual, 2B
> Group, SS
> Law, LF
> Offense, C
> Law, P
>
> (qtd Valerio 84)

---

[1] Giamatti disagrees with the ritual/sports definition of Candelaria *et al* in favor of a more classically orientated genesis theory. He claims sports were born of "Aristotelian leisure, not as a remnant of primitive religion" (*Take Time* 47).

It is a reasonable symbolic guide and longtime fans of baseball would be hard pressed to take issue with the importance of these words. Of course, the power of these words is dependent upon the perceptible abundance of alternate line-ups. A less nostalgically-correct but equally formidable squad might look like:

Astroturf, CF
Stadium, RF
In-Your-Face, 3B
Mob, 2B
Prima Donna, SS
Code, LF
Brutishness, C
Cabal, 1B
Gimmick, DH (hitting for Profit, P)

And this kind of team may often be the squad the faithful, fictional ballplayer is dismayed to find him or herself on.

When Giamatti banned Pete Rose from the game because Rose had bet on baseball games while he was manager of the Cincinnati Reds, it was a fully legal exercise of his moral authority as League Commissioner to act in "the best interest of baseball." (The Commissioner's office, after all, was established by Major League team owners in response to baseball's "original sin" -- the Black Sox scandal of 1919. The Comissioner's office was designed to give the public the secure feeling that any whiff of scandal would be dealt with swiftly and severely.) But it was a dramatic decision, one where the ideals of the office and the game came into direct conflict with the way of the world as defined by one of the game's greatest stars. It represented a collision between mythic versions of the essence of baseball.

Pete Rose was a determined, hard-nosed player whose characteristic gesture was running-out a walk. Rose was so intensely competitive, he broke catcher Ray Fosse's collarbone in an All-Star Game. "I'd walk through hell in a gasoline suit just to keep playing baseball," Rose is often quoted as saying. He was also a rarity for a player: he was an informed student of the game.[2] He knew the statistics of his predecessors and used them as measures for his own performance. His most acknowledged record -- the most all-time hits in Major League baseball -- is of course due to his skills and longevity but also I'm sure to his early intellectual recognition that the once "unbreakable" record of Ty Cobb

---

2 Whenever sports writers are feeling cruel -- and this is frequent enough -- they go to the clubhouse and ask the players who Jackie Robinson or Curt Flood was and publish the inevitably embarrassing results.

could be reached. While he may not have ever been confused with Joe DiMaggio, Rose was a quintessential baseball man.

Allegations that Rose bet on baseball games while he was manager of the Cincinnati Reds brought about his expulsion from the game and made him ineligible for election to professional baseball's Hall of Fame. The collision of the moral imperatives against betting and Rose's on-field accomplishments could not have been more severe. A less idealistic Commissioner may have let the case drag out in the courts until a compromise was reached, but Giamatti had his ethical line worked out. Before he even needed its practical application Giamatti had spelled it out as clearly as a plagiarism warning in University handbooks:

> Cheating -- a covert act to acquire a covert advantage -- strikes at the heart of this basic convention of openness and equality and the agreement that they are essential. If the other internal agreements of the sport on its rule makers do not defend the sport, if cheating is not dealt with swiftly and severely, the game will have no integrity. . . . Cheating is a constant temptation to those who have honed so keenly the competitive edge, who strive for betterment through sport, and it has been ever since Odysseus cheated at the end of the Funeral Games near the end of the *Iliad.* (*Take Time for Paradise* 62-3)

Given the tightness of this logic, Giamatti's decision on the Rose case was probably inevitable.

The Commissioner's decision to ban Rose was often supported in terms of how the game's alleged need for "positive role models" were paramount, and, like all failed ballplayers, Rose had let down the children of America. The counter-argument has its own constituency which argues Rose's on-field achievements need to be recognized in Baseball's Hall of Fame whether or not he was a nice guy. What is the Hall of Fame for? The arguments for recognizing the achievements of the "fallen" ballplayers then become complexly intertwined in an argument about baseball's claim to possessing a special virtue in need of protection.

If professional baseball can be seen as inherently corrupt, "cheating" becomes more abstract and refracted within its compromises, just as we can be cynically unmoved by the ethical breaches of politicians. And if the peculiar industry Giamatti acted on behalf of is in fact unfairly controlled, and the fix is indeed on, what integrity do its rules really have? What obligations does the hero (like Odysseus) have to these rules? *Rules* are also cherished by cheats and the baseball cheat can ultimately be a credible anti-hero, whose

expanded consciousness is not defined by "the saps" who believe everything is on the up and up.[3]

Professional baseball is one of the few constitutionally protected business monopolies in the United States. It has been able to maintain its exemption from anti-trust laws, in part, through its ability to project itself as a wholesome entertainment linked to the health of the entire Republic. And the Commissioner's authority to issue moral indictments "in the best interests of baseball," may also be seen as a euphemism for "the best interests of baseball's owners."[4] However academically sound Giamatti's faith in the game was, his decisions as Commissioner can always be put in the perspective of the upper-level management of baseball's greatest fix. In a notebook written by Theresa Morgenstern Miller -- wife of Marvin Miller, the lawyer who helped institute free agency in baseball -- Giamatti's actions are satirically cast in just such a perspective:

> giamatti was like a biblical character as he announced his punishment of rose. he was angry, cold, severe, flag-waving, pennant-waving. he was the saviour of the national pastime, of the nation itself . . . he died a hero. driving the money changers from the temple. employed by bigger money changers he was looked upon as the great hope for the future of the game. not, mind you, to restore its integrity, but rather to rebuild its *appearance* of integrity. appearance is all. Who better than a renaissance scholar to shield the lords of baseball from exposure to the light of honesty and fair play. . . . his death is a big blow to twenty-six owners and ten times that many reporters and commentators who will no longer have their biased propaganda sugar coated for them. (Miller 393-4)

While the Millers' own (small case and all) propaganda is perhaps best understood within the arcane politics of baseball's labor disputes, the claims that baseball's spiritual perfections are mere sugar coatings is more than knee-jerk anti-intellectualism. It is the inevitable (and reasonable) counter to claims of baseball's metaphysical purity.

Giamatti's nemesis, Pete Rose, would claim he was being prejudged by an Ivy Leaguer who probably didn't understand how things really were. Rose's defense of himself is found within the language of quantified achievement. (One may protest the vulgar expression but the bottom-line value in quantity, whether it be a baseball stat, salary,

---

[3] For example, the Abe Rosenthal character of *Casino* bases his life's work on his sophisticated understandings of rules and possibilities.

[4] The league's first Commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, often used this authority to squelch ideas about the racial integration of baseball. When Giamatti's successor Faye Vincent made some of his pro-union feelings known he was promptly fired by his employers -- the owners of the Major League franchises.

or school grade, is fairly obvious.) Rose's crime rests partly in his personality. As George Will puts it,

> There is a fine and fuzzy line between admirable intensity and disfiguring obsession. Once when the Cincinnati Reds' plane hit severe turbulence Pete Rose turned to a teammate and said "We're going down. We're going down and I have a .300 lifetime average to take with me. Do you?" No jury would have convicted the teammate if he had strangled Rose, but if he had, the world would have lost a striking specimen of a man utterly defined by his vocation -- perhaps too much so. The melancholy example of Rose shows that people with particularly narrow tunnel vision have no peripheral vision for adult responsibilities. (228-9)

Rose, after all, is just one in a long line of athletes whose success rests partly in their "bad boy" testing of the parameters of gentlemanly play who did what they had to to survive in a very competitive profession. Legendary Giants manager John McGraw allegedly pulled a knife on a fan, Superstar "Prince" Hal Chase was known throughout the National League for his income-enhancing little fixes, and Ty Cobb, the man Rose pursued in the record books and named a son after, once leapt into the stands to beat up a disabled man because he allegedly called Cobb a "half-nigger." Cobb, who was also snared in a game fixing scandal in his day, was nonetheless among the first group of inductees to baseball's Hall of Fame.

The Rose / Giamatti feud occurs along fault lines where baseball's properties can be claimed by opposing myths. Leaving the particulars of the legal case, the dispute allegorizes a conflict within baseball's literary representations. The Giamatti myth, if you will, begins with a claim for baseball's essential goodness and its superiority to other games. This baseball spiritualism often longs to transcend the competitive regularities of the game and pass into its "timeless" essences. It also is the start of a faith which precedes a moral confidence in the correctness of baseball and informs actions on behalf of preserving and reclaiming its virtue. The Rose myth on the other hand insists that the game is a compromised thing, and its human players are corruptible agents of the fix. This myth finds authority in revelations of the phony structures which profit on claims to virtue and expresses an individuated freedom by distancing one from the innocents who still believe.

Like the *Gatsby* paradigm, where the appealing veneer of ultimate success is always threatened by unsavory revelations of backstage fixings, baseball fiction often finds its idealistic assertions underscored by its myriad hypocrisies. W.P. Kinsella's warm celebrations of the sport's qualities and Ring Lardner's almost apocalyptic cynicism in the face of the game's commerce, constitute a wide divergence in appreciation of its myths. However, I hope to demonstrate that it is not a competition between these two views.

Lardner's cynicism is an element in work like Kinsella's, and a Kinsella-like idealism is the foreground that makes a vision like Lardner's possible.

It is not surprising then that one of baseball fiction's most successful plotlines has been what might be called the sport's "fall from grace" -- the game-fixing scandal of 1919.[5] While I think it would be wrong to believe the 1919 World Series games were the first and last professional baseball games to be fixed, this particular scandal remains compelling as it becomes structured as the single moment when baseball dealt with its corruptibility. The Black Sox novels cleave the issues of baseball's spiritual affirmations and commercial fixes, but they also *link* conflicting visions of baseball's properties into the dramatic stories of how the fix was made. And the Rose / Giamatti myths merely follow the sport's conflicting patterns of representation.

Good Game / Bad Game

The appraisal of baseball's literature often begins with declarations of the pastime's worthiness of intellectual reflection. The sense of the sport's "goodness" is translated into a rhetoric about its suitablity for literary representation. While there is a kind of historical truth in stating "baseball is the foremost game among acute thinkers, intellectuals and, above all, storytellers and poets" (Bjarkman xvii), asking how this became true is rarely done in terms of baseball's history as popular culture, and more in listing the on-field properties of the game. What has emerged then in baseball's literary culture is a kind of catechism concerning baseball's unique, positive qualities which often precede the testimonials. Claims of baseball's singular difficulty, its historical integrity, its exotic parks, its chance theories, its release from time-clocks, its green fields, its defense-with-the-ball, its managerial strategy, its mirror of democracy, its ratios of failure, are sublimated in the language of its exclusive celebrants.

The estimation of baseball as a quasi-religious symbol of American good often begins in the enumeration of its "miracles." Lines like Red Smith's "ninety feet between the bases is the closest thing to perfection that man has yet achieved"(*Baseball Wit* 12) abound like toasts to the grand old game's formal integrity. In the affirmations found in W.P. Kinsella's fiction we will see a broader, more humorous application of the kinds of hopes found in the baseball dialogues of Bart Giamatti. However, the belief in the game as

---

[5] There are many novels about the scandal; Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* (1982), Harry Stein's *Hoopla* (1983), Eric Rolfe Greenberg's *The Celebrant* (1983) and Brendan Boyd's *Blue Ruin* (1991)

the place of the possibility of transcending conditions of birth, is similarly strong and reliant on a whole culture of celebration. As we will see in Kinsella, the tiniest idiosyncracy in baseball can quickly be turned into the pretext for a mystical episode or divine intervention.

Before turning specifically to Kinsella's version of baseball's munificence, however, I think it is important to consider how, in effect, baseball-lit gets away with it. The Pete Rose and Ty Cobb experience offers a chance to counter the affirmative vision, but the texts which choose to take this kind of passion first are much less numerous than the texts which laud the integrity of the game. As I was saying in the previous chapter, the predominance of baseball in the field of sports literature is both unchallenged and problematic. The belief that baseball has something over other sports is its own motivational rhetoric. *Baseball is good because it is baseball.* And this is, I believe, fundamentally important for considering why baseball literature found its measure of respectability by the early 1990s. In articulating the beauty of baseball, it is other sports, particularly football, which are usually scapegoated as the bad sports.

Poet Donald Hall's baseball writing is less grandly philosophical and more casually observational than one may expect. (One gets the feeling Hall's pet reference to the "country of baseball" is appropriately differentiated from Giamatti's cherished "kingdom of baseball.") While he too values baseball above all, Hall writes provocatively about other sports, including football. Looking back to football's roots, Hall offers this important reminder:

> It was all very collegiate. It is not much remembered that in this country football originated as the gentleman's sport; baseball belonged to the working classes. Football was like tennis, not bowling; it was like rugby, not soccer. (179)

But somewhere along the way professional baseball was no longer the most popular American sport. While team owners and players will not be missing many meals, and "popularity" is a term that can be quantified in other ways besides TV ratings and magazine covers, there is little doubt that baseball does not enjoy as exclusive a relationship with the American audience as it did up until the television era.[6]

---

6 On TV, football's pre-eminence is unrivaled: the Super Bowl is invariably the highest rated single program of the year and ABC's *Monday Night Football* is the only regular sportscast to break the Top 50 of the Neilson ratings -- finishing in 1995 at #5 with an average audience of 17.8 million viewers. Source: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1996.*

The arrival of a cultured, literary identity for baseball comes on the heels of the popularization of televised football. The strong tones of nostalgia and exclusivity in baseball literature often come at the expense of football, and football and baseball fans are placed in a never ending series of comparisons, finding strong high-cultural assurances in Thomas Boswell's essay "99 Reasons Why Baseball is Better Than Football," but never surpassing George Carlin's famous comedy bit about the differences between the two sports. Adjoining football with technology and television is a reversal of the adjoining of baseball with tradition and books, and these reverse images of the sports resonate throughout baseball literature. Giamatti Miltonically dubbing television as "all-falsifying" (Valerio 1), George Will complaining of baseball clubhouses as "having been swallowed by MTV"(224), or Boswell's cool declaration that while "baseball is vastly better in person than on TV. . . . Football is better on TV"(37) are just a few of the persistent suggestions that baseball is somehow uncomfortable in the modern world and, therefore, less forgiving of its modern transgressions. (Hence the morality of baseball players is scrutinized with a more general disapproval than are the athletes in other sports.)

While it is unlikely a great football fan would have no appreciation for baseball, or that a great baseball fan would be oblivious to the drama of a football game, amongst baseball's literary enthusiasts there is sometimes a demonstrable insecurity in the face of the working class's preference for football and television instead of baseball and books. Sportswriter Peter Golenbock may see a paradigmatic Fenway Park where "Harvard professors sit and talk the same language with the fans with blue collars" (6), but the seating arrangements in the real Fenway Park are organized according to class consideration (more $ = better seat), and the heavy book buyers (to say nothing of full professors) may not exactly be spilling their beer in the bleachers.

What baseball has created out of its own nostalgia is an internal division amongst fans where the good game's purists are in opposition to those who will allow baseball a more TV-era glitz like the NFL. Baseball's premier essayist Roger Angell writes about going to see a Mets game with Giamatti. In the course of the game Giamatti launches into a kind of hallelujah for authentic baseball fans and blames the technological era for the failures of less gifted fans. Rather than claim baseball as a *lingua franca* as he might in a more composed setting, Giamatti fractiously evokes an unpleasantly elitist differentiation between *us* and *them:*

> "You and I are traditional fans. We come here in a ceremonial fashion. We don't exactly kneel, but we're interested only in that stuff" -- he gestured at the diamond and the outspread field before us -- "for our basic information we come to testify. We're not participatory fans. For them, that object" --

> he pointed to the towering Diamond vision board in left center -- "is more important than anything that happens on the field. For them, it's the videos and the dot races and the commercials, which are probably all connected to rock music anyway." (322)

Apparently, it wasn't enough that they paid to see the Mets.

If baseball can serve as "a daily reminder of our rapidly disappearing past" (Grella 555) it also serves as an antidote to the suddenly apparent future. The literary nostalgia for baseball is not without its vitriol and, like some movements of nostalgia, attends on strong conservative reactions to contemporary developments. Donald Hall's baseball insights then are underwritten with a cruel caricature of football, whose fans' faces are invariably "meaty with liquor" (192). His calculated disgust over the importation of football rituals like "tail-gating" or shouting "Go!" to baseball games spirals into a kind of associative nightmare where football's popularity is entwined with an image of the "fury (of the) underclass" (193) and a paranoid vision about violence in American culture. Looking at the image of the football player on the transformed logo of the NFL's New England Patriots, Hall recoils with horror:

> thick-necked, leering with mayhem, giggling with sadism, brow furrowed not by thoughts of his tiny dinosaur-brain but by anabolic steroids -- an image of the decline of the republic's hero from enlightenment ectomorph, spiritual with endeavour and guilt, to sadistic, hulking mesomorph, and apelike *Homo Footballus*, the object of our weekend attention and obsession, squatting before the goalposts of a diminished life. (198)

What is interesting is how Hall's vivid allegations against football were at one time levied against baseball. Football becomes an important part of baseball's cultural dialectic, always there to offer a vision of the bad sport. The founder of the modern Olympic movement, Pierre de Coubertin, articulated the metaphorical difference between the noble Greek *Olympian* and the ignoble Roman *Gladiator*, (Guttmann "Roman Sports" 7) and it is precisely this poetic difference found in the baseball vs. football dialogues which has helped baseball enthusiasts make their declarations for their game's moral and social virtue.

Defining the aesthetic differences between sports is a free, honest enterprise. And there is nothing wrong with fans of one sport or another making their claim for their sport. However similar the organizational structures of professional football and baseball, these sports are, of course, quite different to see. The argument which claims specific moral virtue of one sport over the other is something else; it seems to me that the concentrated attack on football is a vestigal reminder of the case against baseball and its own "hulking mesomorphs." Football, along with television, rock music, jumbotrons and designated

hitters become metaphors of cultural abasement -- just as baseball itself is in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*.

The proposition that baseball is peculiarly amenable to the literary imagination is also a frequent declaration of the virtues of the game. Even the game's most frustrating annoyances can be turned into writerly shibboleths. The slow, leisurely pace of baseball (its reputation for stretches of boredom) has become in fact the most often repeated example of how the writer fits in to offer narrative and anecdote to those long stretches. Canadian poet George Bowering claims "Have you ever heard a writer complain that baseball is too slow? Not a chance" (*Taking the Field* 7). While many students suspect it to be true, it is still erroneus to assume that the "literary" experience is naturally geared to the slow and to the peaceful, without room for its own mesomorphs. But the temptation to link the good sport with the good intentions of authors brings the most spurious kind of speculations, like Hall's theory that football and basketball "encourage penis-envy prose: in football, envy of meat violence, splintered bone, and cleat marks on the eyeball; in basketball, gray-boy envy of black cool" (112).

I hestitate to make warnings of divisive *isms* in our midst, but there is a possibility something which could be called "sportism" (the biased attribution of positive moral qualities to one sport at the expense of others) is part of the cultural formation of baseball literature. There are reasonable grounds on which one can compare the moral universes of two sports, say, cockfighting and badminton, but these comparisons may also revolve around inferred stereotypes of class. It would be hard to imagine a better sports novel than Charles Willeford's instructive thriller *Cockfighter* (1972), where the protagonist claims an integrity for cockfighting that is often lamented in baseball fiction: "Cockfighting is the only sport that can't be fixed, perhaps the only fair contest left in America. A cock wouldn't throw a fight and couldn't if he knew how" (51). As we begin examining the moral controversy detailed in the fiction of Kinsella, Lardner, and the Black Sox novels it is important to give thought as to how philosophical idealism expressed in much baseball literature expresses a shift of the sport away from its working class base. When looking at "sportist" utterances in baseball literature, it is reasonable to imagine that what is being criticized about football, or any other sport, is standing-in for baseball's known compromises.

Kinsella

W.P. Kinsella is certainly the most prolific and perhaps the most idealistic author of baseball fiction. Best known for his novel *Shoeless Joe*, which was turned into the film

Field of Dreams, baseball has become for Kinsella a regular trip to the bank. Not at all afraid of the limitations which may be associated with being called a "baseball writer" (a category with which Mark Harris felt uncomfortable) Kinsella admits that "Being accepted as a baseball novelist is like striking a vein of gold; one strikes a vein of gold, one does not abandon it until every last nugget is mined" (Horvath & Palmer 194). While Kinsella is not exactly perched in the ranks of the mega-famous fiction celebs (like John Grisham, Tom Clancy, Anne Rice *et al*) he has found a secure niche.

Kinsella also has become a likely target for those who are displeased with the forms (and popularity) of *Field of Dreams*. His work is accused of the most obvious kinds of sentimental conservatism and nostalgic exploitation. (Newt Gingrich's recommendation of a viewing of *Field of Dreams* as a way out of the 1994 baseball strike was exactly the kind of endorsement Kinsella's detractors thrive on.) However, Kinsella has tapped into *something* and has developed an insistent series of gestures or beliefs which focus on baseball's ideal properties. Since the success of *Field of Dreams*, others may have hoped to cash-in on the Kinsella-formula and none (so far) has managed it. Even if Kinsella's prose were the absolute middle-American lit-equivalent of Norman Rockwell or Lawrence Welk (it isn't), like these two populist masters he would deserve some credit for illustrating his paradigm and for doing more than just reflecting typical cultural prejudices.

Despite the matrix of "Americana" in his baseball fiction, W.P. Kinsella is actually a Canadian author, born in Alberta in 1935. Before he found his stride with baseball fiction, Kinsella was known in the Canadian literary marketplace for his short fiction about Native communities. The use of Native folklore and legends is present in some of his baseball fiction, and his interest in using native themes continues unabated. His early collection of Indian stories *Dance Me Outside* (1977) became a critically acclaimed Canadian movie of the same name, eventually metamorphosing into a Canadian television series called *The Rez*. At Canadian universities, Kinsella's work has been continually linked to ongoing campus debates about authorship and appropriation vis-a-vis stories about minorities written by someone from the dominant society. What right, the debate has asked, did Kinsella -- a white male Albertan -- have to use Native stories for his work? Governor-General award winning author Rudy Wiebe, for example, called Kinsella's work "demeaning" ("Petrie in Prime," *CBC Newsworld*, Sept 16 1994) in its humorous portrayal of Native life. For his part, Kinsella ignores these opinions, or shrugs them off as expressions of the "Trendinistas." Maintaining an intractable cynicism toward the academy, Kinsella considers himself a "pro" who answers only to his fans.

Kinsella's baseball fiction is less accompanied by controversy (but no less problematic), and he has brought his work to American literature's frontlists. Starting with

the franchise book *Shoeless Joe* (1982), Kinsella followed with a strong collection of baseball stories called *The Thrill of the Grass* (1984). A more ambitious but less acclaimed novel, *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (1986), preceded another collection of stories, *The Further Adventures of Slugger McBatt* (1988), which was followed by a short novel *Box Socials* (1992). His most recent collection of baseball fiction is the collection of short stories, *The Dixon Cornbelt League* (1993).

Like many authors who have been writing sports fiction, Kinsella claims "the best sports literature isn't about sports" (Horvath and Palmer 186). The familiar textures of baseball are not used to illustrate historical knowledge of the game but as a framework for strange stories about average Americans. In his essay "The Magic Cocktail: The Enduring Appeal of the Field of Dreams" Bobby Fong, defending Kinsella from the criticism that his fiction is too much of an artificial look at the game, writes that Kinsella does not look "*at* baseball but rather *through* baseball" (35).

Baseball oddities and extraordinary "characters" are a cherished part of baseball lore. (The first baseball book I ever read was *Strange But True Baseball Stories*, a grammar school level collection of professional baseball's greatest comebacks, one-armed players, midgets, and imperfect perfect games.) Kinsella's work functions on a similar principle: baseball's beloved placid historicity is always interrupted yet distinguished by some strange event. Kinsella's baseball fiction characteristically details strange phenomena that unfold within the well-known earth-bound realities of baseball. These mysterious events affirm the essential correctness of baseball. For example, in the story "The Thrill of the Grass" a group of men conduct a "pilgrimage" to a strike-emptied stadium and replace the artificial turf with real sod and grass; in the story "The Last Pennant Before Armageddon" a long-suffering fan of the Chicago Cubs struggles with the psychic knowledge that the victory of his team will accompany certain nuclear holocaust; in "Diehard" a widow places the ashes of her husband in the Metrodome; in "The Baseball Wolf" an exiled outfielder turns into a wolf; in "Fadeaway" a struggling manager's career comes to a crossroads when he is visited by the long-dead Christy Matthewson. The weird events just don't happen in baseball settings, they confirm the lore of baseball: real grass is better, the Cubs will never win, Twins fans don't deserve a decent funeral *etc.*

Throughout his work there is an abiding faith in the qualities and possibilities inherent in baseball. There is a particularly strong insistence on the sensual details of baseball's setting. The importance of real grass and real sunshine to the game are the most melodic of Kinsella's *lietmotifs* . However, though it is true Kinsella offers a strongly sensual vision of baseball's positive essences, his work is not as pious as the average *Field of Dreams* reviewer might believe. As the scenarios of his short fiction might indicate,

Kinsella's impulses are strongly comedic. The faith in baseball often comes out as an ironic deadpan reminiscent of a radio broadcaster's cool in the face of the hilariously odd.[7] In "The Baseball Wolf," for example, a player's unexpected transformation into *el lobo* is calmly accepted by his roommate, whose main concerns are expressed in a kind of *Odd Couple* schtick, "You realize it's going to smell like wolf piss in here" (*Dixon Cornbelt* 12).

Kinsella is, of course, a purist. Most people who care enough about baseball to focus their writing career on it could probably be described as "purists" -- people happy with the dimensions of the game as they were and suspicious of innovations designed to please a new era of less-informed fans. Author Luke Salisbury, in a fire-and-brimstone speech titled "Baseball Purists Purify," claims the purist is out to preserve the essence of form itself, the "crucial" thing which not only maintains the sport's integrity but makes "*Madame Bovary* a better novel than *Valley of the Dolls*" (236). And to the influence of "the mindless, commercial credo of the NFL" the purist must be morally resolute: "If we all stood up like Christ facing the money lenders, Major League Baseball would be as receptive to our message as humanity has been to HIS" (242). While Kinsella may not be as evangelical as Salisbury, in his fiction night baseball, artificial turf, the designated hitter, the wild-card playoff system, etc., are all seen as impurities . A strong believer that other popular sports are "not condusive to quality fiction" (Horvath and Palmer 188), Kinsella keeps returning to the imaginative possibilities inherent in baseball's alleged writerly qualities: the absence of a clock in regulating the duration of the game and its diverging foul lines:

> The other sports, football, basketball, hockey are twice enclosed, first by time and second by rigid playingfields. There is no time limit on a baseball game. On the true baseball field the foul lines diverge forever, the field eventually encompassing a goodly portion of the world, and there is theoretically no distance that a great hitter couldn't hit the ball. (Horvath and Palmer 188)

Kinsella's theory ignores the theories by which *physics* are usually understood.[8] As fans of the real game may have a long wait to see 700 foot home runs or 40-day games, just as

---

[7] Like Bob Uecker's talk-show routine about the radio announcer who calmly renders the play-by-play, complete with the advertisements and out-of-town updates, just as the atomic bomb is dropped on Chicago.

[8] Baseball's lack of "clock-time" is also not unique. Golf, tennis and cricket all share this quality -- and more than their share of the "afternoon sun." The infinitely diverging line is

they might be waiting on any number of unlikely miracles, they are in the highlight-reel of Kinsella's fictionalized game as gestures of faith in the world beyond scientific reason. By extending the boundaries of baseball's qualities, Kinsella turns them into myths of spirit and further emphasizes the rightness of their more quotidian equivalencies. By believing in the pure essences of baseball, the fan may be brought to more imaginative possibilities. "There are no limitations," Kinsella has said, "at least in baseball fiction" (Horvath and Palmer 188).

Kinsella defines the protagonists of his baseball fiction as "usually good-natured, compassionate, [and] somewhat befuddled by the curves life has thrown at them" (Murray 41). We need not take him at his word, but "befuddlement" is typically a less threatening state than alienation and one of Kinsella's great skills is his ability to convince his readers that strange occurrences are not traumas. His protagonists often display a kind of *heroic* lonerism, not unlike the image of ballplayers whose obsession with the rituals of baseball border on mental instability. The soft decency of the Kinsella hero grounds the figures of the mythic narratives; without the down-beat, comic sweetness of the *real guy*, Kinsella's baseball fiction would resemble the full burlesque of baseball books like Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel.*[9] Neither preacher nor heretic, the Kinsella protagonist then becomes a friendly witness to the "miracles" which attend the pure essences of ideal baseball.

The befuddled Kinsella character is rarely an unambiguously successful Major League basebaii player. *The Dixon Cornbelt League*'s line-up features an exiled journeyman, a struggling coach, a pitcher whose "fastball is gone," a manic old timer, a chunky AAA prospect, and a "choker." The less than spectacular talents of these characters probably work better as a source of identification for the reader or the fan. A successful modern ballplayer can no longer be "just like us": their celebrity and wealth makes them unlikely recipients of empathetic response, unless the successful ballplayer is somehow *punished* for enjoying his riches. Kinsella is more interested in characters who express a

---

also shared by "the plane" of the football's goal line -- theoretically, if Emmitt Smith jumped a mile high and broke "the plane," it's still a touchdown.

[9] In Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*, the limitless baseball transcendentalist is mocked through the character of Mike "the Ghost" Rama, a left fielder who is constantly crashing into the walls he'd prefer not to believe in,

> it wasn't as though he misjudged the proximity of the wall in his effort to catch the ball, but rather he seemed completely to forget that such things as walls even existed. He just could not seem to bring the idea of a barrier into his head, even after bringing the two into forceful conjunction. (124)

kind of populist grace, as the "choker" of the title story, "The Dixon Cornbelt League," admits he does not want to be a god: "I want to become invisible. I don't want to play professionally -- I only want to play for fun" (*Dixon* 173). Kinsella turns from Bubblegum Card hero legends to emphasize the properties of the game: "It seems to me that baseball is the hero that we worship rather than the individual players who make up the game" (Murray 48).

The success of *Shoeless Joe / Field of Dreams* is in its insistence on the spititual affirmations found through the worship of baseball. The appeal of the text's main image -- the baseball field carved out of an Iowa cornfield -- is so strong with its fans that the movie set has become one of Iowa's top tourist attractions.[10] In expressing the idealistic possibilities in baseball, *Shoeless Joe* is without peer. Actually, among the tropes which are most often used in baseball fiction (baseball as metaphysical sublime, baseball as pastoral retreat, baseball as equal-opportunity meritocracy and baseball as reparation for the "generation gap"), *Shoeless Joe* explores each with insightful confidence.

The religious overtones of Kinsella's novel are particularly striking. The story of Ray Kinsella , an unsuccessful farmer who faithfully builds a "shrine" on the instruction of a disembodied voice and who begins entertaining the play of the ghost of "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, the Chicago White Sox outfielder who was disgraced in the 1919 game-fixing scandal, is a story of restitution through faith. In his essay "Hegel, Marx, and *Shoeless Joe:* Religious Ideology in Kinsella's Baseball Fantasy" Timothy Lord calls Ray "a modern Noah"(44) who is creating a "secular church"(46) in an effort to overcome his alienation (49). While Lord's Marxist essay is predictable in its ultimate condemnation of Ray for replacing "one opium with another less obvious one" (49), it does draw out Kinsella's use of such parallels without being overwhelmed by the mere use of baseball. In comparison, Russell Hollander's essay, "The Religion of Baseball: Psychological Perspectives," offers a wider context in which the religious metaphors of *Shoeless Joe* can be understood but with some faith in the transcendental possibilities of sports. (Hollander stops short of challenging baseball's religious hegemony on this metaphor and offers no commentary on golf's or football's "Sunday afternoon services.")

---

10 Ironically, the ballfield created by MCA-Universal near Davenport, Iowa may have recently been topped in the tourist trade by inspiration from another fictional text. Robert Waller's wildly popular *Bridges of Madison County* has brought thousands to the area southwest of Des Moines looking to recapture the version of Iowa the best-selling novel indulges in. In Durham, NC a minor league ballfield was repainted and restructured by Orion Pictures so it would look *more minor league* for their feature *Bull Durham.* Now, tourists looking for the "authentic" minor league vision come to Durham's refashioned park. Indeed, if you build it so they can make a movie of it, they will come.

It would be inncorrect, I think, to assume Kinsella himself actually believes baseball is a latter-day replacement for religion. He is himself a mercenary pro, and what interests him is the vitality of the metaphor, its entertaining resiliency and the common currency of its application. Like Bart Giamatti, he is aware of the extraordinary associative powers of the words and images of the game, and like a wily teller of tall tales he thinks of what readers might want to hear. Consider a passage from *Shoeless Joe* where Ray distinguishes the pastoral nostalgia of his Iowa cornfield with a trip to Chicago's Comiskey Park, located on the notorious South Side:

> It is unwise for a white person to walk through South Chicago, but I do anyway. The projects are chill, sand-colored apartments, twelve to fifteen stories high, looking like giant bricks stabbed into the ground. I am totally out of place. I glow like a piece of phosphorous on a pitch-black night. Pedestrians' heads turn after me. I feel the solid stares of drivers as large cars zipper past. A beer can rolls ominously down the gutter, its source of locomotion invisible. The skeletal remains of automobiles litter the parking lots behind the apartments. (38)

And before the skeptical reader asks if the drivers of the large cars were wearing *Superfly* hats, Ray himself imagines, "I picture young black men in felt fedoras going on a lavish spending spree with my very white Iowa credit cards" (39). Even though Ray should not be applauded for his cowardly, racialized fears, he expresses a *real* fear -- justified or not -- that white American voters express in election after election. The diction of the passage (*stabbed, pitch-black, gutter, beer-can, litter* etc.) works in the same broadly suggestive, populist way the catechismic words of baseball (*sunshine, green, game of catch* etc.) express a real longing -- corny or not -- for Kinsella's Iowa or Dorothy's Kansas. Now, I have no idea how Bill Kinsella really feels when he's walking through the inner city, just as I don't know how he really feels about the "church of baseball,"[11] but considering that the conceit of *Shoeless Joe* is a *magical cornfield*, it's safe to imagine part of his success comes from his willingness to propose understandable binaries which make the choice of baseball seem more sublime.[12]

In some ways *Shoeless Joe*'s baseball-as-religion comparisons overwhelm the text with their aggressive repetitions. The novel's *denouement* hinges on a long passage that

---

11 The term the Susan Sarandon character in *Bull Durham* uses to describe her faith.

12 Kinsella retains a kind of populist security in his methods and angrily dismisses his detractors as "creepy little academic critics who refuse to praise anything unless it's unintelligible" (W.P. Kinsella *Contemporary Authors* 221).

Spitball editor Mike Shannon calls "The Sermon in the Bleachers" (62), where the game's most insignificant role-player talks of *the rapture*:

> The word of salvation is baseball. It gets inside you. Inside me. And the words that I speak are spirit and are baseball. (192)

The movie's version of the sermon is more secularized and less threateningly odd, but it remains bold. Enhanced by the authoritative voice of James Earl "This is CNN" Jones,the movie's creed derives its authority from baseball's historical roots:

> This field, this game is part of our past. It reminds us of all that once was good and could be again.

It's possible to see this transformation of *Shoeless Joe*'s bold comparisions and strong use of understood images as a co-opting by a conservative political philosophy, but the nostalgic sentiment was already unambiguously present in the novel.[13]

Kinsella's use of the ideal possibilities of baseball in *Shoeless Joe* are not just idiosyncratic expressions found in one quirky book of magic realism. Though the possible sweetness may have never been as thick, particularly with the film version and what Angell called its "goo of goodness"(344), the idealized baseball trope is abundant in baseball fiction and always a significant part of Kinsella's fabulations. Kinsella's concern with mystical experiences found in prosaic settings (magic in Iowa?), with testing the limits of reality within sturdy forms, with the offering of moral visions to simple men through the comforts of baseball, are his signature expressions and form the most coherent paradigms of idealistic baseball fiction.

---

[13] The main alteration in *Field of Dreams* is the replacement of the novel's kidnapped J.D. Salinger with a fictional African American author called "Terence Mann" played by Jones. The presence of the character helps diffuse the legitimate criticism that baseball nostalgia -- particularly as expressed in *Shoeless Joe* -- might also express a latent nostalgia for the all-white Major Leagues. This particular criticism is articulated in Bryan K. Garman's essay "Myth Building and Cultural Politics in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*." According to Garman, "the world [Kinsella] envisions, the culture in which it is embedded, and the baseball fraternity all have racist underpinnings" (56). I find this understanding unnecessarily accusatory; anybody may be susceptible to a moment of nostalgic affection for something that may never have been, and it seems easy to blame this affection on a lapse in political consciousness. Challenging nostalgic expressions on their hidden endorsements of racism or sexism is often valuable and needed, but overwhelming these expressions with guilt, which implicates every gesture to the past with America's social evils, is also reactionary. It is perfectly OK to hate *Shoeless Joe*, but this is different than using baseball's racist past as a way of delegitimizing all affectionate recollections of play before 1947.

Kinsella's follow-up novel *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (1986) is a more ambitious novel than *Shoeless Joe*. Although it was not as obviously successful in the popular arena (no movie this time), *The IBC* still works the familiar, idealized grounds. Again set in a postcard Iowa full of fresh baked pies and magical possibilities, baseball's inherent spiritual harmonies emerge to repair psychic wounds in good characters, returning ballplayers to the old days when the goodness of the game was easier to see, returning fathers to sons, and returning the game to the essences of its perfect forms.

The Iowa Baseball Confederacy is about a thirtysomething man, generously named Gideon Clarke, whose father was an Iowa City eccentric who spent his life hectoring the Chicago Cubs, searching for details about an alleged 1908 visit of the Cubs team to the town of "Big-Inning" Iowa[14] to play the "Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars." The Cubs organization, the townspeople in Iowa, and family members all believe Gideon's father's obsession to be a form of madness, especially in the absence of any concrete evidence such a game took place. Suddenly, the present day Gideon unexpectedly receives faith and is assured of the veracity of his father's claim and continues his dead father's quest to prove the IBC really existed. With his friend Stan, a failing but determined ballplayer, Gideon steps through a crack in time (reversing Rip Van Winkle's time leap) and into Big Inning, Iowa, 1908. There, Gideon becomes acquainted with the mysterious Indian spirit Drifting Away and witnesses a baseball game whose extra innings play through forty days and forty nights of flooding. Of course Gideon must make a choice about how he and Stan should exit this past (*vis-a-vis* considerations of how their actions in the past may influence history) to where his eventual return trumpets his reintegration into contemporary American society.

In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, baseball and images of the past are united to form a critique of the game's myriad contemporary fixes. (If magic is needed, isn't reality, by definition, hopeless?) Gideon's quest to prove the veracity of his father's claim starts with a confrontation of the MLB's corporate monopoly and the hegemonic contol of team owners over their *product*. In his dealings with the uncooperative Cubs organization, Gideon laments "It was sad to see that, to the Cubs, baseball was not the least magical; it was strictly business" (6). This first disappointment, the discovery that the guardians of the truth (baseball) are not interested in the truth, becomes a motivation for the purist to blow the trumpet or turn the tables. The slip in time in the novel allows Gideon and his

---

14 Alluding to the old baseball joke -- Q: Where in the Bible is there a reference to baseball? A: In *Genesis*, "In the *big inning*..."

friend (who plays in the determined style which is often applauded as that of a "throwback") to find an idealized game which can change lives. As Stan says,

> 1908 was when baseball really meant something. It really *was* America. Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and weekday games starting at six p.m. in order to get through by dark. (251)

True, 1908 was the last year the Cubs won the World Series, and by this date, baseball had established itself at the center of American popular culture. But Stan's nostalgic indulgence is an obvious overstatement which also expresses his present-day impotence as a ballplayer. Unfortunately for Stan, whose physical limitations deem him to be little more than an excellent softball player playing for pizza (83), baseball in America is ruthlessly Darwinian. Stan's overriding dream to make it as a marginal player in "The Bigs" is his heroic stamp, and the magic time-slip to a place where baseball "means something" is meant to make his passion seem less pathetically adolescent and more in tune with the virtues of "throwbacks" and the perfect state of the perfect game. Yet, somehow, throughout the time-slip Major League Baseball has to retain its authority and remain, as the novel's Joe Tinker claims, "as close to heaven as any of us will ever get" (228). The irony remains that in discovering the limitations and humiliations of the MLB entertainment industry, Stan also understands that it is only playing in this league that is real playing; essences of play are celebrated, but only "the Bigs" count as a full realization.

Extrapolating on the well-worn understandings of baseball's essences, Kinsella again turns to religious comparisons. Gideon recollects his education in Revelations:

> Neither my father nor I ever played anything but sandlot baseball. I was on the Onamata High School team, but only because there were just ten boys in our high school and one of them was in a wheelchair, making his handicap only slightly worse than mine, which was lack of ability.
>
> "Why not baseball?" my father would say. "Name me a more perfect game! Name me a game with more possibilities for magic, wizardry, voodoo, hoodoo, enchantment, obsession, possession. There's always time for daydreaming, time to create your own illusions at the ballpark. I bet there isn't a magician anywhere who doesn't love baseball. Take the lay-out. No mere mortal could have dreamed up the dimensions of a baseball field. No man could be that perfect. Abner Doubleday, if he did indeed invent the game, must have received divine guidance." (44)

While the senior Clarke is conscious enough of baseball history to add "if he indeed invented it," the appeal of the Doubleday myth remains the same. In this mini-replication of the *creation vs. evolution* debate, a *created* game is not about Doubleday but about a sense of purpose and intent; whereas, an *evolved* game must accept accidents,

bastardizations and the potential for meaninglessness. The created game is also inextricably American (A.G. Spalding sponsored the Doubleday hoax in part to establish this patriotic "fact"); whereas, the evolved game is European in origin and limited in its development. The game of endless possibilities, of magic, of divine inspiration -- the institution Giamatti claimed "best mirrors the condition of freedom for Americans that Americans ever guard and aspire to"(*Take Time* 83) even without Doubleday, rhetorically rests on the patriotic Doubleday myth of inspired creation. Kinsella's baseball is so supremely American it even receives belated aboriginal approval from the embittered Native-American Drifing Away who, while scornful that "the white man's world is full of squares" (47), ultimately admits "Baseball is the one single thing the white man has done right" (177).

Gideon himself is initially alienated from his father's enchanting postulates. He starts out as an uneducated fan whose open receptivity to the miracles of baseball makes his eventual "conversion" less nutty. It is Gideon's father whose appreciations of the grand old game most strongly resemble the kinds of testimony Kinsella himself offers in personal interviews. One of Gid's father's monologues is a favorite Kinsella thought:

> "And the field runs to infinity. . . . You ever think of that, Gid? There's no limit to how far a man might possibly hit a ball, and there's no limit to how far a fleet outfielder might run to retrieve it. The foul lines run on forever, forever diverging. There's no place in America that's not part of a major league ballfield: the meanest ghetto, the highest point of land, the Great Lakes, the Colorado River. Hell, there's no place in the *world* that's not part of a baseball field." (44-45)

To the world of baseball, the Gideon character is less an oracle and more of a witness. His relationship to the biblical Gideon, who is enlisted by God to lead an army of believers, is ironically drawn-out in the narrative but falls away from a programatic reworking of the biblical story. When the spirit of God finally possesses Kinsella's Gideon, he will blow his proverbial horn, but he will remain too passive and domestic to lead armies of men. The emphatic Kinsellian image of baseball embracing or cross-hatching the physical limits is Whitmanesque in its all-encompassing embrace of America, baseball acting as a geometric agent of manifest destiny, eventually claiming everything along the limitless frontier. (Even considering the "never ending foul line" proviso, either many spots in America are not covered, or, if the curvature of the earth is accounted for, everything is covered by *one* ballpark.) And the power of *the word* to hold the wild country together is the best Gideon can hang on to when he returns to the contemporary world, assured of the perfections of baseball in the "Big Inning."

The *Iowa Baseball Confederacy* does much more than *Shoeless Joe* to mythologize baseball's celebrated lack of adherence to clock time. Yogi Berra's immortal line "it ain't

over till it's over" is not only American motivational blather, it is, in terms of the game, still true. Unlike other popular professional team sports, a baseball game can only be completed when one team has finally won. (The more upper-class pastimes of golf and tennis share this open time structure, and in Japan baseball games can be played to a tie.) The fictional match between the Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars and the Chicago Cubs, which stretches into the longest game of all time, says little about the wrath associated with the Great Flood and more about the resilience of baseball's forms. Of course, anybody who has watched the San Diego Padres and Houston Astros go into the 10th inning has felt that a baseball game could go on forever, but few have actually reached anything close to biblical proportions. Taking the game to such a preposterous length dramatizes a specific, everyday quality that baseball exclusivists like to invoke as a superior quality of the sport.

The open-ended, leisurely pace of baseball may be claimed by Kinsella *et al* as an example of the "writerly" qualities of the national pastime, but baseball fiction has a distinctly problematic relationship with the myriad details and stories-within-stories of individual games. Not only are the results of fictional games of no real gaming interest, the details themselves are often too complex and finely enmeshed in the idioms of real baseball history to be captured in a novel which hopes to be entertaining. Certainly not much could be as dull and pointless as a complete play-by-play analysis of a fictional forty-day baseball game.[15]

Fictional reconstructions of baseball games tend to bring the reader to the naturally dramatic moments of the game -- the third strike pitch, the bottom of the ninth inning of the seventh game of the World Series, the play at the plate, the big homerun, the big whiff. The analytical perspectives associated with armchair managers can threaten to minimalize the appeal of the literary product. (What if *Casey at the Bat* was full of analytical chatter? How would the poem change if we knew what Casey's batting average was? What was his slugging percentage in ninth inning situations? Was he often naturally inclined to go deep in the count? Was he better at home in Mudville or away?) Kinsella actually uses a very limited series of image-patterns to express baseball's ideals and studiously avoids most of the "boring" details of the actual deluge-match. The metaphysical game is less bothered by the usual moments and will rarely refer to just another routine groundball. By focussing on overarching paradigmatic aspects of the game Kinsella ironically picks up the pace in the retelling of the non-clock bound game.

---

15 In fact the only baseball book which seriously tries to address the occurrences of one game within a complete narrative is Daniel Okrent's non-fiction classic *Nine Innings*.

Baseball as a slow game is a relatively recent invention. Chances are, fans in 1908 saw baseball as a lively and fast-paced spectacle and felt a day at the park may have been less the family picnic and more of a raucous day out with chances to sing, cheer, jeer, -- even to gamble and drink. Gideon's arrival in Big Inning, however, starts out as an uncomplicated pastoral escape from the hustle and bustle of today. When Gid arrives in 1908 he experiences a blissful reduction in noise: "There is the sound of harness bells, the nervous fumbling of horses, a creak of wagon wheels in the dark. The only other sounds are a few voices mixed with the cheeping of early morning birds. No motors. No horns" (135). The fantasy of the quieter past brings baseball along as part of the remedy for a contemporary world beset with noise.[16]

---

16 Television and technology have not speeded-up baseball with Hollywood razzamatazz: if anything, the effect of electronic broadcast systems (Radio and TV) to help promote the commercial product (Major League Baseball) has been to slow down the game. On average a game takes about one hour longer to play today than it did in Ty Cobb's day. While not entirely scientific, this following comparision between the time it took to complete games then vs. now still illustrates an elongation of game time.

Times Of World Series Clinching Games
(1939. Chi.Cubs v.Phi A's -- 2:21)
(1957. Mil Braves v. NY Yankees -- 2:34))
(1965. LA Dodgers v. Minn. Twins -- 2:27)
(1977. NY Yankees v. LA Dodgers -- 2:19)

Times Of 1993 World Series Games
(Game 1: 3:27)
(Game 2: 3:14)
(Game 3: 3:16)
(Game 4: 4:14)
(Game 5: 2:53)
(Game 6: 3:27)

While there are on-field explanations for the extension of game times (more relief pitching, more batters stepping in and out of the batter's box *etc.*) the demands of broadcast advertisers are not insignifiant. Fortunately for advertisers, the leisurely pace of baseball also gives plenty of time for broadcasters to sell time for "important messages." Advertising has also, in a way, brought clock time to ML baseball: umpires look at their special watches between innings to make sure play resumes when the ad time has run out. Ironically, the celebration of baseball's lazy, non-clock time is more a function of pastoral nostalgia than of the game's intrinsic beauty. Lost in the reverie of soft summer afternoons at the ballpark is the abiding sense of how early baseball was admired for its "hurly-burly" speed. Remembering the non-existent olden days when baseball was played for the "love of the game" has always been a part of the vocabulary of the professional sports (Goldstein 132-3) but the particular romanticizations of baseball's open time probably finds its source with writers and commentators who have discovered the game well into the postwar television era.

To say the paradigm is influenced by television is, of course, not to say it is phony or relegated positionally beneath other sources of cultural transmission. Our television-

Kinsella's romanticized Iowa, with its "heaping dishes of vanilla ice cream" (*IBC* 166), is not the only setting or gesture in his baseball fiction. Both *Shoeless Joe* and *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* work on the premise of appealing to a certain kind of faith in popular baseball images and axioms to speak for strong metaphysical yearnings. Less prominent in the novels and more obvious in Kinsella's short fiction, is a comedic irreverance which allows Kinsella to play with the limitations of baseball-as-religion tropes. (The layers of strange plot twists, red herrings and preposterous cameos tilts the magic realism of *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* toward farce.) Kinsella's novels may be the most popular literary fiction to authorize baseball as a quasi-religious experience, but they are not the first. In Philip Roth's satire *The Great American Novel* (1973), an idealistic manager preaches in the same high tone which sounds like a characteristic Kinsella moment:

> Daytime baseball is nothing less than a reminder of Eden in the time of innocence and joy; and too, an intimation of that which is yet to come. For what is a ballpark, but that place where Americans may gather to worship the beauty of God's earth, the skill and strength of His children, and the holiness of His commandment to order and obedience. (95)

While Roth's novel will go on to mock any and all claims of baseball and American literature to mean much, the language of this sermon hits squarely to the field Giamatti and Kinsella are playing in.

A visual design by Michael Langenstein called *Play Ball* (1982) is one of the most famous conflations of religious and pop cult iconography: a version of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* where God is handing Adam a baseball. The image is humorous and it works. The mix of the well-known icons is direct (I've seen it replicated in an advertisement with car keys in a similarly effective way) and encourages the viewer to re-think each icon in the wake of their reconfigurations. The mix isn't perceptibly sacriligious

---

influenced paradigms can be as fruitful or as hopeless as our pre-television ones. Regardless of the source, the faith in metaphysical qualities for baseball (endless summers, perfect construction, the yin and yang of balls and strikes, the connection to the past, the open-ended time frame) is authentically felt in a way that can't be summarily dismissed because of a suspicion that Giamatti, Kinsella and Ken Burns are *kitsch*. Russell Hollander writes of the so-called "peak experiences" (7-9) of religious faith in connection with similarly powerful experiences in the consciousness of athletes and fans. Similarly, in John Strausberg's fascinating book *Reflections on the Birth of the Elvis Faith*, the authentic belief in Elvis Presley's divinity, a phenomena which could have easily been dismissed as a trailer-park cult, may also reflect a profound need and an unlikely willingness to locate spiritual values in American popular culture.

as it might be in certain constituencies if God was handing Adam a needle or a condom -- although these are not bad ideas for public service ads. The image has its audience and is a kind of shorthand for Giamatti's philosophy or Kinsella's fiction; quickly linking a creative God exclusively to America and to the ironic stylings of its popular culture. The spirit of *jouissance* in the style of incongruous representation in *Play Ball* is echoed in Kinsella's fiction and in all fictional representations of an idealized baseball world. (In the next chapter, I will be paying more attention to an ironic style of baseball fiction by looking at the use of pastoral artifice in Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* [1952] and Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* [1956]) Kinsella's fantasy of a Super-Iowa is also an artificial pastoral construct, but it is making a stronger claim for baseball itself than either of the two famous novels from the fifties.

God is important to all gamesfolk. In baseball fiction, where all the games are fixed in outcomes, God's absolute decisions (who wins or loses -- the real thrill of the game) are replicated, revered and mocked. In Nancy Willard's baseball fantasy *Things Invisible to See* (1984) allmighty power is summoned in a sporting metaphor,

> In Paradise, on the banks of the River of Time, the Lord of the Universe is playing ball with His archangels. Hundreds of spheres rest like white stones on the bottom of the river and hundreds rise like bubbles from the water and fly to His hand that alone brings things to pass and gives them their true colors. What a show! He tosses a white ball which breaks into a red ball, and in the north east corner of the Sahara Desert the sand shifts and buries eight camels. (1)

This is a more tragic working of the conflation in *Play Ball* and less limited to the syllogism which finds out God is American; however, God's whim and cruelty is ultimately what Willard tries to find remedy for. (The tragic ballgame of the first part of her novel is redeemed by a magic game at the end.) No matter how unpredictable the bounce of the ball, the fiction writer works with the God-like knowledge of how the game will turn out. Predictably some of the most dynamic baseball fictions find the narrator in the midst of compromised historical realities where the writer locates his or her authority in the consciousness of the fixer.

Ball Four: The Irreverent Audience.

Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970) is the edited diary of a once-hot New York Yankees pitcher who, at the end of his career, tries to hook onto a spot with an expansion team. The premise of the book is obviously interesting, but the premise doesn't explain why *Ball*

Four became such a runaway bestseller and how it made Bouton a veritable literary celebrity. To a certain extent, *Ball Four's* incredible popularity changed the nature of sports literature and brought its marketplace in line with more adult demographics. *Ball Four* also stands as one of the sharpest critiques of the controls buried within baseball's Mom and apple pie reputation.

By today's standards *Ball Four* may seem unexceptional and tame, but it was, in many ways, the first real "tell all" book by a professional athlete. Not only is it full of surprising disclosures about ballplayers' regular use of amphetemines and their seemingly *de rigeur* marital infidelities on road trips, it names names and is told with the sympathetic voice of the fading ballplayer who, even by the meagre scales of yesteryear, was underpaid. Bouton's is an active and enthusiastic voice whose plainspeaking arouses sympathy and brings in the laughs. From the preface of *Ball Four* Bouton balances his boyishness with a refreshing sacreligiousness:

> Right now, the fact is that I love the game, love to play it, I mean. Actually, with the thousands of games I've seen, baseball bores me. I have no trouble falling asleep in the bullpen and I don't think I'd ever pay my way into a ballpark to watch a game. (iii)

By challenging baseball on the grounds that it is "boring" (which is the dark side of its cherished "leisurely pace") Bouton establishes his voice as authoritative and rebellious.[17] A claim that baseball is "boring" is something that wouldn't regularly be announced in the purist's discernments. The professional authority of somebody who actually played the game is suddenly endorsing baseball's peskiest criticism and Bouton doesn't stop there.

At the time, most jock biographies were fairly innocuous recollections of the on-field accomplishments of ballplayers and ballteams which sold the clean image of the game and were generally marketed toward adolescents. Bouton's *Ball Four* is not so much a radical departure from baseball's publishing schedules as an ante-up turn toward a less flattering, less promotional discourse. So in *Ball Four* you get replications of jerky locker room stuff: "Some guy farted and everybody laughed, and about five minutes later, in a sudden burst of quiet, he farted again and somebody hollered, 'Will somebody answer the phone! Some ass keeps calling!'"(26). You get memorably discouraging words about Yankee legend Mickey Mantle: "there were all those times when he'd push little kids aside when they wanted his autograph . . . I've seen him close a bus window on kids trying to

---

17 This authority is memorably described in Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953): "Boredom is strength (...)The bored man gets his way sooner than the next guy. When you're bored you're respected" (411).

get his autograph" (29). You get revelations that the boys in the bullpen are more interested in "beaver-shooting," (looking up the skirts of female fans) than in training for their big moment. You even get forceful expressions of atheism, and a studied disdain for the encroachments of Christianity on American sport: "Since no one has an article saying, 'God didn't help me' or 'It's my muscles, not Jesus,' kids pretty much get the idea that Jesus helps *all* athletes" (157).

Despite its aberrations from more circumscribed ballplayer memoires, *Ball Four* does not read like a wild party. The format is a longstanding newspaper device: Jim Brosnan's journal-book *The Long Season* (1960) was also quite successful, and while it has little of *Ball Four*'s bitchiness it is an equally honest and well-written diary of a season in the majors by an average player. (*The Long Season* is properly regarded as a baseball classic and as the obvious precursor to *Ball Four*. While Brosnan's books are more inside-stuff and much less humorously irreverent than Bouton's, *The Long Season* was, in its day, similarly criticized for its "treachery.") *Ball Four* remains a "classic" not merely on the basis of its reputation for scandal, but for its attempts to "tell it like it is."[18] *Ball Four* is a remarkably sensitive introduction to the complex issues involved in professional baseball: life on the road, the sometimes difficult relationships with teammates and coaches, how contract negotiations work, how racial tensions are expressed, and just how unlikely success is. Unlike the idealistic texts, *Ball Four* is less interested in a harmonious philosophy which can contain myth and metaphor and more interested in the messy details.

Immediately after its publication, however, *Ball Four* was indeed a scandal. Particularly critical were the voices from the professional baseball establishment who were not too keen to have the code of locker-room silence lifted by a smartass wash-out like Bouton. In *Ball Four*'s fascinating sequel, *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally* (1971), Bouton chronicles the debate surrounding *Ball Four* and takes the reader through the steps of his unlikely new career as a literary celeb and talk show item. Particularly memorable in the sequel is the collection of comments made at *Ball Four*'s expense: Pitcher Jim Bunning, then of the Philadelphia Phillies but now of the House of Representatives (R-KY), said "The thing that's wrong with that book is the thing that's wrong with the country" (112). Pitching coach Jim Turner said "That book would go over great in Russia" (112), and Yankees stalwart Billy Martin proclaimed: "I didn't read it, but I know it's horseshit" (114). The aggressiveness of the response was great publicity, but it was

---

18 "Tell it like it is" being the motto of Howard Cosell, the true icon of 1970s sports reporting.

also *felt*. MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn personally took Bouton to task for the "disservice" he had done to the game.

To their credit, David Halberstam and Roger Angell, who would both go on to be standard-bearers in a more upscale baseball-literature market, saw the virtue in *Ball Four*. Halberstam, an avowed Yankee fan, was particularly scornful of the sports media's condemnation of *Ball Four*: "Bouton has become a social leper to many sportswriters and thus Sy Hersh, when he broke the My Lai story, became a "peddlar" to some of Washington's most famous journalists" (159). Angell praised *Ball Four*'s detailed content, saying the book was "a rare view of a highly complex public profession seen from the innermost side, along with an ironic and courageous mind" (163).

If *Ball Four* did alter the baseball book market, it is important not to exaggerate the innocence of baseball fans or readers of baseball literature before *Ball Four*. It certainly wasn't that the pre-television public was incapable of imagining scandal or of believing ballplayers could act like jerks. The public *loved Ball Four*, and in the summer of 1970 it sold over a quarter of a million copies.[19] A taste for scandal sheet revelation and inside stories was already developed in the literary marketplace: Hollywood biographies of a Mary Astor or a Hedy Lamar -- which contained the details of their love affairs -- were quite popular, and there was little reason to doubt people would not be similarly interested in the true off field life of ballplayers. Also, the determination of MLB to draw the curtain on what's really going on, makes attempts to reveal the sordid details more dramatic than they might otherwise be. Of course, the self-sustaining mythology of professional baseball as All-American "family" fare whose heroes need to remain loveable in the eyes of the "dirty-faced kids" is *still* quite strong and has not been dismantled by the success of one book. (In the fifth chapter I'll be discussing at greater length how the representations of children in baseball's mythology have influenced its aesthetics.) Since *Ball Four*, hagiographic biographies are still staples on the marketplace -- particularly the quickie biographies of *the* summer baseball story (Cal Ripken, Hideo Nomo, etc.) prepared for the Christmas rush -- but publishers now may likely demand more *dirt* from their subjects. Now, a biography like Keith Hernandez's *Life At First* (prepared after the Mets win in the 1986 World Series) chronicles more unpleasant behaviour than *Ball Four* does, but it wasn't exactly news. And now that a more uncensored kind of biography has potential for success, even legendary ballplayers from the past are occasionally re-examined without the celebratory gloss. For example, Ty Cobb's vituperative racism was never discussed in print much in

---

[19] My source for the figures and patterns concerning *Ball Four*'s market performance is *Publishers Weekly*.

his time, but now it has become the dominate theme of popular texts about the legendary Tiger, as seen, for example, in Ken Burns' *Baseball* or the Tommy Lee Jones biopic *Cobb*. And the proposition that Cobb was a bad guy not fit for the goodness of baseball has filtered through: in the *Field of Dreams*' ghost game, and in a similar ghost game that occurs in Nancy Willard's *Things Invisible To See*, Cobb is specifically excluded from participating in the idealistic magic.

The summer *Ball Four* hit the racks[20] sex was selling. Joining Bouton's tell-all on the non-fiction bestseller lists of the year were the under-the-mattress classics *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid To Ask)* and *The Sensuous Woman by "J."* These might be signs of an increasingly salacious audience, but they are also signs of a more adult, less prudish audience (who may not all be buying the same books anyway) who might be learning that sports literature wasn't necessarily a celebration of heroic statistics. The less censored, more comic seventies style of *Ball Four* still lasts in baseball fiction and is conspicuous in popular movies like *Bull Durham* and *Major League*.

Bouton's good fortune gave him a literary career: he went on to edit the anthology *I Managed Good, But Boy Did They Play Bad* (1973) and to co-author a murder mystery with Eliot Asinof called *Strike Zone* (1995). (Even his ex-wife Bobbie Bouton got into the game, co-authoring a tell-all with Nancy Marshall, wife of relief pitcher Mike Marshall, called *Home Games: Two Wives Speak Out.* (1983)) In the course of becoming a celebrity author, Bouton even learns of unsavory backroom "fixes" in the book-industry: he realizes the venerable Red Smith's condemnation of *Ball Four* was pay-back to Bouton's editor who once dared to publically criticize Smith's great friend Vince Lombardi (*I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally* 101).

The success of *Ball Four* calls into question many assumptions about the current nature of baseball literature's popularity. While some of the defining characteristics of literary baseball are often spelled in idealistic terms, the companionate terms of baseball as a fixed, limited enterprise has always had a constituency. *Ball Four* is a start to understanding a less reverent sensibility for interpreting baseball history (and a wake-up to the possibility of making big dough by writing about it), but it is capturing a sense that has always been out there, expressed or subdued in different ways, but still present. The proposition that official baseball is terminally corrupt and its ballplayers are something less

---

20 Following a publishing schedule most literary baseball projects still take: publish in the Summer when interest in the game is high and if it's a hit, sales will last until the New Year and then go paper in the Spring.

than Adonises, after all, had been even more seriously tested in baseball fiction fifty years earlier by Ring Lardner.

Ring Lardner.

While the earliest examples of baseball fiction were youth market books like Gil Patten's Frank Merriwell series, Ring Lardner's work helped bring the idea of baseball fiction to a wider audience.[21] But Lardner's work still pre-dates a time where the term "baseball fiction" was not automatically thought to be adolescent and unsubstantial. Despite Virginia Woolf's declaration that Lardner "writes the best prose that has come our way" (qtd Bowman and Zoss 254), Lardner's critical reputation has often been assessed in terms of the "worthiness" of his favorite setting. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of Lardner that,

> Ring moved in the company of a few dozen illiterates playing a boy's game. A boy's game, with no more possibilities in it than a boy could master, a game bounded by walls which kept out novelty or danger, change or adventure. (qtd Yardley 5)

It is a strong dismissal of the sport's literary possibilties (and one which interestingly cues Giamatti's "condition of freedom" or Kinsella's fascination with superceding walls and preternatural occurrences to illustrate the spiritual properties of the sport), and an even stronger indication of how elusive it might be even for a writer working through profesional baseball's so-called golden age to find acceptance as a serious author.

Lardner's career as a baseball writer is chronicled in Jonathan Yardley's concise biography, *Ring* --

> For more than five years -- from March, 1908, to June, 1913 -- Ring Lardner reported the daily events of major league professional baseball. For many more years than that, baseball was at or very near the core of his existence. As a boy in Niles, Michigan, he played the game with his friends, cheered the local heroes in their contests with neighboring towns, and counted down the days to the baseball excursions he would make once

---

[21] Candelaria writes that Lardner "singlehandedly transformed the sport from a casual motif in juvenile stories to a formal nuanced metaphor servicable to serious literature" (25), which captures the difference between Lardner and his predecessors but unneccessarily casts this difference in terms of cultural improvement, as if Lardner had heroically "won" a modal battle in baseball fiction. In Robert J. Higgs' study *The Laurel and the Thorn: The Athlete in American Literature* a similar claim about Lardner's shift from the Frank Merriwell paradigm is made but put more in terms of the newspaper-reading audience looking away from the east-coast college man Merriwell to the relatively uneducated midwestern or southern ballplayers of Lardner (23).

> or twice a year with his father and his brother, Rex, to Chicago, ninety miles to the west. As a beginning reporter in South Bend, Indiana, he heightened his understanding of the game by covering the Central League, a minor league in which many outstanding players refined their skills to major league levels. Though he stopped covering baseball regularly in the summer of 1913, it was one of the subjects most frequently discussed in the daily column he wrote for the Chicago *Tribune* until 1919, and he covered almost every World Series until the mid-twenties. His first fiction, published in 1914, had a baseball setting, and he became a national celebrity because of the baseball stories collected under the title *You Know Me Al.* Eventually he wearied of the stupidity of so many of the game's fans, and after the integrity of the game was so conclusively undermined by the Black Sox scandal of 1919 he turned, in disgust and sorrow, to other subjects. Yet he never lost his love for baseball as he had once known it, and in the last years of his life he remembered it with deep nostalgic longing. (5)

Lardner's impressive outflow of baseball-related material, both fiction and non-fiction, has never been equalled. And while the initial and residual levels of affection Lardner had for the game were, I believe, genuine, his baseball fiction is rarely susceptible to moments of poetic longing for the fields of green. The bitterness Lardner felt as a result of the 1919 game-fixing scandal was also genuine, but it was felt not so much as an unexpected shock as a last straw (cf. Yardley 216).[22] Lardner's bitterness was a work-in-progress, and the mark of his baseball fiction is its unparallelled cynicism. As Candelaria memorably puts it, Lardner was "Blessed with the incisive eye of an artist, he was able to transform into fiction much of what he saw around him, but burdened by a pessimism rivaling Ahab's, Lardner frequently turned much of what he saw into unbridled invective" (30).

The invective which abounds in Lardner is also a function of style. Lardner is a satirist whose fiction is usually a kind of monologue about a self-deceiving character, and the laughs must be at this character's expense, usually a semi-literate "rube" or "busher" from the sticks whose talent as a ballplayer is no remedy for his human shortcomings. In Lardner's fiction, "The Busher" is corrosively derided for his selfishness, his belief in his own celebrity, his lying, his cowardice and his stupidity. Though enormously popular in its day, over the years Lardner's baseball fiction has been criticized as *cruel* -- on the grounds that the butt of his misanthropic sense of humor is a powerless guy from the country. No matter what truth there is in seeing the busher as the ultimate victim of "the fix," there is no hiding the fact that the joke is on him -- and Lardner's humor hinges on this "cruelty."

---

22 Just as many fans have genuinely walked away from following MLB after the 1994 strike -- expressing disgust in the work-stoppage as the ultimate expression of the greed thay have long felt was hurting the game.

Lardner's baseball stories, "Alibi Ike," "My Roomy," "Hurry Kane," "Harmony," and his epistolary novel *You Know Me Al* (1914) all have an extraordinary insight into the daily lives of ballplayers. Just as Bouton's *Ball Four* would rest its disclosures in a sophisticated understanding of how the operation really works, Lardner's invective is never without its sense of authority about *how* ballplayers interact. The competitive tensions and social inequalities of ballplayers, which are the bases of Lardner's comedy, are played out on a credibly fluent stage. If the Lardner character is a "type," it is one Lardner has uniquely typified with his studied ear for the language of baseball players.

"Alibi Ike," perhaps Lardner's most famous short story, works the typical angle by pitting a more sophisticated narrator against an amusingly self-deluded busher subject. The busher, who "never pulled a play, good or bad, on or off the field, without apologizin' for it" (*The Best Short Stories of Ring Lardner* 35), is a running anecdote for the narrator, whose less than impressive skills as a ballplayer allows him a vantage to mock the career of the more talented, dumber "Ike." The narrator's motives never announce themselves as anything stronger than the usual yarn-spinning of a ballplayer, but the sharpness of his focus cuts quickly: right away he recalls the busher saying "Why do you all call me Ike for? I ain't no Yid" (35), relegating him immediately to an unpleasant ignorance rather than a sweet unworldliness.[23] Ike's alibis, however, are part of the intensely competitive atmosphere in a society that also values baseball. If baseball is measured in on-field accomplishments, Ike embodies the poetic injustice that sees on-field achievers turning out to be Pete Rose or Ty Cobb. Ike's alibis -- making excuses for the good *and* the bad -- are crudely arguing that "all men are created equal" since he does not want to draw undue attention to his talent. The fascinated and less-gifted narrator does not want to hear the alibis and reacts bitterly to how sports obviates these claims to equality. The narrator is embarrassed for Ike, and he imperiously claims the busher's "play was to shut up and he didn't know how to make it" (43).

One of Ike's alibis follows what has become a clichéd dramatic moment in baseball fictions: the heavy-hitter is told by his manager to bunt, so what does he do? Passing on the instruction to bunt and (natch) coming up with the big hit, "Ike" tells the coach ("Cap") he swung (and hit) rather than follow orders because the pitcher came in with "the hook" (curveball) and, after all, Cap was just teaching the team the values of patience in "waiting for the curve." The explanation earns his manager's forgiveness, but when pressed further

---

23 Imagine for a second the qualitative differences in *Forrest Gump* (1995) if *le* Gump's "simpleness" found him at a Georgia busstop "innocently" spouting racial epithets.

on the incident by the curious narrator Ike unwittingly reveals an instinctive command of the game and an impressive self-confidence:

> "That ball he threwed me looked just like the one I struck out on in the 1st innin' and I wanted to show Cap what I could of done to that other one if I'd knew it were a 3rd strike."
> "But," I says, "the one you struck out on in the 1st innin' was a fast ball."
> "So was the one I cracked in the 9th." (44)

Ike's alibis are not a reflexive dismissal of his surroundings but an inelegant (but still Gatsbian) attempt to contain his extraordinary riches within the ideology of teamwork. The narrator, however, is left on the sidelines, and the only resource he has is to arrange for a particularly cruel stunt to be played on "Ike" -- a witty, but real attempt to cut the rube down to size.

In Lardner's less funny baseball story "Harmony," a young phenome's rise is revealed to be the equivalent of an industry insider's lucky break. The ballplayers in the story care little for *the game*, except as a prelude to their off-field camaraderie which has brought them together in an amateur singing quartet. The failures and trades of their profession threaten the vitality of their amateur venture as mercenaries come and go with no regard for authentic harmony. The crass commercialism of baseball has almost erased the concept of fun, as the boys gripe --

> "I don't care if they have to pitch the bat-boy. But when Mike goes, where'll our quartette be?"
> "Well I says, do you get paid every 1st and 15th for singin' or for crownin that old pill?"
> "If you couldn't talk about money you'd be deaf and dumb," says Art.
> "But you ain't playin' ball because it's fun, are you?"
> "No," he says, "they ain't no fun for me in playin' ball." (158)

The cancellation of "fun" is an important step in the process of authorizing a professional approach. (As one might say to a student faced with a difficult assignment: "*it's not supposed to be fun* .") But in a profession which is based on a *game*, it may be unproductive to think of ballplaying only as serious and difficult work. (As one might say to a student faced with a difficult assignment: "*it isn't brain surgery.*") One might compare the more effervescent "fun" characters of the game like Dizzy Dean or Ken Griffey Jr., who have a knack of reminding fans that "it's a kids' game," to the more studious personas

of Ted Williams[24] or Greg Maddux, whose success appears to be the result of more adult, problem-solving skills. As Red Sox slugger Carl Yastrezmski puts it, "I loved the game, I loved the competition. But I never had any fun. I never enjoyed it. All hard work, all the time" (*Baseball Wit* 70). The key, of course, is winning. Nothing else in America is as important as winning and in Lardner's world this creates an oppressive atmosphere where youthful enthusiasm is crushed by the commercialized pursuit of winning and where wisdom is always cast aside for the younger legs of the next rookie sensation.

The professional imperatives of organized baseball exist as a structure outside of the grasp of fun-loving American "innocents" and the attempts of bushers and rubes to control their fates become in Lardner's fiction a comical and invariably disasterous adventure. Lardner's novel *You Know Me Al* (1914) is perhaps baseball fiction's most cynical text: condemning not only the corporate structure of baseball but also refusing to sentimentalize the condition of the rube. The ideological conflicts in this inimitable text are also animated by the full realization of the book's epistolary form. The distance between the semi-literate writer of the letters (Jack Keefe, "The Busher") and their reader (the text's "Al" and, by extension, you) is the primary source for laughs. This distance is also a confirmation of the helplessness and strange fascinations of the baseball fan.

You Know Me Al is actually the novelization of six 1914 *Saturday Evening Post* pieces called "A Busher's Letters Home." The enormous popularity of these columns was to be the signature of Lardner's fame (Yardley 163). And even though Lardner is still critically admired for his comfortable use of local color and the self-deceiving narrator, his best book has not benefitted from its association with baseball. Yardley writes that *Al*

> suffered under the handicap of being dismissed, or condescended to, as a "baseball novel." It is indeed that, but it is also much more: Jack Keefe is one of the great "originals" in American fiction, and the language with which he writes his friend is an expression of the vernacular that has had a lasting effect on the way American writers describe American talk. (165)[25]

---

24 Williams's pride in his craft is often a source for literary admiration. Beat-poet Gregory Corso even honorarily brings The Splendid Splinter into his guild's league in the poem "Dream of a Baseball Star": "Randell Jarrell says you're a poet! / I cried / So do I! I say you're a poet!" (71)

25 It would be unfair to blame *You Know Me Al*'s relative obscurity on the stigma of the baseball novel. Today, the fact that the Busher could write letters at all with that kind of frequency may have upgraded his once hilarious semi-literacy and, for better or worse, the epistolary novel -- like the epistle itself -- is increasingly a thing of the past and connotes the old-fashioned.

Lardner's use of the vernacular has had an obvious resonance in baseball fiction and reportage as writers are often caught up in the space between the discourse of the relatively uneducated ballplayer and the desire for more inside dope for the well-read fan. And though Lardner's vernacular style is imitated (as it is in *Bang the Drum Slowly*) what is still untouched of Lardner's is his unquenchable cynicism, as most baseball texts prefer to employ the vernacular style to establish sympathetic / authentic character. While The Busher Jack Keefe is perhaps not as irredeemable as some of Lardner's critics would have it, there is no doubt that Lardner's replication of his everyday speech is not a celebration of the values that come from the cornfields of America.

Jack Keefe, the rube author of the letters to Al, is a young pitcher in the Chicago White Sox system trying to make his mark in the big leagues. In his many letters Keefe is demonstrably stupid, gluttonous, cheap, cowardly, selfish, vain and gullible. In his missives to Al, he is always trying to put on his best face but in so doing unfailingly reveals his worst side. The Busher possesses an energized ignorance of his own failings, the kind of man who may interpret his place as the sucker as a sign that "all the boys wanted me to play poker" (37). It is an engaging mix of vanity and carelessness, exemplified in page after page, but rarely as humorously as in this passage:

> Coming out of Amarillo last night I and Lord and Weaver was sitting at a table in the dining car with an old lady. None of us were talking to her but she looked me over pretty careful and seemed to like my looks. Finally she says Are you boys with some football club? Lord nor Weaver didn't say nothing so I thought it was up to me and I says No mam this is the Chicago White Sox Ball Club. She says I knew you were athaletes. I says Yes indeed and specially you. You certainly look healthy. I says You ought to see me stripped. I didn't see nothing funny about that but I thought Lord and Weaver would die laughing. (37)

But just as often his simplicities do not adjoin any Gumpian purities of spirit and display real character flaws that have consequences in the quality of his life.

In some ways, Jack Keefe can be more sympathetic than the sweet, childlike rube. His needy repetitions of "you know me Al" -- signalling his desire to fix an image of himself in somebody's mind -- strikes me as quite human and as a fair commentary on the transparencies of all our machinations and shortcomings (let he who is without a spelling mistake throw the first stone). Ultimately it is the silent point-of-view of his friend Al which comes off as suspicious and slightly inhuman. In the third section of the book, where The Busher's less than perfect marriage is revealed, there is more implied contact between Jack and Al, but the obvious dislike between their two wives is never overtly compared to how Al feels about Jack. Is he a true friend? A tolerant correspondent? Or,

like many of the Busher's teammates, stringing him along for the comedy? Lardner's satire of Keefe, because of its viciousness, returns the ballplayer to a world where real indignities happen, where baseball itself is no remedy for human cruelty.

Jack Keefe is placed within the context of a real historical drama. Unlike the Frank and Dick Merriwell dime novels, whose upstanding college-educated heroes lead their fictionalized teams to victory, *You Know Me Al* places the rube on a real team with real names where his guileless voice can slyly articulate some of Lardner's insights into the American League.[26] For example, Keefe's contract negotiations emphasize his grandiose expectations as he promises to hold out for three thousand dollars but settles for one and a half. The exchange is also an underhanded attack on White Sox owner Charles Comiskey's legendary parsimoniousness. So when The Busher is claiming "no wonder everybody likes"(24) Comiskey, we are made aware, long before the information from *Eight Men Out* , that the team owner is not out to be liked, and the bottom line for everybody on the team is: "Comiskey will own you till he sells you" (118).

The jocular tone of Lardner's writing tends to mask the bitterness of his indictments, but the Busher's real life powerlessness is not so funny. Jack Keefe's gullibility is shared by all players. When members of the Chicago White Sox conspired with gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series, Lardner probably *knew*, but like the silent recipient of the Busher's letters, Lardner did not rush to defend the accused ballplayers nor did he try to rat them out. The real conspiracy seemed to be the most likely conclusion of all the what-can-you-do? fixes Lardner tabulates in his fiction. According to Black Sox historian Eliot Asinof, "No matter how much he hated to admit it -- especially to himself -- it was not in him to resist the logic of his cynicism. The sellout was on. He could smell it" (93). And much has been made of Lardner's nose in the matter: he always takes a starring

---

[26] The incorporation of Jack Keefe into the fold of a recognizable team links his corruptible greed and inherent laziness with the live legends of the Major Leagues. A Lardner reader realizes success in "the Show" is not dependant on moral virtue.

Baseball fiction, however, often removes itself from baseball's real history and, therefore, the prejudices of real live fans. How the author chooses to represent "real" baseball is perhaps the most crucial liberty at his or her disposal. If the novel's teams and settings are completely fictionalized -- like Malamud's New York Knights, or Harris's New York Mammoths -- issues of partisanship are displaced and baseball is suddenly about something else (character, form, setting, whatever) as nobody has a developed emotional investment in the fortunes of the Knights or the Mammoths. The author is the fixer and by removing the delights of chance from his or her baseball games, must look to the overall myths, legends and sensual qualities of the game. Creating a passive atmosphere to contemplate the properties of the game beyond who wins, the fan often becomes villainous and menacing, ultimately lashing out at the heroes of the game, as the fan in Peter Abrahams morality tale *The Fan* (1995) does.

role in the literary recreations of the scandal.[27] Lardner's reaction to the 1919 scandal was to leave the game entirely and focus his attentions on becoming a "real" author in New York. But Lardner's career did not take off as he had hoped. According to Yardley, Lardner "wrote no baseball fiction of any sort until 1925, by which time he was writing almost entirely for money and was willing to do just about whatever the market wanted" (215). The popularity of baseball in a way had fixed itself onto Lardner and compounded his disillusionment with the sport's limitations. It was as if Lardner himself could not escape the rube's province which he had helped to define.

Black Sox Books: The Fixed Game's Perfections

The legend of the Black Sox scandal has become a centerpiece for discussion about baseball's place in the hearts and minds of Americans. Baseball's so-called "darkest hour" has been mythologized to the point where it stands as the historical marker of baseball's "fall from grace," where the fix finally caught up with the great national game.

That ballplayers conspired to throw the 1919 World Series is not in doubt, but the literary fascination with the scandal is not merely based on a desire to "get the story straight" but to map the moral space where baseball is argued. If baseball can be proposed as a place where we can "connect with something larger than ourselves" (Thorn 54) and also be protected as a corporate monopoly that owns rube athletes like chattel, the thrown series puts a fine historical point on these opposing but connected arguments.

Baseball history, like all history, is open to interpretation. "The numbers" may often be presented as a final authority on achievement, and the numbers in theory may offer an equitable basis for debate.[28] But in finding the true story, the numbers are only a small

---

27 Lardner's alleged impromptu singing, "I'm forever blowing ballgames / ... and the gamblers treat us fair" (Asinof 94) to the tanking ballplayers on a team train has become *the* moment of tension in dramatic renditions of this seminal bit of baseball history.

28 Most fans and casual observers of baseball recognize the subjective and partisan basis for sports arguments. Few have all of baseball's statistics at their fingertips, and even in the face of a vast historical knowledge, many of the basic assumptions about the game are influenced by the affection of fans for certain players or moments. (i.e. In a passionate Williams vs. DiMaggio argument, no matter how sophisticated the analysis of the numbers gets, the partisan element of the argument will remain intact.) The history of the game that baseball's literature delineates is particularly subjective and informs partisan affections as much as quantifiable achievement. For example, the St. Louis Cardinals have won more World Series than any other national league team, yet their history is rarely as significantly detailed as the histories of the New York Giants or Brooklyn Dodgers. This is not an injustice to the Cardinals, but a recognition of the popularity of the great New York teams with baseball's fan base and a recognition that the New York teams may have better stories.

part of the equation. Many baseball writers like to contemplate the oral traditions they associate with baseball. The infield chatter, the talk of the local legends, the passing on of verbal mementoes from father to son, the barroom arguments *etc.* are poetically linked to associate the baseball writer with the more folksy, less commercially motivated storyteller. And as appealling as the picture is, and despite the small measures of authenticity in it, it remains true that every canonical baseball story was established with the aid of the commercial media. The use of print, radio, movies and television to promote and disseminate versions of baseball history is inseparable from the these histories. The Doubleday myth itself is a product of the media as much as it is a self-interested gesture from A.G. Spalding. From Babe Ruth's called shot to the George Brett "pine-tar incident," the liason between baseball and the media has made the sport's histories available to the wide public. The news media, to which sports news has attached itself, has, like professional baseball, managed to pass as enterprises whose primary concerns are social rather than financial.[29] Given the media's interest in shaping baseball history, baseball stories can become naturally suspect as promotional items.

In a review-essay, Peter Carino writes that the modern interest in retelling the Black Sox scandal is an effort to "call into question the authority of history" (278). Certainly the game fixing scandal is one of baseball's seminal moments, but the fascination of recent years has less to do with glorifying the past and, as Carino suggests, more to do with a desire to revisit the judgements of official history. Of course, adult mainstream fiction of the 1980s-90s is another enterprise which is not beyond commerce, and the contestations of this fiction have no specific moral authority beyond hindsight. Revisiting the same legend, even in the hopes of debunking its authority, ironically reinforces the details of that which was meant to be discredited. As the impeachment of the Doubleday story has kept that myth alive, legends of the Black Sox can't help but reinforce the pathos of "Say it ain't so, Joe."

Eliot Asinof's *Eight Men Out*, the first history of the scandal to take a more sympathetic look at the players, also conveys a sense of how contemporary anxieties about baseball, the entertainment industry and cultural change can be seen in light of this particular tale. Asinof's version is fairly rich in anecdote and it carefully describes the players' actions in a normal human light. Still, the recitation of events unwittingly emphasizes the same old song: this was when baseball / America lost its innocence. (John

---

29 Luther Pond, the co-narrator of *Hoopla*, tags the *New York Times* an enterprise which "succeeeded in projecting the impression that the paper was above commerce" (191).

Sayles' lovingly detailed film version of Asinof's history must stage the dramatic "Say it ain't so, Joe" moment, even though the exchange is generally accepted as a fabrication from the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* [Asinof 121].) There are other clusters of similarly-themed baseball novels[30] but the real difference with the Black Sox novels is in the extraordinarily high quality of the writing. The Black Sox novels were not written as pulp throwaways and, taken as a group, form a critique of baseball's moral contoversy.

The ideal game's brush-up with American professional sports' most notorious scandal is a survival issue for the myth which claims baseball as an almost sacred part of American life. The fix and the reasons for the fix test the values Giamatti invoked in his banishment of Rose; the fix also tests the sport's claims of superiority (particularly as a contrast to less wholesome pastimes) and tests the spirited revelations of *Ball Four*, the cynicism of Lardner and the soothing nice-guyisms of Kinsella.

Already we've seen how Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe / Field of Dreams* uses the patriotic invocations of baseball's spiritual perfections to rescue Joe Jackson from his perfidy and return him to the edenic pasture of ballplaying freedom in an old-fashioned ballfield. In this fiction, baseball is forgiving -- *the game* has a pure, non-material essence which transcends history and the need for a few dollars more. In Harry Stein's *Hoopla* (1983) and Brendan Boyd's *Blue Ruin* (1991), however, the fictionalizations of the historical scandal take a more concentrated look at the mechanisms of the fix and offer a more thorough interrogation of the commercial structures behind baseball's proudest myths.

By 1917, baseball was alleged to be "the biggest entertainment business in America" (Asinof 12). The business of baseball did not just involve the players and owners, but the thousands of writers, saloon keepers, and bookmakers whose businesses depended on the national game.[31] However, by then baseball was also entrenched as an affirmative, wholesome presence on the American cultural scene. In 1910, President Taft

---

30 The first woman ballplayer, Barbara Gregorich's *She's On First*, (1987), Mel Cebulash's *Ruth Marini -- World Series Star* (1985) and Paul Rothweiler's *The Sensuous Southpaw* (1976), or a sole caucasian on an African-American barnstorming team in Jeff Craig's *Chappie and Me* (1979), Jerome Charyn's *The Seventh Babe* (1979), C.C. Risenhoover's *White Heat* (1992), and Quigley Martin's young adult novel *The Original Colored House of the Dead* (1981) are all repeat thematic performances.

31 In the period following the strike of 1994, many observers did not miss the games but could see how strangely emptied the summer newspapers and newsbroadcasts suddenly were. Nobody felt sorry for -- and few sided with -- the players *or* the owners, but many commented on the thousands of hot dog vendors, souvenir hawkers and tourist traders who suffered losses.

declared baseball a "clean, straight game" (Seymour *The Golden Age* 274) eminently worthy of popular goodwill. The prohibition era, with its struggles to legislate in the name of improvement and with its rapid advances in technology and changes in fashion and style, would naturally affect the course of baseball history. Moreover, the legendary backdrop of the roaring twenties -- a proven winner in books and on the screen -- puts the Black Sox scandal in a discourse about much more than game-fixing. As Luther Pond, the composited journalist character who co-narrates Harry Stein's *Hoopla* puts it,

> The quality of the change then in progress has, of course, been endlessly remarked upon in the years since -- has, indeed, been reduced to a visual cliché by the relentless newsreel footage of flappers, and packed ballparks, and pole sitters, and Wall Streeters gone berserk. . . . Those who like the sound of such things are wont to observe that this was the instant where Americans lost their innocence; it was, more precisely, the time when they stopped being embarrassed by it. Abruptly, in a hundred tiny ways, millions of people were behaving, *thinking*, with an unmistakable abandon -- often in ways that a half dozen years before would have been beyond imagining. Within months of prohibition, numberless good burghers were blithely breaking the law. All at once, hitherto conservative men were rushing their savings into beach property a thousand miles from home. One memorable afternoon, my own landlady, Mrs. Zachary, turned up with her hair bobbed. (292)

Pond's assessment has the ring of truth insofar as what we think we know about the era, but it is also an "everybody's doing it" rationale for a journalist who is creating the clichés which obscure the levels of control where the fix originates.

Peter Carino writes "*Hoopla* employs a double narrative to undermine the authority of a single historical perspective" (281). The character of Luther Pond, a composite character based on famous journalists of the time (like Lardner, Hugh Fullerton and Walter Winchell), is representative of the official story, while the other narrative is the voice of Buck Weaver, the least obviously guilty of the "eight men out," but doomed by the official story nonetheless. It is in some way as if the satiric *You Know Me Al* format was modified so that both sides of the correspondence are drawn out in stories that imply each other.

Luther Pond's cynicism resembles Lardner's, but his assurances in the way of the world also form an obvious layer of bragging self-deception as thick as Alibi Ike's. "In a world so at ease with mediocrity as this one," Pond claims "the qualities I possessed in such abundance -- energy, personal style, forthrightness, a sense of the dramatic -- were exceptional. So I was never one of those phoneys you'd find over at the Algonquin" (3). Failing to see the machinations of his own greed and his complicity in corporate fixes while

condemning the moral failures of others in his columns, Pond eventually does real harm to real people in the name of selling newspapers. Luther Pond becomes a repository for the charming gestures the media uses in order to sell themselves as guardians of the public good. Hence, Pond is relentless in defining tabloid-style journalism and is often convincing while using his perceptive intelligence in exposing the ill-motives of others as a legitimatizing conceit.

The Pond narrative is set some fifty years after the scandal, and in discussing his role as a journalist he does get to establish the crucial difference between *the official story* and what *really happened.* What Carino calls "the memoirs of a scoundrel"(283) is also a confession the narrative needs to illustrate the moral universe of the fix. Without Pond's demonstrations of the space between what the papers see and what they write, the official story might be less contested. Pond has the intelligence to differentiate between the immediate demands of his columns and the more complex and disturbing nature of the truth. And realizing his success lies in the exploitation of the real story in order to write the official story clears his way to a considerable social power.

Pond's narrative recollects a wide variety of fixes that do not work as a single, backroom conspiracy but as complex alliances between powerful groups who are working through systems they did not invent. For example, Pond recalls how the press would record African-American prizefighter Jack Johnson as invariably speaking in a stereotypical "negro dialect"(29) when in real life he is revealed to be a more sophisticated sportsman than the white boxers he is matched against. The racism which followed Johnson was not invented by the press, but without it, they cannot get a story with the dramatic build-up of *The Great White Hope.* The appeal to deeply-held values, which is affirmed in the Kinsella novels as a profound spiritual need, is turned around in the Pond narrative of *Hoopla* as a sharp critique of appealing to the lowest common denominator.

If baseball is befouled by its bad eggs it must first be made pristine by its enthusiasts. Responding to the ignomious stripping of Jim Thorpe's Olympic gold medals because he had played some professional baseball, Luther Pond declares "the public felt a good deal less betrayed by the duplicitous redskin than did the many newspapermen who had labored for six months to make of him a hero" (135). Nobody much cares about game-fixing in sporting events which have not been hyped; the "depravity" of the fix might depend upon the public investment in the particular game. Only children expect professional wrestling to be on the up and up, so grown-ups are not upset when it turns out to be fake. There were other Major League games (as well as minor league games) which had been thrown before the Black Sox, and there were games thrown afterwards which did not disturb, as Nick Carraway put it, "the faith of fifty million people" (*Gatsby* 75).

Luther Pond's relationship with baseball baddie Ty Cobb is used by Stein to indicate the press's complicity in creating the baseball myths which are still taken for granted. Pond's relationship with Cobb becomes something of a mutually advantageous use of sources. Cobb feeds Pond information about the Black Sox eight in order to keep Pond silent about games Cobb himself "helped." The unbelievably crude and cheap Cobb is called in Pond's column a "man of culture"(141), a note of "historical irony" (Carino 283) in the text but one with lasting significance.[32] Cobb as villain is a fairly recent text -- a fact which demonstrates the strong control MLB has over its product. Stein acknowledges the changing public opinion about Cobb by ending the Pond narrative with the journalist personally suggesting to Cobb that they will both come through it all "smelling like roses" (366).

Hoopla's other narrator, Buck Weaver, is closely based on the life of the Chicago thirdbaseman who did not come through the scandal smelling like a rose despite his protestations of innocence, his good series numbers, his legal acquittal and his reasonable explanations for what really happened.[33] The Weaver character makes less of a statement about baseball than the composite Luther Pond does about journalism. But if the sophisticated and powerful voice of Luther Pond comes off as a Lardner busher writ large, the more fully individuated Weaver, whose understated love of the game, need for a buck, and complex interactions with women and teammates, comes off as a real guy who is powerless in the face of the machinations of Pond's world. The semi-literacy of Lardner's Jack Keefe, which was a point of ridicule for *Saturday Evening Post* readers, becomes an imposing issue for Weaver as he tries to articulate the truth without the sophisticated gestures of the literary pro. The presence of college-educated second baseman Eddie Collins on Weaver's team is a source of tension. Not only does Collins disrupt the working-class atmosphere of the locker-room with his condescending attitude toward the players' tastes, Collins is paid three times more by the team owner on the basis of his college education -- deflating the belief ballplayers will be rewarded solely on the basis of quantifiable on-field merit. Aware of the connection between education and class distinctions Weaver says, "most of us ballplayers had not been so sure how we felt about domeheads in the first place. It just did not seem right that a fellow fresh out of college, who was well furnished upstairs, would take a job smacking baseballs from an ordinary joe" (168). It's a fair reminder that baseball players were paid working class wages once

---

32 cf.Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt calling Babe Ruth "a noble man" (48).

33 Weaver went 11 for 34, with 4 doubles, a triple, and he scored four runs.

upon a time, but it is also a generous acceptance of Collins' cerebral "furniture" -- something the proud Pond would not admit about the Algonquin round-tablers.

The publication of Lardner's *You Know Me Al* during Weaver's career brings a reaction from the ballplayers which may sound similar to the complaints levied against *Ball Four*, but more likely stems from resistance to the kinds of controls the stereotype of "the rube" places on working class ballplayers. Weaver complains, "what he printed in there was not funny! There was only one reason anyone would print such a thing, and that was to make money!"(161). His outrage at the falseness of *You Know Me Al*, and at Lardner's financial gains for such untruths, is a principled reaction. As many celebrities are, Weaver is uncomfortable with the fact that he is a text and a reward for the myth-makers. The dignity of playing-quietly-for-pay in sports is undermined as it becomes inextricably linked to the media's need to get paid by coming up with a *big story*. As Weaver recollects, "Those pencil pushers only want one thing and once they get that they leave you high and dry" (163). It is Weaver then who is compelled to remind us that the immortal tag-line,"Say it ain't so, Joe"(47) was made up by a writer.

Unlike Shoeless Joe Jackson, whose illiteracy is romanticized by Kinsella as a sign of his lamb-like susceptibility to the despots of baseball's fixes, Stein's Weaver is not illiterate, nor is he naively unaware of the presence of gamblers in the game or the allure of illicit activity. Weaver is not even above making fun of Jackson's illiteracy and admits, "Joe was also stupid. Stupid and ignorant" (44). Weaver's literacy is partly tested by his adversarial relationship with the college educated Collins and the famous Lardner. In order to prove something to the haughty Collins, Weaver and the boys go on a reading binge of contemporary baseball fiction. Ironically, he claims they read Hugh Fullerton's *Jimmy Kirkland and the Plot for a Pennant* (1915). This becomes doubly ironic when it is considered that Fullerton was the journalist who would eventually help break the story of the game-fixing scandal, and that this particular novel, *dedicated* to Charles Comiskey, is about how gamblers conspire to throw games and try to corrupt Jimmy Kirkland, an incorruptible American phenomenon. And, to further the irony, it is men like Weaver who appreciate this kind of affirmative declaration of baseball morality -- they are men who prefer the sequel to *Casey at the Bat* where Casey doesn't strike out. Whereas, the cynics who know Jimmy Kirkland as pure fiction are the ones who dictate the terms of the mythologies that will banish the real Weaver to the hinterlands so that Jimmy Kirkland may thrive.

To what extent Buck Weaver actually participated in the gamblers' fix of the World Series is impossible to know. His stats suggest he was giving it his all, but the case can be made that is because the other fixers (the pitchers Cicotte and Williams in particular) were

getting the job done and that the spotlight never shone on Weaver. Regardless, Stein does not attempt to present exculpatory evidence to remedy a specific injustice, but uses Weaver's voice to challenge the traditional authority of the official story. Weaver's narrative is a more complex intertwining of the issues he is faced with; not a case of *good ballplayer vs. bad ballplayer* or *White Sox vs. Black Sox*, the inside knowledge of the cynic is companioned with believable sentiment about the game,

> Even if we did go on with it, what of it? The national game was full of sell-outers, just like any other business. It is a thing of life.
>
> But over the next few days, I admit that I started to have a few other feelings. It is an odd thing, but baseball could do that to you sometimes. (269)

Brendan Boyd's *Blue Ruin* (1992) starts off with similar protestations about the relativity of history as the narrator proclaims, "There is no truth, only versions. This is mine" (7). The narrator turns out to be Sport Sullivan, the flamboyant Irish-American gambler who helped arrange the fix. The perspective the fixer brings to his narrative is the feeling of power associated with being able to pull off such a feat. According to Asinof, "Sullivan had always laughed at the workings of law and politics, for he had all the connections he needed to stay out of trouble"(8) and the connected or made man has the peculiar creative authority of the criminal mind: he can do things, imagine things, which the rest of the world prefers to ignore. To the extent we can acknowledge Shakespeare's Iago or Milton's Satan as elevated creators (fixers) of scenes because they can interpret their moral universes from perspectives which are not contained by law, Boyd's Sullivan is similarly elevated as a conspirator to the fix. He becomes a credible anti-hero, whose obstacles are the small minded "saps" who want baseball to be clean. His criminality, like that of many bookmakers or bootleggers of the period, was his attempt to make something of himself in the already defined reality of America. Sport Sullivan's America, as Peter Carino writes, is a place where "everyone has a dream, everyone has an angle, but everyone is only as powerful as the more powerful allow" (286).

Sullivan's narrative starts out with often disturbing details about his father, whose paternal advice is thus typified: "Once he cautioned me never to dream, because if my dreams didn't come true, I'd be disappointed, and if they did, I'd be even more disappointed" (3). It is far cry from "if you build it he will come," and Sullivan does not take his father's advice to heart as he does dream of being *somebody*. Cordelia Candalaria, summing up the thesis of her study *Seeking the Perfect Game*, states that "baseball's ideal of the perfect game connotes with peculiar precision the literary and moral truth about America's history and society" (147). And in this ideal quest, Boyd's Sullivan ironically

stakes his claim. Finding no comfort in the traditional bromides of steady advancement, he does not seek the perfect game, he dreams of the "perfect scam" (30).

Baseball's status as a working class pastime, however, is problematic for the gambler as he tries to advance to the status of "made men," whose ancestors Arnold Rothstein reminds us, "got here two hundred years before us ethnics" (24). For Sullivan baseball is a business, and the rah-rah followers of the game come off as grotesques who get what they deserve. But in an encounter with a sports-wearied train passenger, Sullivan can only return the traveller's suspicion with vulgar patriotism:

> The man in the seat next to me, who looked like a recent retiree from a particularly debilitating profession, stuck his stubby finger into the headline. He informed me that an inside guy had told him all ballgames were fixed. I said, "Don't defame our national pastime, Jasper, or I'll piss on your wing tips." Then I walked out to the rear platform to insulate myself from fatuous society. (19)

Lacking any social grace himself, Sullivan maintains an emphatic dislike of the gullibility of the people who play beneath the bankrolls. Arnold Rothstein's cold reminder to Sullivan "I never attend baseball matches. I detest sports" (144), covertly expresses the social barriers enclosing a bookmaker nicknamed "Sport." And Sullivan's dissatisfaction with his status is, to a certain extent, defined by the baseball crowd he can't seem to escape. Even among sports, Sullivan finds baseball particularly odious: "I enjoy going to the track mostly" he says. "It's how I got started in life. I only got converted to baseball when the war closed the tracks. I'd been thinking of switching back recently, having grown weary of sucking up to ball hawks, of varnishing men I could hardly bear to meet" (68). Disgustedly, he asks of the "swinish"(121) crowd, whose conclusions are usually based on crude hunches, "Aren't such apes the likeliest of God's unfortunate to call every sap they inflict their theories on "Sport"?"(197), ironically mocking Jay Gatsby's omnipurpose sobriquet and defining his own place and name in society.

The world of *Blue Ruin* (the title refers to bad batches of moonshine whiskey) is one where the values associated with cultural prominence are challenged. It is a world where scams are run at every level, where Aimee Semple McPherson's cousin might try to sell you opium (121). Sullivan's fixing is not a condition but an activity. Sullivan is certainly not a "positive role model" but unlike the Luther Pond character of *Hoopla*, he has a detailed sensitivity and a heroic desire to do something rather than be overwhelmed by the forces obstructing him from his dreams. He is in a situation where "if he said no he was a chump. If he said yes he was a thief" (46), and he ends up articulating an always uncertain chronicle about what it means to say yes.

Fixing the World Series for Sullivan is a beautiful game; it is his equivalent of winning the World Series. He is never sure if the fix will be pulled off, so the fixing is, at every step, a game. But the obvious illegality of his choices and the alliances he must forge to pull it off threaten his own sense of freedom in the pursuit of his dream. The financier of the fix, Arnold Rothstein, incredulously asks Sullivan, "You don't believe in happiness, do you, Sullivan? Please tell me you're not one of those. You might as well put a spike in your aeorta" (74). But Sullivan does seem to believe in a kind of happiness -- and his often melancholic attempts to try to outdistance controls (Rothstein, the Players, "America" *etc.*) are signatures of that faith.

Like other anti-heroes of criminal narratives, Sport Sullivan ends up spending his victory alone in Mexico. His description of his life might seem the envy of the middle class at their desks:

> I take long walks, sketch, read voraciously, sitting in my lush untended garden, staring up through the swaying jacarandas, picturing again all the loveliest scenes as they could have been, and as, no doubt, they someday will be, in some country, in some year, in this brief life whose realest parts are what we dream of it, in this best of dreams, which is, at last, my own. (339)

But the fulfillment of his dream becomes a kind of death, where the anxious, irresolute nature of games is replaced by the certainty of fixed routines. The dream is a total obfuscation of Sullivan's personality and an achievement which depends upon exile from American society.

Conclusion(s)

An unquestioning faith in institutions and cultural icons may indeed be the cause of real ruin. Many who have believed being innocent would automatically bring acquittal, or who did not voice their worries as they assured themselves *the doctor knew best*, have seen their lives destroyed following their faith. *Hire a lawyer, get a second opinion* may underline cynical understandings of institutions, but they are worth remembering and, unfortunately, they are not free. When considering the faith put into baseball as "one's best hope" (Giamatti *Take Time* 82) one might also recall the commercial interests in professional baseball and its support systems, even the literary ones. Baseball may aspire to the conditions of freedom but, as anyone who has spent an afternoon at the SkyDome knows, it isn't free.

It is also clear that the intensity and scope of the texts of baseball's sublimity are connected to the intensity and scope of the texts of baseball's dark commercial shadows. Professional basketball and professional football do not have (meta)fictional narratives about corruption as embracing as the Black Sox scandal, nor do these sports have the same popular texts of disapproval when the games' stars make big dough or when their stars are caught in scandals.[34] Yes, the texts themselves have undoubtedly enriched the literary cachet of baseball, and, yes, there is an argument to be made for the perseverance of higher standards of conduct in baseball's public arena, but the fact remains that professional baseball is an entertainment business and not a public service. This does not make it unworthy of affection, nor does it cancel out all extrapolations as to its significance in American life.

As the game fades in popularity, the need to assert its narrative lessons has increased. The sense of nostalgia which is part of Kinsella's appeal is in step with baseball's promotional strategy; particularly in its mania for new "old-style" uniforms and stadiums. It becomes exceedingly difficult for baseball to come to terms with the self-referentiality of its history when the status of actual games becomes less important. As fewer people care who won last night, baseball continues to aspire to fiction.

---

34 One might compare the relative indifference of the NBA to Michael Jordan's gambling habits with the severity of Giamatti's Pete Rose sentence.

THREE

Green Fields, Young Berries and Piney Woods:

The Pastoral Convention in Classic Baseball Novels. (And Detective Fiction)

here's the green field green as childhood
the arena the stadium the space of the game
and the game doesn't go outside this green

--Viola Weinberg, *The Playoffs and Everything*

And so it was that one afternoon at Candlestick Park the message board happily flashed a sign that read "Real Grass, Real Sunshine, Real Ball." Rocky Bridges, coach of the Giants, tried to put the slogan into perspective. "Well, two out of three ain't bad," said the resident pixie.

--Bert Randolph Sugar, *Rain Delays.*

Pastures out of Ballparks

For the baseball fan the ballpark / stadium is a specific area of fascination, pride and occasional discernment. For travelled fans of the game, discovering the different lay-outs of the ballparks, exploring the different services offered, is a peculiarly intriguing and sustaining tourist thrill. The often sentimentalized excitement of walking up the dark runway tunnel of a stadium to come through and see the vivid green of the stadium's field is perhaps the game's most common aesthetic experience. And ballparks, whether they are major or minor league, often become aesthetically identified with the city they are located in and help define the identity of those towns and cities.

Ballparks are not hard to come by. Any flight over the U.S. reveals a country that has that same curious diamond shape carved out practically everywhere. And each one of these parks has its own legends of dimension and identity. From the low right field fence of Yankee stadium to a rocky infield that gives softballers an excuse for not diving, from the legendary Elysium Field in Hoboken -- site of the game's first organized leagues -- to the undeniable comfort of the Houston Astrodome, ballparks become extensions of one another, constantly refining and recapitulating the practical necessity of form. Like baseball games themselves each park is tantalizingly different yet reassuringly the same.

For the seasoned baseball fan the ballparks which are usually singled out for praise are Boston's "lyric little bandbox" (Updike 319) Fenway Park and Chicago's "Peter Pan of a ball park," (E.M. Swift qtd Evers, *Murder in Wrigley* epigraph) Wrigley Field. The seniority of these parks (Fenway was built in 1912 and Wrigley Field in 1916) evoke the sport's history and traditions. While the Red Sox and Cubs are both beloved for their ability to lose with frustrating consistency, their fields have seen some of the game's greatest moments: Ruth's famous "called shot" in Wrigley in the 1932 World Series; Carlton Fisk's dramatic home run in "the greatest game ever played" at Fenway during the 1975 World Series.

Fenway Park and Wrigley Field are, as they say, "quirky" rather than purely functional. Fenway has an improbably short left field (315 feet compared to the SkyDome's 330) while Wrigley -- without lights until 1988 -- entertained all of its games in the daytime. These parks possess what seems to be the checklist of *must-haves* for the baseball purist: natural grass (Wrigley's ivy covered brick walls further its "natural" appeal), a square rather than oval design, only baseball is played there, and they have some idiosyncratic dimensions that make things difficult for the untested and lyric for the faithful. The purist looks for the ballpark to be fully individuated and in tune with the traditions of

the game. Hence, the baseball *aficionado* is more likely to prefer a Victorian design with its nooks and crannies to the modern ballyards of the 60's and 70's.

Whatever antique appeal Wrigley and Fenway maintain they are also, in their own way, quite functional. They are located in "safe" areas of the city, still vital parts of functioning neighborhoods. When the Dodgers left an increasingly under-class Flatbush for the more obvious riches in Los Angeles, it dramatized the bottom line rule that local affection for a ballpark must be accompanied by local attendance. Comiskey Park in Chicago's notorious South Side was not secured by its nostalgic poetry and a more fortified, functional park was built in its stead. Detroit's Tiger Stadium (older than Wrigley) is slated for demolition. Even the Bronx's venerable Yankee Stadium is being threatened by a midnight move by its tenants as they eye the more middle-class friendly marshland of New Jersey.

The well-established tenure of a major league ballpark is naturally appealing to amateur historians and advanced fans but potentially less appealing to many paying customers who want to have a conveniently good time. These "Green Cathedrals"[1] are also temples of another kind of green. The harmonies evoked by the quirky stadium must also attend on what poet H.C. Dodge called in 1886 "gate-money music" (Thorn 9). The construction of baseball as a pastoral game is not threatened by brand new stadiums; this pastoral construction becomes reinforced as the game's historical sites are demolished and the peaceful green can still be talked of even if one watches the game at SkyDome or at home, on television.

The pastoral vision of baseball (baseball as green and afternoon sun, connected to the natural world, to health, to the countryside and traditions of play as opposed to something aggressively urban and industrial), is good for baseball's business. The nostalgic "throw-backs" of Fenway Park and Wrigley Field are used to evoke positive feelings about the sport in the entire marketplace. This does not mean that these pastoral sentiments are without their own integrity or out of place in big league ball. What it does mean is that the "natural" qualities associated with baseball -- its pastoral setting -- have been reinforced by big league, big city baseball. Similarly, the pastoral response in English literature is often less about a celebration of rural life than the creation of an imagined, nostalgic space where the unpleasant march of time can be avoided. That baseball can relocate its nostalgic, pastoral vision in service of its business was dramatically demonstrated in 1992 by the wild success of Baltimore's new downtown stadium.

---

[1] "Green Cathedrals" is the title of Philip Lowry's book about the art and architecture of baseball stadiums.

Rouseports and SkyDomes

Oriole Park at Camden Yards, built for the start of the 1992 baseball season, quickly became the talk of the major leagues. And for good reason: Camden Yards is one of baseball's best designed and customer-friendly stadiums. Not only is it conscious of the kinds of specific things the hard-core baseball fan wants in a playing location, ("natural" etc.) it is also impressively integrated into the core of a re-energized downtown Baltimore, with its centerfield looking out onto the skyline and its front gates a short walk from Baltimore's popular Inner Harbor.

The architects who designed Camden Yards specifically thought of recreating some of the lost "magic" of old parks. In a self-promoting program for its first season the Orioles' club boasts of its field's design and peerage: "an *asymetrical* (my emphasis) playing field and natural grass turf are just some of the features that tie it to those magnificent ballparks built in the 1900s. Ebbets Field (Brooklyn), Shibe Park (Philadelphia), Fenway Park (Boston), Crosley Field (Cincinnati), Forbes Field (Pittsburgh), Wrigley Field (Chicago) and the Polo Grounds (New York)" ("Insider's Guide" 13). One may note that only two existing fields, Wrigley and Fenway, are mentioned in the company of the departed treasures of yore. The names of long gone fields not only arouse feelings about the good times in those old parks but feelings about a long gone America. (Lowry's point about the ballfields constituing a Cathedral-like importance in the American collective imagination is not so absurd. The creation of Camden Yards-like parks has some interesting correlations to Gothic-revivals in the face of advancing technology in the Victorian age.)

In a brochure published by one of the Stadium's financers well before ground was broken, it was promised that "Modern facilities will be incorporated into the old-fashioned appearance of the ballpark." Here it seems that "modern facilities" are at least an equally important proviso. While Oriole Park at Camden Yards is successful, it is notoriously more expensive than the Orioles' previous home, Memorial Stadium. As important as the allure of the natural and the old-fashioned is, the guarantees of access to public transport, ample parking space, concession alternatives, comfortable facilities and luxury boxes are more basic. New stadiums and arenas are now primarily looking to establish connections with corporate season-ticket holders rather than the occasional blue collar fan, and a certain upscale poshness is designed to fit in with the "old fashioned." Without the contemporary amenities an old revered ballpark (like Chicago's Old Comiskey) is just *old* and not long for the wrecking ball.

Just as ice-cream parlours realized that an 1890's "all-natural" pitch is good for business, so it was for baseball and the Baltimore Orioles.[2] Naturally, investors in the new ballpark (including the city of Baltimore) were not only interested in a conservative aesthetic statement. And the development of the ballpark is not entirely an isolated vision as it compliments downtown Baltimore's "renaissance" which followed the "old fashioned" re-development of the Inner Harbor into a hot tourist spot. Baltimore's Inner Harbor was remodeled by the Rouse Development Company, the same developers which turned Boston's historic Fanueil Hall / Quincy Market and New York's historic South Street Seaport into financial successes. The Rouse Company developments share a good deal with the look and feel of Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The celebrated ballpark is in many ways a "Rouseport," a simulacrum of the historic as a front for increased revenues.[3]

The naming of the stadium obviously has some advertising implications. In naming a park the owners may have to take into consideration responsibilties to major sponsors (Busch Stadium), municipal fealty (Fulton County Stadium), and needed self-promotion (Dodger Stadium). But team owners and fans are quite conscious of the literary, connotative powers inherent in the synonyms for *stadium.* Camden *Yards* ,while referring to the erstwhile train yards the stadium is built on, has a pleasant ring as does the "park" in Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The suggestive greenness of *park, field, grounds* and *yard* could all have come right out of that second most famous comedy routine about baseball. (George Carlin on the difference between baseball and football: "*Baseball* is a 19th century pastoral game -- *Football* is a 20th century technological struggle. Baseball is played on a *diamond* in a *park* -- the baseball park! Football is played on a *grid iron* in a *stadium.*")

While it's interesting to see how the poetry of the pastoral has passed football (often played in the exact same "green cathedrals" the baseball games are played in), it is more important to see how baseball's increasing sense of nostalgia for itself encodes its own sense of diminished popularity. The properties of the "pastoral" have not prevented baseball from becoming less popular than football; however, it has become essential in establishing its historic authority as "America's Game."

---

2 In the inaugral season the Baltimore franchise topped the 3 million attendance mark for the first time in its history.

3 "Rouseport" and "Rouseification" are coinages which came out of Boston in response to this kind of architectural development. As explained in *Monk* magazine's glossary, "How to Talk Boston" -- "*Rouseification.* the marriage of cuteness, commerce and historic preservation. *Rouseport.* generic name for Rouseified historic districts like South Street Seaport, Balitmore's Inner Harbor and Faneuil Hall. Trusted destinations for white bread Middle Americans afraid to venture far afield in those big bad cities in the east"(13).

The power of certain words within the context of the sport is not testament to the cleverness of advertisers but to how deep the sentiment about what baseball should be runs in the American public. That is, the language of the game has become increasingly layered with myths that have for a large part been fostered by popular fiction and film. The popularity of these myths is not negligible or even possible to debunk. The pasture that baseball takes place in is imaginatively transportable; the pastoral myth remains intact whether the viewer is in Wrigley, Fenway, Riverfront, SkyDome or, perhaps most importantly, watching it on TV in the comfort of his or her home. That pasture leads to many pleasant images of a lost America, of places yet unspoiled by pollution or crime or free agency. And these positive feelings are aggressively courted by baseball's Rouseports since these frames of mind may also help us get in the mood to come again and to *buy more*. And now the Camden Yards version is being cranked out as the standard model: first reproduced at Jacob *Field* in Cleveland and then in *The Ballpark* in Arlington, Texas.

While reconstituting the past has always been part of official baseball's promotional history, it wasn't always this epidemic. When pro baseball's attendance sagged in the 1960's and 70's there was a perception that baseball was passé, and in order for it to survive it had to "get with the times" and keep up with the once purely collegiate sports (basketball and football) that were encroaching on its revenue shares. Thus the sport saw all kinds of modish alterations: brighter uniforms, pace-accelerating rule changes, astroturf, gigantic scoreboards and, to the continuing disdain of traditionalists, the American League's establishment of the designated hitter rule in 1973.

In the 60's and 70's the National League in particular saw an outgrowth of similarly designed "multipurpose stadiums" whose cavernous interiors could accommodate non-baseball spectacles, featured artificial turf, used less of the traditional design of the ballpark and went with the Coliseum-oval (the "octorad") of the football stadium.[4] However, it would be a mistake to believe that all these once new ballparks were just grudgingly accepted as cost-cutting gaps or necessary evils; they had and still do have their defenders.

While they are the bane of purists and rarely the subject of lyric poems, in their day multipurpose stadiums had their own state-of-the-art appeal. It would seem that their bigger-is-better ambitiousness was part of baseball's desire to get more "modern" when the "olde-tyme" game wasn't bringing in new fans. The sheer increase in the numbers of fans that could be housed at a game in the multi-purpose stadiums brought clear dividends to

---

[4] Philadelphia's Veteran's Stadium was inaugurated in 1972, Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium in 1970, St. Louis's Busch Stadium in 1966, and Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium in 1966.

some of the teams in gate receipts. (And unlike the old-fashioned stadiums, some of these cavernous homefields have been the home fields of recent World Series winners and box-office champions. It has been said that Wrigley and Fenway fans, like all losers, need poetry.) Perhaps more significantly, the cavernous, artificially turfed stadiums also helped define a more distinctive National League style, a game with emphasis on defense and speed. Ray Miller, a coach experienced in both big leagues, claimed that "the bigger ballparks make for better baseball because there is less emphasis on getting Godzilla to the plate to hit a home run" (Will 57).

Professional sports are now so thoroughly integrated with popular entertainment systems that it should be said it was not always so; baseball was not at the forefront of the popular culture explosion of the 1960's. Then, in comparison to the fashions and tastes of protest-era culture, baseball's old-fashionedness seemed to make it curiously out-of-place and certifiably *square*.[5] Not surprisingly, the word "purist" can be used derisively, referring to someone holding onto an old discredited tradition in a society that dares to go to the moon.

Professional baseball's impure herald of artificial turf was "Judge" Roy Hofheinz, the man responsible for creating what is baseball's counterweight to Wrigley and Fenway, the Houston Astrodome. The Astrodome has its own impressive *rite du passage* and significant claim to identity. Hofheinz's vision of a domed stadium, where customers could escape the heat of a Houston night and enjoy a sports match in air-conditioned luxury, has never really challenged the pastoral vision of the game but has highlighted the importance of setting in its constant appeal to a complete aesthetic vision for the game.

> Even as baseball emerges from the architectural dark ages of the 1960s and 70s, marked by the blight of the multipurpose stadium, and begins to once again build traditional parks like Camden Yards and The Ballpark in Arlington, these -- and all big time sports stadiums and arenas constructed today -- are designed around the luxury skybox and the elaborate electronic scoreboard. Both are the intellectual offspring of the Judge [Hofheinz] who changed the very way Americans attend their games. (Rushin 44)

Hofheinz's audacious stadium, garishly painted and accompanied by mascots, exploding scoreboards and so on, whatever its excesses, highlights the *experience* of going to a game

---

[5] In quite a few of the baseball fiction's texts (*The Brother's K*, *Shoeless Joe*) the Vietnam era itself causes a rift between the "baseball values" of the father's generation and the protest values of the son's generation -- rifts that lead to different versions of the metaphorical "game of catch."

by acknowledging that the game is not enough.[6] The average fan will likely remember the experience of going to the game and who won, but not the final score. The Astrodome's aggressive "modernity," self-aggrandizingly associating itself with space shots and advertising itself as the "eighth wonder of the world," sets up a foundation for obvious contrast in idealistic baseball literature.[7]

In Gene Fehler's poem "Artificial Baseball," the natural world of baseball is contrasted with the dome:

> Late Summer in its sun-drenched dance of green
> Stood watch outside the massive sterile dome
> Where air-conditioned artificial turf
> Took weary time-warped players far from home. (32)

Again the word "green" and "Summer" are invoked to speak of real baseball, (while most stadiums, even minor league ones, play their games at night). And now "home" is located for the ballplayer in the past; he must be "time-warped" into the massive dome. And the domed stadium becomes a repository for all alienating advancements of the technological age.

Fehler, it turns out, is less subtle than one of the Majors' great stars, but makes the same public appraisal: when Mickey Mantle, one of baseball's ultimate country boys, came to the Houston Astrodome for its first exhibition game, he said "It (the Astrodome) reminds me of what I imagine my first ride would be like in a flying saucer" (Heylar 74). In the boom economy of the 1960's such promises to go to the moon were satisfying, but in a more strapped time, where ballplayers earn a discomfiting amount of money, there may be less public desire to take the game and its imaginary pasture to outer space.

As Tal Smith, later president of the Houston Astros, put it "Hofheinz took baseball out of its drab surroundings and revolutionized it with comfort and color" (Helyar 76). The Astrodome may now be mocked for its kitschiness, but the Rouseports of today are no less artificial. (The Astrodome is *kitschy* but it is not *ersatz*.) Camden Yards *et al* are

---

6 Camden Yards, while impressive, is more carnivalesque and distracting than L.A.'s Dodger Stadium (baseball's most classically efficient park). Nor has the Astrodome been completely disavowed: Toronto's SkyDome, with its retractable roof and adjacent luxury hotel and franchised McDonald's and Hard Rock Café, have used the "state of the art" appeal for record-breaking attendance figures.

7 Hofheinz himself had the Houston "Colt 45s" renamed "Astros" in deference to the outerspace theme. (The Astros are still unchallenged as holders of the most garish home uniforms from 1975 to 1988.)

reactions to the faded appeal of what was thought to be fashionable progress not too long ago; similarly baseball pastoralism is a reaction to the perceived modern failures of the game, a retreat to what never was because what is is too shameful. And damned if the game isn't still fun to watch despite all those domes and millionaires. The pasture of the literary imagination is, like baseball's great Doubleday myth, a back formation, but an incredibly appealing and, by now, a constitutive one.

In his influential study of sports as a formulaic distillation of ritual Allan Guttman wonders whether,

> Is it then farfetched to suggest that one reason for the relative decline of baseball in recent years has been the diminuation of the pastoral element? Baseball games are now played under electric rather than solar light. Astroturf replaces grass and the still air of the Astrodome further insulates the fan from Zephyr and Boreas. For the television viewer, there is neither night nor day, only the bright image of some distant weatherless event. (Guttman 108)

I would argue that pastoralism itself is symptomatic of baseball's perceived decline. And this perceived decline (and desire for its supposedly pastoral antecedent) predates the Astrodome; it even predates the Black Sox scandal. But the more the Astrodome is considered, the warmer the legendary Zephyrs will be.

The use of the pastoral in baseball literature is somewhat symptomatic of the nostalgic gentrification of the baseball marketplace. In his introduction to *The Achievement of Sports Literature*, Wiley Lee Umphlett cites the green fields as a source of baseball's substantial literariness: "the pastoral nature of the game . . . lends itself to the reflective, introspective posture so essential to the creation of mature fiction" (15). (Always conscious of the "juvenile" or "insubstantial" roots of sports writing, the pastoral opens up to the promised land of "reflective," "mature" and respected fans.) Of course, real sunshine and "fields of green" are probably more important in the game of golf, yet golf has not inspired a comparable body of mature fiction. (To say nothing of cricket, soccer, field hockey, rugby, or even frisbee.) The baseball pastoral has less to do with the intrinsic qualities of what makes baseball beautiful than it does with the American literary imagination's fascination with innocence and corruption.

Et in Arcadia Ego, Obese Cantarit

Much can be said about what constitutes the pastoral, and even in reference to baseball it remains a complex literary classification. Of course, pastoral doesn't just mean a love of nature or an unambiguous celebration of rural life. From the latin "pertaining to or consisting of shepherds" (*Webster's* 1055) we generally associate literature's pastoral with classical and early European works. Virgil's *Eclogues*, Milton's *Comus*, Shakespeare's Romance Plays and Marvell's famous love poems are pastoral works that are usually mentioned in studies of the genre.

According to the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*,

> Pastoral tends to be an idealization of shepherd life, and by so being creates an image of a peaceful, uncorrupted existence; a kind of pre-lapsarian world .... The dominating idea and theme of most pastoral is the search for the simple life away from the court and the town, away from corruption, war and strife, the love of the gain, away from getting and spending. (Cuddon 478-80)

This definition works for the baseball pastoral as well. The Sunshine and Real Grass of the ballpark are meant to locate a place away from the city's frustrations.

Baseball, however, is a city game. To the frustration of mythologists there is no single moment of the game's creation, but it did emerge with the development of "Town Ball" clubs in New England and was finally organized to its more or less current form when Alexander Cartwright and his New York Knickerbockers helped establish the National Association in 1858. The development of an idyllic pastoral vision of baseball's beginnings starts with the fostering of the Doubleday myth in 1889. While the Doubleday myth served sporting goods manufacturer's A.G. Spalding's patriotic desire to declare the game "native, unsullied by English ancestory" (Seymour *The Early Years* 9), what remains of the myth is the idyllic image of Doubleday Field in smalltown Cooperstown, far away from the noise of industry. Baseball's "shrine," its Hall of Fame, was then placed in Cooperstown despite the transparency of the hoax. The Hall, while no longer officially endorsing the Doubleday theory, does little to distance itself from it. In his book *Baseball Between the Lies*, Bob Carroll points to a telling obfuscation in a more recent Hall of Fame program that

> dispenses with the whole subject as apparently beneath consideration: "Whatever may or may not be proved in the future concerning Baseball's

> true origin is in many ways irrelevant at this time. If Baseball was not actually first played here in Cooperstown by Doubleday in 1839, it undoubtedly originated about that time in a similar rural atmosphere." (Carroll 17)

What is surprising is not so much the mealy-mouthed acknowledgement of historical inaccuracy but the continued insistence on the rural setting. As Thoreau said, when one is looking for a home or a seat, "better if a country seat." (72) Doubleday, or whoever, is not so important but the vision of the idyllic field in the country is. The setting of the myth begins to overwhelm the facts and characters of history. In his study of Shakespeare's pastoral comedies Tom McFarland writes,

> The figures in a pastoral setting were . . . less important than the setting itself; or rather they provided an index to the setting. For the pastoral was above all an ideal setting. (McFarland 21)

And the pastoral ballpark (like Doubleday's field) is an ideal fictional setting. Ideally, the ballpark exists in what Northrop Frye called the "green world" (67) of Shakespeare's comedies, evoking "a symbolism in which the comic resolution contains a suggestion of the old ritual pattern of the victory of summer over winter" (68). They are places where the troubles of the city can be escaped, and, with intriguing gambol and play, the true self can be discovered in the unequivocal motions of bodies, and the restored individual can be returned to the city. It is largely an imaginary and highly artificial "natural space."[8] Again, this ludic "green world" is as available to fans of televised baseball as it was to patrons of The Globe.

It is the artificiality of the pastoral and the self-referential nostalgia of the particular artifice which baseball readily uses to define part of itself.[9] Just as the shepherds of Marvell's poetry are not to be confused with real shepherds (who would be concerned with the hard and unpleasant labor of shepherding) the ballgames in the pastoralists' setting are similarly absented of the more unpleasant aspects of going to the game (*i.e.* overpriced tickets, lousy seats, can't find parking, kids crying, sitting beside some drunk, sitting too close to the speakers, cold hot dogs, lousy game) in favor of more pleasant sensual

---

8 Frank Kermode, in his *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvell*, emphasizes at the outset that pastoral "probably suggests the word "artificial" rather than the word "natural" (qtd McFarland 25).

9 As Donald Hall, in a nod to *The Winter's Tale*, defines the country of baseball as "Baseball is a country all to itself. It is an old country, like Ruritania, northwest of Bohemia and its seacoast"(67).

elements of the baseball experience. Baseball's pastoral mode creates its own cherished litany of what's beautiful about the game but doesn't dive too far into the details (the crucial "dope" of the die-hard). According to Candelaria, "the novelists who write nostalgically about the sport are markedly diffuse about it" (50). [10]

The baseball pastoral ideal is content within a small range of specific sensual memories. And when these memories are preserved in a familiar way there is an evocation of baseball's own Arcady. As McFarland notes:

> In the world of pastoral, the gliding brook is limpid, the stream is silvery, the pastures are green, the breeze is soft. "Twas always Spring; warme Zephyrus blew / On smiling flowres, which without setting grew" -- these lines, translating Ovid's pastoral vision of a golden age, go to the heart of the matter. (21)

In baseball literature there is always the crack of the bat, the slap of the ball in the glove, the roar of the crowd, the smell of leather and hot dogs, the greenness of the freshly cut grass, the smooth infield dirt *etc.* For example, there is the following passage from Thomas Wolfe, famous among baseball-literature enthusiasts,

> Is there anything that can evoke Spring -- the first fine days of April-better than the sound of the ball smacking into the pocket of the big mitt, the sound of the bat as it hits the horsehide. . . . and is there anything that can tell one more about an American Summer than, say, the smell of the wooden bleachers in a small town baseball park, that resinous, sultry and exciting smell of old dried wood? (qtd Guttman 101)

In Baseball's Arcady the game is always related to its "natural" setting, to its connection with the seasons (i.e. the game stirs out of the spring, blossoms in the summer and dies-out in the fall). As Nicholas J. Mount writes, baseball fiction's pastoral obviously privileges "cyclic and event time over linear and clock time" (64), but this kind of privileging can also be used to inform expressions of baseball's literary pre-eminence. Natural words like "summer" and "green" reoccur not only within the works themselves but often as the important sell-words in the titles: *The Boys of Summer, The Summer Game, Real Grass Real Heroes, The Thrill of the Grass, Progress of the Seasons, Season's End, etc.*

---

[10] Diffuseness in the face of the endless array of "dope" is not solely limited to a nostalgic approach; even in a harder-edged beer 'n nuts approach to baseball, the numerical detailing of the game can be cast as part of the over-intellectualizing of the game.

In the traditional measure made between the *ludic* (the playful) and the *agonistic* (competitive) tendencies of sport, the pastoralist is most interested in the ludic aspects. By degree they harken back to an imagined past innocence, to a picture of a lost childhood, and the promise of free play. As scholar S.K. Heninger emphasizes, "from its inception, pure pastoral has described some half remembered place in archaic terms, a nostalgic reminiscence of an idealized childscape" (McFarland 30). The agonistic aspect of sport is often seen as the culprit, that the win-at-any-cost spirit of a rapidly urbanizing America has corrupted the pure core of the beautiful game and that the natural country boy's innocence is ready to be chewed up by the modern world.

In this chapter I will be discussing how the pastoral functions in three of baseball's most respected novels; Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly*, and Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh Prop.* The purpose of this discussion is not to limit meaning in these texts to their pastoral moments nor to suggest that these novels are unambiguously "pastoralist." What I hope to demonstrate are the self-conscious limitations of the pastoral trope in baseball literature, particularly as it relates to the professional game's history as a big city business. The pastoral is conflicted throughout these fictions: desired, articulated but also denied and cruelly punished. The pleasing artifices of the baseball pastoral (born out of recognizable, legitimate images) then become crucial in establishing the role of the writer as myth maker and poet for an essence of baseball, beyond our grasp.

And with a final curveball, I will turn my discussion over to place the pastoral trope within a relatively new and less respected form of baseball fiction: *the baseball detective novel*. While explaining the parameters of this genre fiction, I hope to illustrate how the calming images of the pastoral are challenged by the urban sleuth.

The Natural

Published in 1952, *The Natural* was Bernard Malamud's first novel. It also is probably the first of what we might call high-brow, literary baseball novels. It was of course made into a popular movie with Robert Redford in 1984, which has sparked even more recent interest in the novel.[11] And because of the unabashed patriotic and pastoral romance of the movie

---

11 The role movies have in shaping the popularity of an author's work is obvious, undoubtedly to the consternation of Malamud's fans who see *The Natural* as a prelude to his more mature work. Where fans of the novel might have once felt compelled to say things like "The position of *The Natural* as an *although*... work in the Malamud canon is indeed strange" (Turner 110), the casual reader might likely see *The Natural* as Malamud's most notable piece.

one may expect that the novel is similarly sweet on baseball. While the pastoral is obvious in Malamud's text (it often is in the *re-selling* of a baseball text -- in critiques, on jacket covers, in movies and television -- that the more obviously trite examples of nostalgic pastoralism are exploited), it does not actually make use of this form to sell admiration for the game.

In 1952 it was not common for a "serious" literary artist to write about baseball. For example, one blasé reviewer for *The New York Herald Tribune* wrote about Malamud's efforts this way: "Sooner or later I suppose some one of our generation had to attempt to write a serious novel about baseball" (51). But, *The Natural* isn't *about* baseball; it simply uses baseball as the most appropriate setting for its exploration of myth. In this function *The Natural* is even more "pastoral" than Kinsella's work, insofar as Kinsella's fictions are unironically *about* baseball.

The Natural explores a country-mouse / city-mouse paradigm (country boy with natural talents and a dream is corrupted by the city and its wickedness) that is recognizable from the Ring Lardner formulas. However, the novel disposes with the slapstick of the laughingstock rube and allegorically turns its hick-hero towards a less cynical and more human revelation of "the fix." In 1986 Malamud said,

> Baseball interested me, especially its comic aspects, but I wasn't able to write about the game until I transformed game into myth, via Jessie Weston's Percival legend with an assist by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* plus the lives of several ballplayers I read, in particular Babe Ruth's and Bobby Feller's. The myth enriched the baseball lore as feats of magic transformed the game. (Abrahamson 10)

Malamud's desire to "transform the game into myth" may have been more successful than other ventures to do likewise, but in many ways the myths precede him. His literary associations also conceptually "rescue" the popular sport from its associations with the trivial and "the peanut crunching crowd" into the more weighty arenas of "myth." Malamud's transformation of myth in *The Natural* acknowedges the metaphorical flexibility of baseball -- something that is taken for granted now. And the pastoral becomes the only likely setting for baseball's myths. As James M. Mellard claims in his essay "Four Versions of Pastoral," the pastoral mode is Malamud's "greatest strength" because "it has given him an archetypal narrative structure of great flexibility, a durable convention of characterization, a consistent pattern of imagery and symbols, and a style and rhetorical strategy of lucidity and power" (67).

So, *The Natural* is a conscious reworking of several myths. From the west comes Roy (French for "King") Hobbs, an extraordinary ballplayer who is making another crusade for the grail (the pennant) as his earlier crusade failed due to a flaw in his character. With his own excalibur (a homemade "shining golden" bat named "Wonderboy") he supplants other claimants to the throne (Bump Bailey, Whammer Wambold) and becomes the crucial spark plug in the New York *Knights* charge. His quest is aided by the wisdom of father figure and coach Pop Fisher (i.e. The Fisher King), well-meaning sports writer Max Mercy and earth-mother Iris Lemon. All the while his quest is impeded by (Morgan La Fayish) baseball Annies Harriet Bird and Memo Paris, by Comiskey-like Mammon / owner Judge Banner and by devilish fixer Gus Sands.

As Malamud mentions, much of the detailing of myth in *The Natural* comes from real baseball legends. Just as Cubs first baseman Eddie Waitkus was shot by an obsessed fan in 1949, Roy is similarly put out of the game. Like Babe Ruth, Hobbs is placed in an orphanage even though he has parents; again like Ruth, a propitious Hobbs homer allegedly inspires the convalescence of a sick boy in the hospital, and, once again like Ruth, Hobbs greedily eats himself into another "bellyache heard round the world." Like the celebrated "Merkle's boner" (where the alleged failure of Fred Merkle to touch second base cost the N.Y. Giants the 1908 pennant) the Knight's manager is infamous for "Fisher's flop," a costly baserunning goof. And like baseball-lit's tragic innocent (Shoeless Joe Jackson), Roy is involved in a game-fixing scandal which prompts a kid to confront him with "say it ain't true Roy" (190).

But, as Frederick Turner says in his essay "Myth Inside and Out: *The Natural*," to "assert the presence of myth in a literary work is not necessarily to explain *why* it is there" (112). And some critics, like Edward Abramson, still levy the complaint that baseball is ultimately too "lightweight" to "carry the weight of allusion that Malamud places upon it" (9), which seems to ignore the specific reasons *why* Malamud chose the pastoral of baseball -- some of which may even acknowledge the sport's lack of *gravitas*. The mixing of references in *The Natural* doesn't just play as the clever use of allusion for allusion's sake. Nor is it an ungainly conflation of myths. In his essay "*The Natural*: World Ceres" (proving the temptation for bad punning in sports writing is not limited to low-brow copy writers) Earl Wasserman writes more approvingly of Malamud's approach:

> By drawing on memorable real events, Malamud has avoided the risk of contrived allegory that lurks in inventing a fiction in order to carry a meaning. Instead he has rendered the lived events of the American game so as to compel it to reveal what it essentially is, the ritual whereby we express the logical nature of American life and its moral predicaments. Pageant history is alchemized into revelatory myth. (46-7)

While there is room to interrogate the faith behind Wasserman's assessment of "pageant history" as a lesser alloy than "revelatory myth," his insight leads to an important understanding of *The Natural*'s use of the pastoral setting. It is the familiarity of baseball's "prelapsarian" setting, not the weight of its allusions, which makes it a logical place to express a national tale of expulsion from the garden.

Wasserman sees much of *The Natural* not so much as a celebration of innocence but as a critique of Roy's immaturity. Like many American literary heroes, Roy Hobbs is not particularly interested in growing up. But unlike Huck Finn or Forrest Gump there is no excuse for Roy's behaviour, and his refusal to grow up is resolutely not cute. (There's some resemblance here to Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, whose libidinous arrested adolescence is continually accompanied by misery.) Ultimately we will see how Roy's childish dreams of the countryside causally manifest themselves in his eventual debasement in the professional society in which he has chosen to take up his sword.

The novel begins with Roy's first attempt to leave his home and find fortune in Chicago. It finds Roy dreaming of Gatsby-like travel (Abramson 22)[12] from west to east:

> Lying back, elbowed up on his long side, sleepless still despite the lulling train, he watched the land flowing and waited with suppressed expectancy for a sight of the Mississippi, a thousand miles away. (7)

Throughout the novel then, Roy will retreat to visions of a country-boy past that are never explicitly claimed as his *authentic* past. From what we know his past is probably less idyllic (a childhood spent in an orphanage), and for all we know he could be from Los Angeles. The images that occupy Roy are formulated methods of escape from the vast city he will attempt to enthrall.

The first real image of the country boy that occupies Roy comes to him on the train to Chicago:

> Having no timepiece he appraised the night and decided it was moving toward dawn. As he was looking, there flowed along this bone-white farmhouse with sagging skeletal porch, alone in the untold miles of moonlight, and before it this white-faced, long-boned boy whipped with

---

12 "What should be noticed is the way in which the game provides a unifying element within the vast American pattern of diversity. Roy travels from west to east (like the characters in *The Great Gatsby*), an early sign of his quest having the negative overtones of a pilgrimage reversed. However, in accord with the ideals of popular culture, he moves from rural and small town toward urban large city (Chicago & New York)" (Abramson 22).

> train-whistle yowl a glowing ball to someone hidden under a dark oak, who shot it back without thought, and the kid once more wound and returned. Roy shut his eyes to the sight because if it wasn't real it was a way he sometimes had of observing himself, just as in this dream he could never shake off -- that had hours ago waked him out of a sound sleep -- of him standing at night in a strange field with a golden baseball in his palm that all the time grew heavier as he sweated to settle whether to hold on or fling it away. (8)

It's a portentous baseball vision for the drama of *The Natural*. First of all there is the lack of the timepiece: Roy as "timeless" is still not hopelessly out of date, not getting older and unfit for the game that is often celebrated for its lack of "clock-time." The strong image of the country boy playing pitch and catch is ominously altered by Roy's mind. The dark father-figure who must catch what the boy throws, brings a hint of menace that somehow undercuts the boy's innocent action. The pasture is quickly converted into a "strange field," and the baseball becomes a golden apple whose coveted value institutes confusion.

The pastoral's illusion soothes Roy, particularly as it assuages the discontents of "getting and spending":

> The forest stayed with them, climbing hills like an army, shooting down the waterfalls. As the train skirted close in, the trees leveled out and he could see within the woodland the only place he had been truly intimate with in his wanderings, a green world, shot through with weird light and strange bird cries, muffled in silence that made the privacy so complete his inmost self had no shame of anything he thought there, and it eased the body-shaking beat of his ambitions. (18)

> Sometimes he wished he had no ambitions -- often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had had, a dog, a stick, an aloneness he loved (which did not bleed him like his later loneliness) and he wished he could have lived longer in boyhood. This was an old thought with him. (93)

Easing the "shaking beat of his ambitions" with an image of a "green world" is a normal, postive strategy for coping. (One may even think of a psychotherapist's suggestion to his or her stressed patient to temporally locate their calmning "happy place.") The wish to have "lived longer in boyhood" as well is not necessarily an expression of immaturity, but the declaration is complicated by the artificial setting of baseball, where the illusion of eternal youth is encouraged and mythologized.

On his second crusade, this time to New York, Roy is ritually pegged as a hick, "hayseed" (13), "hayfoot" (21), or "alfalfa" (52) by his teammates. Yet Roy shows few signs of unpolished country ways and, with some credibility, boasts of knowing his way

around the "jungle"(38) of New York. This busher is playing a role which he is conscious of -- a self-tailored artificial version of the heroic country boy. It is Roy's hard fought-for skill -- not magic -- which ultimately brings some "greenness" back to the city's dying ballteam and stadium. The sagging Knights and their ailing coach Pop Fisher have been trapped in a "dusty field, the listless game and half-empty stands" (34). Ideally, Pop would prefer to be in the greenfields; "I shoulda been a farmer" he complains, "I like fixing things, weeding poison oak out of the pasture, and seeing to the watering of crops. I like to be by myself on a farm. I like to stand out in the fields, tending to the vegetables, the corn, the winter wheat -- greenest looking stuff you ever saw" (34). Pop's green thumbs vision is betrayed by the desiccated field and by the fact that his hands are scarred with athlete's foot. In the midst of Pop's desperation comes Roy and his "magic" bat, whose phallic integrity not only adds potency to the lineup but brings on an "ankle deep"(63) rain.

However, there is no certifiable "magic" in *The Natural*, no occurence that can't be explained by coincidence. Roy's abilities, while impressive and often unlikely, are not supernatural. Even his impressive strike-out of "The Whammer" relied on some insightful coaching from his mentor Sam. He is not a Kinsella character who has been transported by spiritual means to baseball's sylvan paradise; the character of the effortless natural is something he is working at. When Roy's mistress compares him to Bump Bailey, she reminds him that it was Bump who was "carefree and playful"; to Roy she says, "you work at it so" (94). It takes study for the actor to look effortless: Roy's performance of a wowing magic act at a swanky dinner club turns out to be, like some Gatsbyesque stunt, "all laid out" (95) for Roy by some local celebrity.

Malamud avoids defining the limits of Hobb's own celebrity by wisely omitting statistics. As I was saying in the first chapter, the spectre of "dope" -- those enumerated processions of evidence -- are problematic for the author of creative baseball fiction insofar as they must compete with recognizable water-marks. But rather than being an example of what Candelaria called the "diffuseness" of the pastoralists, in Malamud's case the wise lack of corroborating figures keeps the illusion of Roy alive. The baseball fan should be asking exactly how many home runs did Roy hit that year? 40? 60? 80? Any one of these answers would have quite specific meanings. It seems to me that answering this question would somehow limit Roy by placing him in a complicated discourse outside of the narrative structure and pastoral illusions which motivate him.[13]

---

13 Although, I have to admit, critics often overestimate what myth, as opposed to boxscores, means to the fans. When a critic flips, "The mythology of baseball is what keeps the game alive in the hearts of its fans"(Turner 118) it can sound like someone saying "ah the sea" when confronted with complicated nautical data.

Whatever revitalizing effect Roy Hobbs has on the New York Knights, he does not mature with professional grace away from his image as the self-made countryboy. One continuing source of personal erosion in the text is the rather ugly relationship between the fans and the player. The crowd is described as a grotesque "zoo full of oddballs, . . . gamblers, bums, drunks, and . . . ugly crackpots" who "cursed and jeered, showering them -- whenever they came close enough -- with rotten cabbages" (59). The ugly mob, unaware of the agrarian simplicities of an afternoon at the park, want results. In effect, they see beyond the facade of character to the real purpose of the game and, to Roy's resentment, this must cut both ways, "The fans dearly loved Roy but Roy did not love the fans. He hadn't forgotten the dirty treatment they had dished out during the time of his trouble. Often he felt he would like to ram their cheers down their throats" (134). While reminiscent of the behaviour of many stars who were unable to be gracious in the face of mass adulation, this attitude is a measure of Roy's determined immaturity.[14] When Roy tells the crowd during "Roy Hobbs Appreciation Day" that he will do his best "to be the greatest there ever was in the game" (90), it is not the statement of an artless hick but the shocking immodesty of a determined student. His pronouncement is particularly egomaniacal when contrasted with its source: the legendary last appearance of Lou Gehrig, a dying man who had the grace to tell his fans that he was "the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

Rather than occupying the selfless, ludic persona of the pastoral hero, Roy continually betrays himself as a selfish agonistic star who gets no pleasure at all from baseball. His fantasies of country boys are ironic contrasts to the fact that he has become the big city schmuck of the Knights:

> The white moonlight shot through a stretch of woods ahead. He found himself wishing he could go back somewhere, go home, wherever that was. As he was thinking this, he looked up and saw in the moonlight a boy coming out of the woods, followed by his dog. Squinting through the windshield, he was unable to tell if the kid was an illusion thrown forth by the trees or someone really alive. (98)

---

14 One immediately thinks of Ted Williams who refused to ever tip his cap to his home town fans, "He ran as he always ran out home runs -- hurriedly, unsmiling, head down, as if our praise were a storm to get out of" (Updike 329). As Roy's resentments conflict with the character of the untroubled wonderboy, Williams ingratitude seems to conflict with the character expresssed in his nicknames -- which some say he invented for himself -- "Teddy Ballgame" and "The Kid."

The pre-adult idyll of the boy and his dog is increasingly not a history of Roy Hobbs. The confusion of the passage "wherever that was," "an illusion," "someone really alive" reveal that even Roy continues to fail to find complete escape in this natural fantasy. And these fantasies are brief. When Roy is confronted with a *real* natural experience with Iris, he rejects her in favor of an insubstantial groupie, Memo Paris.

According to Wasserman the idyll is indicative of Roy's sexual development: "The boy in the woods is symbolic of his entirely private, mother-protected self that, because of the womb-like security, he refuses to mature" (58). The pastoral image, rather than restoring the individual, returns Roy to the image of himself as the lonely child, the wonderboy who should be excused. Iris's fecundity shocks Roy and propels him to act even more childishly: when Iris sends him a letter to notify him of her pregnancy with his child he doesn't even read it, scornfully noting that "Fat girls write fat letters" (150). Memo, on the other hand, will not confront Roy's immature delusions and selfishly sets out to exploit them. Ironically, with Iris out of the picture Roy concocts a wholly unlikely suburban / domestic fantasy of Memo sitting "with a redheaded baby on her lap and himself going fishing" (143).

Where traditional pastoral poetry's green spaces often allow for the shepherd's expression of the erotic, the baseball pastoral imagines a transcendental green place that is pre-sexual and threatened by the erotic. The pastoral image of the ballyard becomes encoded in innocent boyhood and the setting becomes a perfect refuge for the self made "Natural," where adult sexual identity means no more swinging for *Wonderboy*. Roy excuses himself from adult parental responsibility to dream of fatherhood as a prelude to "going fishing." And because athletic achievement must put a high premium on youth, baseball, more than most occupations, lets immaturity form a respectable fraction of its celebrations. (Compare the importance in the titles of Roger Kahn's classic memoir *The Boys of Summer* vs. George Will's *Men at Work*.) The vision of baseball's setting as a pasture for male escape is strong: even the film version of *The Natural* repudiates Malamud's text of Roy's tragic immaturity and validates his alibi of boyishness by rewarding Roy / Redford a restoring game of pitch and catch with his son on a beautiful farm.

The baseball pastoral is not a refuge for sexual fantasies, but for fantasies of the benevolence of an ordered but natural world. In his essay "Four Visions of the Pastoral," James Mellard writes,

> Because of the pastoral conventions in Malamud's novels, the most important source of imagery and symbolism for Malamud is the world of nature, its benevolent elements of fields and streams, groves and parks,

> birds and fish and flowers contrasted to its demonic wastes, sinister forests, torturous mountains and tomblike caves. (73)

Fields and streams can also in themselves be symbolic of their relative opposites; an abundance of pastoral flight can signal the presence of a demonic waste even without images of sinister forests. *The Natural*'s particular use of birds as important symbols (a pattern shared with William Kennedy's *Ironweed* as images of birds are used to comment on the transient / ex-ballplayer's psychic reality) are as often used to undercut the fantasies of flight which condition Roy's basball quest: Roy is shot by Harriet *Bird*, Roy's rain-making homer is said to have "plummetted like a dead bird" (63) and the half dozen burgers Roy binges on "looked like six dead birds" and "tasted like six dead birds" (151).[15] Literally getting fat on the dead birds, Roy is ironically slowed down and weighed deeper within the realities of professional baseball.

Ultimately the larding of pastoral symbolism can offer no escape from the real conditions of real baseball in New York City. In Roy's case it is not so much a case of reality crushing his spirited dreams but a case of passing through a moral test where he can grow up and exit the myths of baseball. Listening to Memo's plea that she is "afraid to be poor"(159) and a doctor's pronouncement that his abused "athlete's heart" cannot stand another year of ball, Roy assents and agrees "the fix is on" (167). In the big game, however, Roy struggles with the moral consequences of his decision. It is then that Wonderboy, the symbol of his self-fashioned youth and phallic integrity, is "split lenghtwise"(181) by a freak bolt of lightning. Without his ju-ju he picks up a bat like anybody else's and promptly brains earth mother Iris with a foul ball he was aiming at an unpleasant fan. In the middle of the count, Roy rushes to Iris's side where she reveals the news about the birth of Roy's son. The injured woman pleads with Roy to "win for our boy" (180), which seems like a corny prelude to a home run ending but is an important premonition of the ending of Roy's narrative.

In his heart, Roy reneges on the fix[16] and returns to the plate with a Casey-like determination to get the big hit. And like the Mighty Casey, Roy strikes out,[17] and he is

---

15 Again cf. *Ironweed* where Francis Phelan's too-late attempt at reconciliation is mediated through the image of the dead bird for Thanksgiving dinner.

16 Echoes of the legend of Shoeless Joe, who many believe never acceeded *in his heart* to the 1919 fix, and his superlative numbers in the series (he hit .375 and had 6 RBIs) are compelling evidence of this theory.

17 In the movie Redford / Roy hits the big home run, which is a serious alteration of the text but fascinating insofar as *the drama* (will he or won't he?) of the moment is the same.

struck out by some über-hick named Herman *Youngberry*. The new natural on the block is described in terms that are familiar in the novel:

> it was his lifelong ambition to be a farmer. Everybody, including the girl he was engaged to, argued him into signing. He didn't say so but he had it in mind to earn enough money to buy a three hundred acre farm and then quit baseball forever. Sometimes when he pitched, he saw fields of gleaming wheat glowing in the sun. (186)

Now it is Youngberry's turn to be plucked, so to speak. While his ambition is more clearly linked to the meadows than Roy's was, Herman Youngberry is placed in the same arena of compromise. Like Pops, his dream of farming may be long delayed, and perhaps his visions of "gleaming wheat" will blind him to the obvious signals of greed coming from "everybody" that have placed him in New York.

After the big strikeout, Roy rejects the fixer's promised cash and dismisses Memo as "a whore" (189). To make matters worse, his past indiscretions are finally made public along with rumors of the fixing scandal. However, to believe that all of this is treachery's just reward, one must believe in the immutable ethics of professional baseball and in the infallibility of public opinion. Sandy Cohen complains,

> Is it really impossible to picture Roy outside the myth? Perhaps that explains why so many critics have not been able to do it, and so consider Roy's removal from baseball his end rather than his beginning. (31)

It is just as logical to say that Roy's strikeout was the first step towards the victory Iris asked him for; the shattered fictions of homeruns and "Wonderboy" are supplanted by the acceptance of strikeouts and a responsibility for his real child. Finished with the pastoral baseball myths which fed the fiction of his identity, Roy is ready to be a real person. Roy's tragedy was not that he chose to "subordinate his pastoral nature" (Mount 69) in pursuit of wealth, it was that he was corrupted by his attempts to propogate the popular myth of the natural.

Reading Roy's final disgrace as his first authentic victory is a challenge to the imagined harmonies of the baseball pastoral. One might ask, if the boyishness of the American hero must be matured, who wouldn't prefer the simplicity of a victorious home run? It certainly isn't surprising that the film version of *The Natural* should go with a homer *vincit omnia* ending and reaffirm the integrity the baseball idyll. And this kind of

---

(It was there to be changed.) Baseball fictions ultimately can only offer a limited range of dramatic situations.

warm re-reading (this flavor of frosting) is not uncommon in the various disseminations of baseball literature as a cultural product. Even when baseball fictions interrogate the function of the game's myths, they can often be repackaged and sold as nostalgic affirmations of these same myths.

To assess *The Natural* as a book which "enriches simple American baseball lore"(Evans 224) is a fair brief, but it doesn't account for how baseball's self-serving lore complicates *The Natural.* Seeing *The Natural* only as a treatment of baseball lore, as an "enrichment," leaves it vulnerable to the kind of spinning which is not interested in a complicated or "negative" vision of the beloved sport -- the kind of spinning the Redford movie indulges in. It is, after all, not the players but the creators of baseball texts who preserve the greenness of the baseball pastoral. It is the sportswriters in *The Natural* who start sweetening the Hobbs legend:

> (Roy Hobbs) belonged they wrote, with the other immortals, a giant in performance, who resembled the burly boys of the eighties and nineties more than the streamlined kids of today. He was a throwback to a time of true heros, not of the brittle razzle dazzle boys that had sprung up around the jack rabbit ball -- a natural not seen in a dog's age and weren't they the lucky ones he had appeared here and now to work his wonders before them? (135)[18]

The successful player is validated in nostalgic terms; the "throwback" from the "time of true heroes"; the "natural" whose honest personal constitution battles the "streamlined," "razzle dazzle" of contemporary urban life. An appealing artifice, out of the tall grass the natural will continually reappear in baseball fictions to look back to imagined golden eras and to suspiciously glance at the dealings of the wicked city.

Bang the Drum Slowly

The pastoral setting in baseball is often used to make a claim for the sports country *virtue* and to escape from, (to paraphrase Roy Hobbs), "the shaking beat of ambition." Just as people will say "this is something I just put together" before some spectacular presentation, and as no politician wants to admit to his or her political ambitions, affectionate

---

[18] The column about Roy Hobbs is analogous to the tone of the publicity which accompanied Cal Ripken's surpassing of Gehrig's consecutive game streak in baseball's troubled 1995 season. Repeatedly, Ripken was praised for his "old-fashioned" values and was celebrated as "throwback," a momentary bright light which *shames* the greed-ridden pastime.

representations of baseball are careful not to stage scenes that overtly propose "winning is the only thing." But the revelation of competitive desire does not erase the ludic pasture -- rather, the continual discoveries of the *agonistic* inform the construction of the pastoral. As Roy's pastoral self-fashioning is a measure of his ambition, and the ability to build "old-style," "natural" stadiums are signs of a zealous enterprise, so pastoral fiction tends to escalate as it contacts material ambition. The higher the salaries, the greener the grass.

Like *The Natural*, the novels *Bang the Drum Slowly* and *The Universal Baseball Association* are not unambiguous conceptualizations of baseball as an Arcadian playground. Rather, they use the conventions of the pastoral as a way of testing baseball's claims to a virtuous setting. Furthermore, the pastoral convention is a way of seeing how the settings of the games themselves challenge the borders between fact and fiction. The point is not to assert, like an episode of *Rolanda*, that fact is good, and fiction is to be overcome; instead it is argued that believing in fiction is part of baseball and all games. Baseball itself is a working of conventional fictions (that 3 strikes and not 4 strikes equals an out is not a scientific fact but a conventionally accepted formula) turned into truths, and the baseball pastoral highlights how conventions and fictions are used not only to sell and question the game but to sell and question the writer's art.

The inner-jacket blurb of a 1973 reissue paperback copy of Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* asks, "Remember the 50s,when Ballplayers were gods and the major leagues seemed like heaven?" It certainly isn't news that a cover blurb would skew the actual contents of a novel. (To paid promoters, mildly sensual books must be touted as "unforgettably steamy," anything with a political theme must be "provocative," and a Pauly Shore movie can be "screamingly funny.") And pastoral nostalgia is the no-surprise come-on in the baseball marketplace. The potential consumer can be counted on to have some previous affection for the sport and as Buddy Bradley says "that need to reclaim some dusty corner of your youth can be overwhelming at times."[19]

Mark Harris's baseball fiction, contrary to what it is being sold as, is not constructed around a nostalgic tour of the old ballyard. Harris, who has written many books which aren't about baseball (including a critical study of Boswell) is most popularly known as the author of the bittersweet *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956) which was made into a successful film in 1973. (Once again, the popularity of a movie has, to a certain extent, defined the *ouevre* of an author.) The success of *Bang the Drum Slowly* has typecast Harris as a "baseball writer" despite Harris's protests that baseball is just one of his

---

19 Buddy Bradley is a comic book store / nostalgia shop co-owner in Peter Bagge's comic book *Hate*.

interests as an author and even his baseball books aren't just "about" baseball.[20] But like a serious actor who is recognized for a silly TV role, Harris is grateful to be popularly typecast as something. Harris is a baseball writer: along with *Bang the Drum*, he has written *The Southpaw* (1953), *A Ticket for a Steamstitch* (1957) and *It Looked Like Forever* (1979). The main hook of these baseball fictions is they are self-consciously in character, down to the introductions. They are constructed as novels "by" the character Henry "Author" Wiggen, a wily left-handed starting pitcher who plays for the *faux-Yankee* New York Mammoths.

Born in Perkinsville New York, an upstate town which could double for Cooperstown, the young Henry Wiggen has little interest in playing up his small town nature and seeks to mature from the limitations of Smalltown USA. Unlike Roy Hobbs, he unselfconsciously follows the drumbeat of ambition and seeks no alibi for his talent or desire. In his first appearance in *The Southpaw*, Henry is more the Lardner rube, mixing his strong aspirations with telling spelling mistakes, malapropisms and unintended revelations. But he is more sympathetically drawn and more likely to grow (Henry's story is equally about the progress of an unlikely novelist) as he learns to how to achieve his big city dreams:

> I knowed that some day I would get up in the morning and it would not be this view a-tall. It would be the big towns, New York and Brooklyn, Cleveland and Chicago, Boston and Washington, Pittsburgh and St. Louis, big towns and big parks, and there would be 30,000 thousand people and my name on 30,000 scorecards and the music and the singing and the cheering and I would touch my hat when they cheered." (57)

---

20 Studiously working against the premise that a baseball novel will not be taken "seriously," the epigraph for the book is from Wright Morris's *The Huge Season*, which states "a book can have Chicago in it but not be about Chicago. It can have a tennis player in it without being about a tennis player" (7). Years later, when baseball fiction was popping up everywhere, Harris reflected that

> at the time I chose that epigraph, I was much more in need, as were many other people, of dissociating myself from baseball; that is, I was going to be earning my living at a university, the way many modern critics who are writing about books are, and I felt that I somehow had to earn my image -- the image of someone who was serious. Therefore I tried to say about *Bang The Drum Slowly*, "Oh, it isn't really about baseball; it's really about something else" (Horvath & Palmer 186).

And the footsteps Harris could hear were there: considering *Bang the Drum*, a *New York Times* reviewer typically writes "instead of a first rate novel, Mr. Harris must be content with a fine baseball novel"(5).

In *Bang The Drum Slowly* Henry has lived this dream for a while, and his voice, while often unpolished, is one of a seasoned pro, more like the narrator of "Alibi Ike," than Ike himself. The citified Henry comes into contact with the pastoral myth and is asked to consider the significance of success in any game. Not exactly a test between country and city mice, *Bang the Drum Slowly* nonetheless offers a striking commentary on the relationship between the natural countryside and natural talent. Not as interested in exposing the structures of pastoral myth as *The Natural*,[21] *Bang The Drum Slowly* works at the failures of these myths to make sense of a baseball life.

The plotting of *Bang the Drum Slowly* is simple: Henry Wiggen is called out of the blue to attend to his friend Bruce Pearson who has just been diagnosed with a fatal disease. Wiggen escorts Pearson home, then to spring training, and then assures Pearson's spot on the team, gets into a pennant race, where, in the midst of absolute victory, Pearson is finally overwhelmed by the disease.[22] While not without sentiment, *Bang the Drum*'s narrative actually is surprisingly able to turn away from the unfair tragedy and present a recognizable journal of "that championship season." In Henry's recollections, the dying friendship is not just a source of pity, their relationship is complicated by their unequal ranks in their profession and in society. (And finally *Bang the Drum* brings this self-conscious hook of "Author" to the tensions of the pastoral elegy, where death is not only an occasion for grief but an inspiring test of the poet's command of artifice.)

Henry and Bruce are a recognizable "Fiedler pair;" Henry is the northern, more urbane and educated adventurer paired with the less educated, more earthy and darker Bruce.[23] Their voyage takes place against the backdrop of baseball's definitive seasonal meanings: from the cold certainties of death in the Minnesota winter (the Mayo clinic) to the rejuvenation of a Southern spring (spring training camp in Florida). Baseball and pastoral

---

[21] Harris claims, "I remember being very disappointed with *The Natural* because it was so symbolic, indulging so much in myth and forth"(Horvath 190).

[22] The enhancement of the pathos of the story in the film version perhaps owes some inspiration to the success of the made-for-TV movie *Brian's Song* (1970). However,a 1956 teleplay starring Paul Newman and presented on CBS's anthology series *The U.S. Steel Hour* also saw *Bang the Drum*'s tear-jerker elements highlighted above its chronicle of the season.

[23] The Bruce and Henry characters were referred to in terms of the Fiedler paradigm in a talk I heard presented by Timothy Morris ("Not Fairy Love: Constructing the Heterosexual in Two Baseball Novels") at the Sports Literature Association's annual conference at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, August 3 1996. Parts of this talk were to be the basis of the second chapter of Morris's study *Making the Team.*

literature's adherence to the "rhythm of the seasons," starting in the Spring and dying in the Fall, is disrupted by Pearson's illness, bringing the message of death in Spring and carrying it throughout the Summer. The benevolent image of the innocent pasture of baseball is destabilized, and is now replaced by the blind reality of cancer. Henry's first reaction to the news of Bruce's illness is denial, "I could not think what 'fatal' meant. It is like a word like 'cancel' or 'postpone' that for a couple seconds I can never think what they mean but must ride with them" (23), trying to put mortality in the terms of baseball games and retain a certain objectivity about the unforseen. The illness of Bruce casts Henry in sharper definition, drawing out the limitations of the baseball setting he's writing about, asking if the available literary contrasts between the pair (country vs. city, utilityman vs. starter *etc.*) are enough to provide meaning.

Unlike Roy Hobbs, Henry Wiggen does not attach himself to the myth of baseball's connection to the simple harmonies of Smalltown USA. Henry gratefully made his leap from Perkinsville, NY, to the bigs in *The Southpaw* and rarely looks back: in *Bang the Drum*, he rarely talks of his hometown, or his parents, or his own lost childhood. Unlike other characters in *Bang the Drum*, who have distinct ethnicities and claim places as home, Henry now boasts that "one place is like the next"(36) and in the course of the narrative concentrates mostly on the baseball season and thinks little of his own absence from his wife Holly, who used to read to him from Marvell's poetry (*The Southpaw* 63-4) and who has just given birth to their first child. The effect of death on the the artificial space of baseball is of more concern to the writer than new life within the family.

Henry is an accomplished ballplayer who, for a few dollars more, sells insurance in the off season to his friends for a disreputable-sounding firm. His intelligence is measured in part by his willingness to accept the game as a job: where players like Bruce just sign their contracts and play, Henry enjoys getting embroiled in a contract dispute and rejecting management offers as something akin to slavery. At home in the anonymous city, Henry has the cynicism to excel in the urban game. At the novel's start, his attitude and place in the world of "getting and spending" is established in how he fields the fateful call from Minnesota:

> Me and Holly were laying around in bed around 10 A.M. on a Wednesday morning when the call come. I was slow answering it, thinking first of a comical thing to say . . .
>
> "Triborough Bridge " I said.
>
> "I have a collect call for Mr. Henry Wiggen from Rochester, Minnesota." said the operator. . . .
>
> "I do not know a soul there." (13)

The near-refusal to take the call not only betrays Henry's cheapness but sets up a disparity between Henry the New Yorker and the voice *out there* trying to get through. While Henry's nickel and dime concern reminds the baseball reader of the Lardner rube, Henry is still more aware of his own motives.[24] So when he says to Bruce that he can't meet him in Minnesota because "I cannot afford it, . . . I am up to my ass in tax arrears" he is quick to assure readers his excuse "was the statement of a true rat" (14). Morever, Henry finally assents to the trip, secure that the venture can at least be claimed as a deductable in service to the "Arcturus Insurance" group.

In contrast, Bruce Pearson is a country boy who does not seem to care much about money. The third string catcher is in fact the only person simple enough to buy a complete coverage policy from Henry. (Not only does Henry sell the policy, he ironically stands as the beneficiary.) Out of place in Henry's world, Bruce's *aficion* is the natural world, as explained by Henry on their trip from Minnesota to Bruce's home in Georgia:

> One thing he knew was north from south and east from west, which I myself barely ever know outside a ballpark. We drove without a map, nights as well as days when we felt like driving nights, probably not going by the fastest roads but any how going mostly south and east. "Stay with the river," he said.
>
> "What river?" I said. "I cannot even see the river."
>
> "You are with it," he said and I guess we must of been. He travelled according to rivers. He never knew their name, but knew which way they went by the way they flowed, and he knew how they flowed even if they weren't flowing, if you know what I mean, even if they were froze, which they always were for a ways, knowing by the way the bank was cut or the ice piled or the clutter tossed up along the sides, which we sometimes did because he liked to stop by the river and urinate in it. He would rather urinate in the river than in a gas station. (27)

In sports mythology Bruce's unrefined, easy understanding of the natural world would probably translate into an unaffected talent on the ballfield. In direct contrast to the more selfish and alienated Henry, Bruce is set up as "the natural" who has a clear understanding of the rhythms of the seasons:

---

[24] The influence of Lardner, particularly in Harris's willingness to have his narrator betray his limitations, unmistakable in *The Southpaw*, is still present in *Bang the Drum Slowly*. In his essay, "Bang the Drum Differently: the Southpaw Slants of Henry Wiggen," Bruce Cochran writes,"Harris' good-humored but completely serious use of Lardner's work as a point of departure is most rich in the very fact that Henry Wiggen is a southpaw -- a delicious irony, given the paranoid aversion to left-handers that Lardner's Jack Keefe exhibits" (152). One Lardner story which Harris is specifically echoing is "Harmony," as Henry gets quite involved in a ballplayers' vocal quartet that hams it up on local TV.

> Moving south he noticed cows out of doors. "We are moving south all right," he said, "because they keep their cows out of doors down here." He knew what kind they were, milk or meat, and what was planted in the fields, corn or wheat or what, and if the birds were winter birds or the first birds of spring coming home. He knew we were south by the way they done chicken. "We ain't real south," he said, "but we are getting there. I can taste it." (27-8)

To the agrarian Southern community he belongs to, Pearson's success in big league ball is a matter of civic pride, imagining the prosperity of the (Northern) city. Henry reflects on Bruce's hopeful press:

> I seen the clips, part of the papers he later burned, and photos of citizens large and small dropping in their buck or 2 and they said in their speeches, "Bruce Pearson will bring fame and glory to Bainbridge," and turned the box over and wrapped the cash in a baseball stocking sewed close at the top by a lady of the town. (44)

The desire of the town to be validated through Bruce is not lost on Bruce himself, who has the sensitivity to understand "the town would be watching, all eyes" (45).

Bruce has lived the full, poetic *rite du passage* of the pastoral baseball hero; he even learned to play the game in "a field of peanut hay" (34). The rub is that it is the city "rat," "Author" Wiggen, who is the celebrated athlete and the naturally-attuned country boy, who is desperately hanging on. For all his understanding of the seasons Bruce is not "a 'natural' ballplayer" (Mount 67); in fact even Henry summarily dismisses him as "a 2 o'clock hitter and the dandiest-looking batting practice pitcher in the business" (47). Henry constructs the logic of Dutch, the manager who keeps Bruce on the team:

> probably Dutch said to himself 49 times "Why do I not turn Pearson loose?" and then never done so but hung onto him and carried him along like you might start pawing through your drawers and come on a batch of receipts and bills and say, "Why do I keep these?"and then throw them back in because someday it might turn out important. (46)

But Bruce Pearson never turns out to be an important ballplayer. Henry ruefully notes, "There are writers that don't even know (Bruce) is with the club" (58). Despite the harmonic appeal of Bruce's rural background and lack of affectation he "is not a natural" (28).

As the pastoral poet's shepherd's musings are not the artless thoughts of a countryhand, as *The Natural*'s Roy Hobbs' talent was not a gift but a honed skill posing as unaffected, Bruce's lack of art is suspect as a kind of detriment to real success. In Henry's baseball world it turns out there is a high premium on *scholarship* – successful ballplayers

have well-thought out "books" (a collection of practical insights into the strengths and weaknesses of others, a source to guide the repetitions towards skill-improvement), something Wiggen emphasizes in an important exchange with Bruce:

> "Arthur, tell me, if you was on one club and me on another what kind of a book would you keep on me?"
>
> "If I was to keep a book on you," said I, "I would say to myself, 'No need to keep a book on Pearson, for Pearson keeps no book on me.' Because if I was to strike you out on fast balls letter high you would not go back to the bench thinking, 'That son of a bitch Wiggen struck me out on fast balls letter high' . . . No you go back to the bench thinking, 'I would like a frank,' or 'I see pretty legs in the stands' (99)[25]

The difference is in their "books" suggests the class and educational differences of smalltown upstate New York and smalltown down South. Their differences also give Bruce and Henry essentially a "cute" and comic relationship: Bruce's simpleness exasperates Henry in ways that make them both more endearing. Bruce's continual misnaming of Henry's nickname "Author" as "Arthur" (as he gets many of Henry's insights delightfully wrong) rather than being set up as a Lardner-like exposure of the busher come off as fair aggravations of the left-hander's pretentions.

During the course of the narrative Henry uses his higher status to "protect" Bruce, authorially "managing" the event of his illness. He asks his teammates to be nicer to Bruce and petitions for Bruce's spot on the team, but he is also holding on for the sake of his book -- his elegy for less-than-Adonaic third stringer. In the course of his machinations for the team to keep Bruce Henry is confronted by an incredulous Dutch: "I seen you about kill him for his stupidity. I seen you once get up from the table and walk away" (90). But Henry continues to protect Bruce, even to the point of standing in against the broadside: "are you a couple fairies?"(89). If Henry's actions confesses a sense of guilt about Bruce's lack of skill it is not accompanied by recognizable expressions of *why-him-and-not-me?*. Henry has a *great* season, and the pathos of Bruce's condition can't disrupt the normal schedule.

Baseball's setting must outlive the player, and the rules of the game have their dominion over each individual. Stepping inside the frame of a baseball setting asks the sport's rules to form the standard by which individuals are measured. As a traditional

---

25 Perhaps playing off his own countryboy identity as a natural hitter in comparison to the studied hitter, Mickey Mantle once asked Ted Williams what the "secret of his success" was and after trying Williams's instructions Mantle confessed "I didn't know which way was up. He got me crazy just thinking about it"(Mantle 93).

pastoral elegy may accost nature for its indifference to the death of the bereaved, Henry's elegy tries to account for the lack of interest baseball has in the untalented Bruce. Bruce's story, while a "real story" which may save Henry's book from just being about baseball, is also outside of the baseball frame and recognizes the presence of chaos outside the pleasant forms of the rules.

The rules of baseball are not everlasting metaphysical absolutes. The faith in rules to have fair meaning is microcosmically checked by Henry's prediliction for a card game called "Tegwar." As Henry explains,"Tegwar, The Exciting Game Without Any Rules, T-E-G-W-A-R, which nobody on the club can play but me and Joe because nobody can keep a straight face long enough" (19). Tegwar is a fix from the start, a bogus game designed to bilk "clucks" out of their money and have a few laughs at the same time. The key to play is the self-confidence with which the players can articulate the bogus rules that star-struck clucks would be too inhibited to challenge. When a sucker does question the fluidity of Tegwar's rules, the traditional immutability of America's game is envoked: "'What new rules?' said Joe 'There ain't been a rule change since the Black Sox scandal'"(141). Tegwar is an alternative text to baseball, where the inability of the sport itself to have anything but a trivial meaning is made absolute. Asking the sport to "mean something" makes one a cluck, even for all the grand but eventually extinct "Mammoths." Bruce Pearson has the grace to realize "I been handed a shit deal" (61), but in a game without rules how can any hand be better than another? Asking why one person is rewarded while another is punished is like asking for clarification on Tegwar rules. Baseball's conventional rules and clear white lines squaring out the green field are pleasant forms to consider, particularly under suspicion that the game without any rules is life.

When Bruce's health falters he is quickly replaced inside the baseball world by a better player. The replacement is another Herman Youngberry figure, a rambunctious rustic from Georgia with the name of "Piney Woods" -- indicating both the fresh forests of the continent and the refined pine that the Bruce Pearsons of the world are destined to "ride." (Woods would be a full subject in Wiggen's / Harris's sequel to *Bang the Drum, A Ticket for A Seamstitch*). Like Bruce, Woods is also a Georgia country boy, emphasizing that it is not birthplace which determines success. However, replacing Bruce with a less "doomeded," pastorally-correct figure, no longer jeopardizes the rhythm of the seasons and reinforces the frame of the game itself.

It is Piney Woods who gets to sing Bruce's eulogy:

> O bang the drum slowly and play the fife lowly,
> Play the dead march and carry me on,
> Put bunches of roses all over my coffin,

Roses to deaden the clods as they fall. (249)

The song's articulation of a final belonging to the earth offers the whole team a lamentable reality and proof enough to seize the day. But moreover, like a pastoral elegy's final reassurances of hope "consuming the last clouds of cold mortality," the eulogy returns Henry to baseball where death does not really occur.

Henry's final conclusion "From here on in I rag nobody" (284) is immediately suspect as the promise dovetails with his palpable guilt about failing to mail Bruce a World Series program and the lingering sadness of Bruce's funeral, which was not attended by anyone from the team. Henry's conclusion sounds like a vain promise to make amends for his failure to write a book that did not transcend the frivolities of a pennant march, for his inability to offer an elegy which could expiate his guilt. For a ballplayer Henry is not such a rat -- he does not drink, he does not cheat on his wife -- but the veracity of his resolve is cast in relief by his always overriding interest in baseball.[26] Though Henry may see himself as something of a sentimentalist, someone who can "never pass a ball field without lumping up a little" (224), he is too consumed with the inside rhetoric of baseball to give up the delights of "ragging" for long. Indeed, Harris cuts Henry loose in *Bang the Drum*'s sequel as the first paragraph in *Ticket for a Seamstitch* is a rag on Piney Woods as a kid "greener than spinach" (3).

The Universal Baseball Association

The pastoral in baseball fiction is not just a preponderance of references to "green" and "fields," but the use of baseball's fancied pasture as a formal device, as a simulacrum of the game safe from the compromises of the city. But by sowing their meadow in the heart of a professional game, the compromises of the city always find their way in. While Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association Inc. J.Henry Waugh Prop.* (1968) has a less explicit usage of baseball's rural diction, it is in some ways more "pastoral" than either *The Natural* or *Bang the Drum Slowly* as it offers the pastures of baseball as a complete fictional world outside of the concerns of real baseball history.

Baseball fiction's relationship with baseball history is problematic. Both *The Natural* and *Bang the Drum Slowly* present baseball history in naturalist terms but do not compare their characters to the performances of recognizable baseball names. Once the

---

26 Harris's Henry Wiggen novels are, I believe, the most careful in reconstructing the details of baseball in a fictional setting.

fiction seriously starts to contravene the probable (like Kinsella's deluge-match in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* or George Plimpton's April Fool's joke turned novel, *The Curious Case of Sidd Finch*, about a boy with a 150 mph fastball) a desire to transcend the natural history of the game to higher forms is exposed. Traditionally, the pastoral poet is not a naturalist or a fabulist. The bucolic details of the pastoral are not meant to engage the setting in a Linnaean manner, or to create a stange other-worldly atmosphere, but to evoke a nostalgic and understood frame which is amenable to expressive poetry.

Within the nostalgic baseball frame of Coover's novel the protagonist's creative expression eventually overwhelms the protagonist's dim view of the city's reality. J. Henry Waugh leads an unenviable urban life: lousy job, unmarried, pre-alcoholic and with few obvious prospects. J. Henry's only real passion is a baseball game that he plays with cards and dice in the privacy of his home. (An imaginary league which is echoed in passions for Strat-o-matic baseball and so-called rotisserie leagues.) To the rolls of the dice J. Henry has constructed a full historical narrative of what he calls the "Universal Baseball Association" to a point where this made-up league is as replete with myth, math, comedy and tragedy as the Major League game. The UBA becomes a complete fictional system, and each roll of the dice enriches the sustaining myths of that system. The established connections between media recording and promoting of league history makes baseball a likely resource for the ingenious book-keeper:

> American baseball, by luck, trial and error, and since the famous playing rules council of 1889, had struck on an almost perfect balance, in fact, that and the accountability -- the beauty of the records system which found a place to keep forever each least action -- that had led Henry to baseball as his final great project. (19)

The perfect balance and accountability of the system J. Henry builds around baseball is held by records and, more importantly, by the faith he places in his internalized narrative. (He believes in his league the way we might think of a novelist truly believing in his or her characters.)

Like a new old-fashioned ballpark, J. Henry's UBA is nostalgically constructed. J. Henry does not follow or like modern baseball, saying "the real action was over a century ago. It's a bore now" (165). The team names (Beaneaters, Keystones, Excelsiors, Bridegrooms, Knickerbockers) are actual names of 19th century professional clubs, while the names of the league's great players (Jock Casey, Mickey Halifax, Grammercy Locke or Hatrack Hines) all have the *old-time* feel of a gone (very Irish) league and sound, as J. Henry's friend Lou puts, it "like comic book names"(189). J. Henry's choice of names,

just like choosing *ballpark* over *stadium*, signals an interest in a "prelapsarian" historical integrity of the game. For Henry the UBA is a markedly better league than its contemporary MLB, which is seen in his real life as an intrusive televised bore. Henry is aware of the pastoral conventions in baseball, saying "Funny thing about both country music and baseball with its 'village greens': they weren't really country, not since they got their new names anyway, but urban. Kid stuff, dreams of heroism and innocence, staged by pros and turned into big business" (36). But in his thorough fictionalizing of the sport he attempts to escape its commercialized falsity and poetically controls his product by re-naming and keeping it to himself as "ruler of that private enclosure" (156).

J. Henry Waugh is a loner: he has few friends (none close) and only ventures out from his apartment to get a pastrami sandwich or to keep tab at a local bar. In contrast to his urban reality the imagined ballfield of his dice game is pastorally reified in a Kinsella-like way: "The afternoon sun waned, cast a golden glint off the mowed grass that haloed the infield" (11). And the pleasures of the ballfields of the UBA directly correlate to Waugh's displeasure with his squalid reality. When "Henry felt plunged into the deepest of winters" he quickly reminds himself, "no, it was the middle of a baseball season, remember? Green fields and hot suns and shirtsleeved fanatics out on the bleaching boards, . . . he turned back to the table" (129). Eventually, he is fired as a direct result of his obsession with his "pastoral of the mind" (Mount 70), and he tests the people he meets in terms of how well they might "understand" what he is doing. While it is possible to see Henry's increasing isolation as a sign of industrially induced dissociative behaviour it is also possible to see it as a sign of the genius-poet -- he's obviously a "genius at games, a mathematical genius" (Cope 35), at work in a world that has no place for this kind of genius or poetry. His fantasies are not just Walter Mitty vainglory; his private communication with the development of his league is fed by an active creativity.

Mirroring the fan-loyalty which is the bulwark of professional baseball's success, in the course of his dice-rolling Henry develops an affection for a particular team (the Pioneers) and specifically for a young pitcher named Damon Rutherford. At the start of the novel, Rutherford "pitches" a no-hitter -- and the event becomes a euphoric validation of J. Henry's system. The celebration of "Young Damon's" victory, however, is soon ruined by J. Henry's selfish desire to have him pitch again too soon: a roll of the dice kills Rutherford with an inside pitch. This "shit deal," like the one handed Bruce in *Bang the Drum*, forces J. Henry to step out of the imagined integrity of the league and forces him to evaluate the fairness of chance in relation to his affection.

It is the considerable imaginative affection that J. Henry gives the UBA which forms its real creative resource. Despite the UBA's grounding in the laws of mathematics

and in its proprietor's ingenious workings of statistical variability, the UBA is also full of poetry, song and fable to help build the myths which make the playing of the game more than an exercise.[27] Particularly after Damon's fatal beaning, the inclusion of song lyrics from Sandy Shaw (shades of Piney Woods) helps draw the emotional content of league events deeper into the self-referential frame of the UBA. Shaw's country-refried lyrics, full of pastoral longing and self-consciously old-fashioned diction, loll in a familiar sunshine. While Henry's real life is falling apart he is "lost" in the imaginative construction of a great wake for Damon Rutherford, featuring Sandy Shaw's *carpe diem* piece "The Happy Hours of Youth,"

> Oh, rookies, come along
> and hear m' sad song!
> Old age is the bane of mankind!
> So enjoy while ya may
> The fair spring day,
> Cause the blue season ain't far behind!
>
> Oh, the happy and sunny da-hays of old!
> When our feet were fleet and hearts were bold!
> There's nothin' so fine in the world to behold
> As the happy hours of youth!
>
> When the years're green
> And the hits come clean,
> You're honored among ath-letes;
> But they'll come a day
> When they won't letcha play,
> And like us, you must hang up your cleats!
>
> Oh, the happy sunny. (99)

Even in a complete fiction, the happy sunny days of the pastoral must be numbered. Given that one of J. Henry's dreams leads one to believe that in childhood he was not fleet of foot but ridiculed as "greasyfingers" (77), the fantasy of a lost innocence in an Adonic Damon Rutherford becomes the more compelling source for a baseball elegy. As *et in arcadia ego* is foremost a tombstone epitaph, the death of Damon is not the end of the pastoral in the UBA but the start of its ultimate expression. When it is time for Sandy to memorialize the fallen Damon the tune even sounds borrowed from *Lycidas*,

---

[27] The celebration of what Brian G. Caraher has called baseball's "mathematical sublime" (the interesting permutations of its statistical data) is itself as much a function of poetry as quantification.

> Hang down your heads, brave men, and weep!
> Young Damon has come to harm!
> They have carried him off to a grave dark and deep:
> The boy with the magic arm! (103)

Clearly, the creative range of the UBA is beyond the rolls of the dice, and the mythologizing of his league's events has become more important than the results of the game. Rutherford's arm is deemed "magic," which puts it beyond the range of predictability. And as the creator of the UBA fiction J. Henry begins to react against the mere playing of the rules in order to preserve its more compelling myths.

Seeking revenge against Jock Casey, the villain who killed the beloved Damon, and facing a crucial decision as to whether the game itself has gone too far, J. Henry finally steps outside of the "law" of his league and, "subtly paralleling the Black Sox fix" (Candelaria 123) *cheats*:

> He picked up the dice, shook them. "I'm sorry, boy," he whispered, and then, holding the dice in his left palm, he set them down carefully with his right. One by one. Six. Six. Six. (202)

The satanic numbers "kill" the offending villain, but the deliberate erasure of chance takes his creation out of the world of sport and into the called shots of baseball fiction.

In his essay "Of Hobby-Horses, Baseball, And Narrative: Coover's Universal Baseball Association" Roy C. Caldwell Jr. also sees this fixing of the dice as the novel's critical juncture: "With this stroke, the Universal Baseball Association enters a new phase. By liberating himself and his league from the tyranny of chance, Waugh seizes an expanded role as the sole source of authority in this world" (167). In short, J. Henry has decided to play God. The creation of the UBA, described as Henry's need for something "with discipline, precision, control"(87) is the only thing the increasingly alienated J. Henry can absolutely control. As Candelaria points out, "J. Henry Waugh('s) initials neatly suggest a biblical acronym, JHW, for the omniscient Yahweh" (120).

Totalizing his control of the league fiction, J. Henry also claims the heightened consciousness of the cheat: the *Tegwar* vet or World Series fixer who smirks at the limited intelligence of the "clucks" and "saps" who live by and look to understand the rules. The rules, however, were the only reliable system to hold together the old narrative of the league and keep the disappointments of the game on the field.[28] By choosing to overturn

---

28 In his book *Literature and the Pastoral* scholar Andrew V. Ettin writes, "In pastoral literature, experiences and emotions are contained within finite limits" (22), or as poet Josephine Jacobsen writes "The game is dreamed for the rules // The game we dream writes lines where *love* means nothing" (158).

the principle of chance, the boundaries which separated the UBA's Arcady and his miserable real life are also overturned, so that the magnificence of the fiction far outweighs any mention of the poor proprietor.

The resolution of Coover's novel is a notoriously problematic one. In the final chapter of the novel the day-to-day life of J. Henry has completely disappeared from the narrative, and the details have become exclusively focused on the progress of the UBA in a strange and distant future. The "real" world no longer seems to exist, and the UBA itself no longer resembles the charted boardgame J. Henry perfected earlier. If anything, the game has mutated into a "pure mythology" (Candelaria 126) based upon the legend of Damon Rutherford. The style of the writing has changed too to an increasingly notated and staccato form, and from these bits, the UBA is pieced together as a kind of sacrifice ritual where a batter is sent out ceremonially to re-suffer Damon's fate. Coover's creative engagement of a philosophical debate about the nature of reality is obvious, what is uncertain is how the reader is meant to feel about this so-called "postmodern tour-de-force" (Candelaria 118). Is J. Henry's disappearance from "real" life a chilling punishment for his indulgence in the UBA, or an apotheosis where the pastoral fiction of baseball has provided real trancendence over misery?

Interpretations of the final chapter often guess that J. Henry's "real life" has suffered a kind of entropic death due to the dissociative noise of urban life and popular entertainment. The self-referentiality of baseball has been parlayed into a kind of *dementia*.[29] This understanding is an important interpretive thread when contemplating the unpleasant feeling of the novel's stylish resolution. However, this thread can only go so far, as it seems finally caught-up in ideas about "couch potatoes" and dumb sports fans. Reading the resolution of *The Universal Baseball Association* as a cautionary tale about the dangers of escapism is an oversimplification which ignores the resolution's playful commentary on fiction itself. In reference to Coover's final odd flourish, Caldwell states that *The Universal Baseball Association* "*semblables* in literature are not the baseball novels of Malamud (or) Harris . . . but *Tristam Shandy*" (162).[30]

---

29 The ultimate parody of the obsessed and impotent fan? A pomo version of the kind of guy Merril Markoe advised women seeking time to kill to ask "Honey, what was the difference between the batting average and the slugging average again? Now sit back, relax, eat, start an art project or even take a nap -- there will not be another conversational lull for hours and hours" (189).

30 Baseball novels that we might call "post modern" are surprisingly few, considering the interest in play and gamesmanship in the conceits of many texts which seek to step aside from traditional narrative forms. Aside from DeLillo's *Pafko* and Coover's *UBA*, the only

Still *The Universal Baseball Association* finds in baseball novels at least *demi-semblables:* Henry Waugh's disappearance into the totality of UBA is related to Roy Hobbs's desire to retreat in visions of a pastoral baseball past and Henry Wiggen's inability to accommodate the career and death of Bruce Pearson into baseball's fictive myths. Of course, the New York Knights and the New York Mammoths are no more real than the UBA's Pioneers, and Damon Rutherford is every bit as real as Roy Hobbs or Bruce Pearson. That Coover's J. Henry could not shrug off Damon's "death" as an unlucky roll or just another statistical development is a manifestation of a higher need for literary fictions:

> Death calls forth pastoral irony in yet another way. It is a common experience, one of the two experiences we all share and therefore one of the two moments in time which we seem to be without distinction or rank. . . . Yet that moment above all others is one that demands we say that this person was special, and that this death has made some mark on the landscape -- both the internal landscape of the poet's heart and mind and the outer landscape of the natural world. (Ettin 119)

What Henry Wiggen's essentially comic voice could not do for Bruce Pearson, the pastoral elegist may do for Damon Rutherford. The final "Damonsday" institutions in The Universal Baseball Assoc. are not quantitatively grander than Milton's claim for the fictionalized King in *Lycidas* or Shelley's claims for Keats in *Adonais.*

While the ending of the UBA may seem as horrible as getting what you pray for, it logically completes the pastoral myth of baseball: entirely self-contained in a controlled setting rather than in the chance of statistics. J. Henry disappears because as a personality he is no longer needed; all individuated personality fades into the triumph of setting and its interchangeable types:

> he doesn't know any more whether he's a Damonite or a Caseyite or something else again, a new heretic or an unregenerate Golden Ager, doesn't even know if he's Paul Trench or Royce Ingram or Pappy Rooney or Long Lew Lydell, it's all irrelevant, it doesn't even matter that he's going to die, all that counts is that he is here and here's The Man and here's the boys and there's the crowd, the sun, the noise. (242)

By the end it is difficult to tell one player from the next and the narrator's commitment to individuation is subordinated to a wholesale commitment for the pastoral setting. Even the

---

text which seriously tests baseball outside of its more conservative journalistic traditions is James McManus's wild and apocalyptic *Chin Music* (1985).

ballplayers in the end can't help but ironically comment on their confinement; one goes so far as to gripe: "Hey, I just got the word, men, this game is fixed!"

"That my boy, . . . is the immortal parable's very message" (225).

Death in the Ballpark: The Baseball Detective Novel

One of the most surprisingly lively by-products of the late eighties / early nineties boom in baseball literature has been the baseball detective novel. The use of baseball or sport as a setting for a murder mystery itself is not particularly new: Ed McBain's *The Heckler* hit the charts in 1960 while Dick Francis's horseracing mysteries have long set a standard in cross-pollinating the murder mystery with a sports setting. What is new, however, is the formation of the baseball detective, a serialized character who not only solves crimes around the ballpark but whose lexicon has been influenced by the current literary discourse about the game. In these mysteries baseball is not just a chance perspective; it is an integral part of the novel's appeal (and frequently the basis of its sales pitch). As the mystery novel continues to be one of the most competitive areas of the literary marketplace, many hooks are set into the dominant design and we see all types: mysteries with recipes, mysteries set in Medieval England, mysteries for cat lovers, mysteries set exclusively in the academy, mysteries where the late-stage Elvis Presley performs the functions of the private eye. To a bookseller, baseball detective fiction might seem like a natural. And the recent abundance of baseball detective titles might be indication enough that this peculiar mix has found a stable audience.

While baseball detective fiction seems born out of the most obvious gimmickry, some of the texts actually are quite sophisticated and thrilling.[31] Predictably, not all of the books (and like everything, maybe not even most) mentioned in the following pages are destined for second printings, but a surprising handful of them have managed to create durable characters and can offer a mercifully unpretentious commentary about the game. Some are good reads; some get chewed up in the gears of the genre and some are hard to read. In particular, and as far as one can take the baseball detective novel as a whole, what stands out to me is the complex urbanity of the baseball detective. And what I would like to do at this juncture is present an overview of the most prominent titles of this sub-genre and discuss the "city beat" views often found in these texts as a supplemental engagement

---

[31] Peter Abrahams' *The Fan*, while not strictly speaking detective fiction, is a sophisticated thriller. Loren Estleman's *King of the Corner* should also be commended for its high quality. Paul Auster, who uses baseball to some effect in his novels *Moon Palace* (1989) and *Mr. Vertigo* (1995) and in the screenplay to the critically-acclaimed film *Smoke* (1995), also wrote the entertaining mystery *Squeeze Play* under the pseudonym "Paul Benjamin." (The novel was written in 1978 but published in 1982 and published again in wide release in 1990, perhaps in response to the expansion in baseball's literary marketplace.) Ironically, "Paul Benjamin" is also the name used by the washed-up writer played by William Hurt in *Smoke*.

of the pastoral in baseball fiction. The big city-place vision of the game offers a valuable critique of the pastoral impulse in baseball fiction and initiates a recapitulation of the nature of the baseball pastoral. That is, it has nothing to do with the country and cows, but with a desire to see a preserved green space within the alienating city.

Private eyes often belong to the city they practise in, and their narrative-voices (popularized by the movies) function as a kind of oracle of the city. The dick has a privileged knowledge of how to get information, where to go, whom to trust, how to always find parking and how to never pay a cover charge. The city-beats of famous American fictional detectives are sympathetically colored by the detectives' personalities: Sam Spade's San Francisco, V.I. Warshawski's Chicago, Spencer's Boston, Dave Robicheaux's New Orleans all take on the narrator's sense of reality. Because of the strong identification with the city, the detective naturally offers something to the average baseball fan, as he or she is ordinarily not delighting in the natural green of yesteryear but in cheering the progress of his or her big city's team.

For better or worse, professional sports teams have assumed a large role in the construction of city "mystique." Boston's Celtics, New York's Yankees, Dallas's Cowboys and Toronto's Maple Leafs have all been successfully promoted as agents of their city's personality. And as urban-oracle, the sports private eye is often a mutation of that other citybeat voice: the archetypal sports journalist who knows all the night-haunts and inside dope. While the image of the whiskey-voiced and damaged sports writer (who invariably chewed cigars, ate like a horse, drank like a fish etc.) may not be as admirable or believable in the 1990s, it is a still powerful trope in baseball literature. The baseball detective often turns out to be a transformed journalist (and just as often the mystery's author is a sportswriter dwindling into fiction) but, more importantly, is possessed of a hard-boiled authority about how the city works.

The literary baseball detective takes on an increasingly lost, working class urban integrity and uses it, often unwillingly, to help solve crimes. The contemporary sportswriter must go underground (so to speak) and take the identity of the private eye because sports writing is part of "the sports machine," serving the interests of powerful business interests rather than what is right by the law. The baseball detective's marginalization is a mark of his or her authenticity in an enterprise that is increasingly represented as obscenely commercial and whose existing journalism is full of transparent self-promotion.

Frequently pre-alcoholic, frequently divorced and usually recovering from a serious alteration in his or her chosen career path, the marginalized baseball detective must make his or her way through the jungle of the city (and "away" cities) and through the layers of

hype with which the industry protects itself. The baseball detective usually has experienced some disappointment in legit baseball careers: Loren D. Estelman's Doc Miller of *King of the Corner* (1992) was a star pitcher before he was sent to prison for seven years where his youthful arm expired; Bill Granger's Jimmy Drover of *Drover and the Designated Hitter* (1994) was a promising sportswriter before a federal judge unfairly indicted him as a mobster and forced his writing underground; David Everson's Robert Miles of *Suicide Squeeze* (1991) tried but never made it into the big leagues and Robert Irvine's Moroni Traveler of *Gone to Glory* (1990) suffers a marginalized fate undreamed of by even the most hard-boiled: he works as a P.I. in Salt Lake City.

The city-desk voice of the sportswriter gone detective is ironically used in one of this sub-genre's most unlikely texts, *Beanball* (1989), a mystery supposedly co-authored by Mets' star Tom Seaver. Even more unlikely, Tom Terrific joins Willie Mays in the writer's circle as Mays is credited with co-authoring the mystery *Danger in Centerfield* (1963). Treading the need to have a writer actually compose the text and a ballplayer to sell it,[32] these two novels were not exactly huge hits. The allure of the mystery sweepstakes is undoubtedly intensified in a marketplace which is interested in cinematic treatments of baseball. There was enough interest in this form to call out baseball-lit stars Jim Bouton (*Ball Four*) and Eliot Asinof (*Eight Men Out*) to team up and present a more common (non detective) baseball story as a *thriller* in *Strike Zone* (1994).

Having a journalist turn sleuth is nothing new, and the authors who are serializing their baseball detectives often have their protagonists apprentice as big city sportswriters. Donald Honig's Joe Tinker from *The Plot to Kill Jackie Robinson* (1992) and *Last Man Out* (1993) is a late 40's New York scribe who brings to the texts a strong *noir* feel, adding grit to the memories of one of baseball's so-called golden ages.[33] Alison Gordon's Kate Henry is a sportswriter who must always deal with the fact that she is a female sportswriter; she must try to accommodate her unique braveness into the pervading sense of middle class propriety and social affirmation her Toronto setting demands. And in the most commercially ambitious series, Crabbe Evers' Duffy House is an irascible old-school, retired sportswriter from Chicago, periodically working on his memoirs, displaced and

---

32 As far as I know, Dan Quisenberry's poetry may be the only "literary" project (non bio *etc.*) that a baseball celebrity has legitimately tried. From "The Bomb": "time slows / one frame at a time / moon-ball spins meant for deep pit / of brown leather"

33 A similar historical slant is also employed by Troy Soos in his Mickey Rawlins mysteries, *Murder at Ebbets Field* (1995) and *Murder at Fenway Park* (1993).

underestimated in the modern baseball world, now working for the commissioner's office when murder strikes. [34]

The Duffy House mysteries are ambitiously presented as the definitive baseball-detective serial. There are five books so far, each progressing with a Sue Grafton-like confidence through a finite list: *Murder in Wrigley Field* (1991), *Murderer's Row* (1991), *Bleeding Dodger Blue* (1991), *Fear in Fenway* (1993), and *Tigers Burning* (1995).[35] Perhaps for reasons which make the House series the most commercially viable baseball books, they are also not the most exciting *mysteries*. (While they steadily improve, none of the five titles is significantly more accomplished than the novel attributed to Tom Seaver.) In their attempt to capture the baseball audience, the traveloguey journalese of House's baseball digressions outshines most of the crime drama. And it's not that Crabbe Evers can't come up with a plot. House's verbal schtick is just not nearly as thrilling as planned: his creation is a type -- a walking, talking nostalgia figure. As legendary columnist Red Smith diagnosed, "most sports writers suffer from hyperthyroid congestion of adjectives and are dope fiends for forced similies" (9), and Duffy House is nearly terminal. (Like these gems from *Fear in Fenway* "she radiated like a scoreboard" (12), "she needed me like a player's agent needs an ego" (44), "His goofy face beamed like a kid spotting Roger Clemens at his local McDonald's "(116)) The reinvention of this voice as a nostalgic *type* -- like the purposeful use of the archaic in Sydney -- intends to bring the reader to the sites of baseball's gloried past and away from the compromises that have left Duffy on the outside looking in.

In the heart of the crusty old guy is baseball's familiar pastoral illusion. He is a Chicagoan; a Cubs fan who characteristically sacralizes setting instead of wanting the win. Of Wrigley Field he begins, "It was daytime baseball -- as the Good Lord meant it to be played"(3).[36] And in the series House starts working his way through the preserved

---

[34] Crabbe Evers is the pseudonym of *Bingo Long* author William Brashler and journalist Reinder Van Til. (Revealed in Barbara Davey's review essay "Let's Go Out to the Ballpark" (8).) The name Evers, like Honig's Tinker, is taken from the Chicago Cubs' immortal double-play connection: Tinkers to Evers to Chance.

[35] One applauds the authors' efforts but remains skeptical one would want to live long enough to see Grafton's *O is for Osteoporosis* or Evers' *Astrodome Apocalypse.*

[36] Chicago seems to be the preferred setting for the baseball detective. On one hand it provides the purist's requisite natural setting: "This was a real baseball park -- not some indoor amusement park with cement grass and the air-conditioning blowing out at five miles an hour. Not designed for football with baseball a summer frill" (Everson 47). On the other hand, with the Cubs tradition of losing without great agony, a certain comic docility is brought to this affiliation. The Cubs are never so impressive that one is

sanctuaries of the old game. He is always fighting against the agents of greed whom he sees as taking the game away from its honest roots. (The victims and villains are invariably caught up in some ownership-level squabble. In the Yankee-tale, a George Steinbrenner character gets his for reasons that are not entirely dismissed.) The detective's old school dialogue itself is determined to capture a sense of a lost, ivy-walled Arcady. Wherever he goes, Duffy House is looking for that Wrigley Field transfiguration; a game enjoyed away from the noise of modern baseball. His determination to see old-time values in baseball brings all kinds of unlikely pronouncements; for example, the following view of kids in the Bronx at play: "kids were playing basketball and wallball in the parks across the street, their shouts mingling with their stereos. . . . It was all urban bucolic and kind of nice, unless you are of the mind that nothing can be nice in the Bronx." (*Murderer's Row* 219) The conflation of the Bronx with the bucolic is an attempt to bring the virtue of the green fields to the mean streets.[37] The sporting connection to the "bucolic" eases House's anxious conscience as it confronts the horrible realities of the Bronx and washes over them with the artifice of baseball's pastoral virtue.

Unlike Roy Hobbs, Henry Wiggen or J. Henry Waugh, who all suffer in a way because of baseball's self-serving myths, Duffy House's strong belief in the old-fashioned sanctity of the ballpark is his saving grace. He is supposed to be a sports-journalist's version of *Columbo*, where his crusty, unslick demeanor allows him to avoid suspicion as he makes his inquiries. Duffy's diversions into trivia, which may periodically connect to the baseball fan, however, do not seem to build up his personality in a meaningful way. However urban he is, his embrace of the pastoral identity of baseball (its lamented artificial past) is his defining gesture.

Alison Gordon's Kate Henry mysteries are less caught up in the atavistic swooning of the grizzled journalist. Gordon brings to her fiction the same inside wit that made her chronicle *Foul Balls* (1984) the standard-bearer of non-fiction accounts of the pains (and pleasures) of being a female sportsbeat writer.[38] The plots of her novels *The Dead Pull*

---

seriously distracted by actual outcomes. *Fear in Wrigley*, *Strike Zone*, *Suicide Squeeze*, and *Drover* all give their due to the Cubs' park with varying degrees of fealty.

37 In his essay "Urban and Rural Images in Baseball" Richard C. Crepeau writes of how reporters in 1933 were careful to cast celebrations of the New York Giants as proof that the "New Yorker was very much like his country cousin. (...) They were still basically simple country folk. New York City was just a big version of Pumpkin Center" (320).

38 *Foul Balls*' abundant and sensitive insights into the emotional lives of players and the demands of the long season may have subsequently been overlooked in light of the book's central hook.

Hitter (1988), *Safe at Home* (1990) and *Night Game* (1992) (keeping with the tradition of silly punning titles) are not intensely calculated, but her characters are personable and the narrative voice less susceptible to cornball homilies.

The Toronto in these novels (the home of the fictionalized Blue Jays, The Toronto Titans) is less a refuge for arcadian memories and is seen as a place where middle-class ideas of progress can thrive within the tradition of baseball.[39] While early in the series there's some effort to establish Kate as a cigarette smoking, tough-talking crank, eventually her qualified place in a baseball society asks her to make special allowances for the sport and its cherished myths. If Duffy House sees a pastoral retreat in baseball, Kate Henry gamely seeks to reinvigorate the baseball retreat by accommodating it to the nice-nice realities of her Toronto.

In *The Dead Pull Hitter* for example, Kate can even manage to get sentimental about Toronto's old Exhibition Stadium:

> horrible Titan Field has its charms. It's a jerry-rigged affair, tacked on to the end of an existing football stadium when Toronto got its franchise. It has artificial turf, which I loathe, and half the seats are bad. But I've seen a lot of games here and I'll miss it when it's torn down and replaced by something up to date. (35)

This articulates the standard demands of the traditionalist but, more importantly, places the sentiment as available in the most unlikely of venues. And proving that hating the "peanut-crunching crowd" is a sign of professionalism, she claims to enjoy batting practise more than the games themselves, as b.p. is the only time when the players (not the fans) own the cherished space: "Whether it was a sandlot in rural Arkansas, a rocky diamond retrieved from the rubble of the New York Ghetto, or the finest major-league park, it was their sanctuary" (35). Like House's *urban-bucolic*, the rubble of New York is enveloped in the baseball goodness of "rural Arkansas."

Ballplaying can always be attached to America and to an affirmative vision of America as innately *smalltown* despite the dominance of its megalopolises. In the introduction to his book *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America*, James L. Machor writes, "In its most ambitious form, the moral geography of

---

39 The use of the fictionalized team name is problematic insofar as its use is probably as much a legal as a creative decision. Major League Baseball, like any company that depends upon a "family-positive" promotional image, aggressively protects its copyright. The Duffy House mysteries have a promotional edge in the maketplace insofar as they can use the real, copyrighted names.

America, is tied to a collective belief that this country, by its very nature, can yield a new, more harmonious society embracing the entire American scene" (15). The harmonious kingdom of baseball -- embracing all of North America -- can be a compelling object to preserve from the intrusions of wickedness which the city invariably brings.

In *Safe at Home*, the second Kate Henry book, the murder mystery is a palimpset for a more thoughtfully articulated story about how a gay baseball player summoned the courage to publically come out. While in *Dead Pull Hitter* Kate complained of her Danforth Ave. neighbourhood being "invaded by yuppies and gays"(31) in *Safe at Home*, Kate is more thoroughly progressive. As a female sports-reporter she has encountered a good deal of boorish, sexist behaviour which she characteristically deflects with humor, (*Mystery Review* Vol. 1 No. 4 Summer 1993) but in the moral economy of her mysteries, the suspected villains are often linked to the retrograde behaviour which seeks to keep her out of the locker room. Kate's love of the game comes with some sense that the enclosure of the ballfield has been preserved in part by the gender discriminations she experiences in her daily life.

Safe at Home's villain is a sexual predator known as the "Daytime Stalker" who threatens a nice kid who is eventually saved by the outed ballplayer, stereotypically insinuating that the gay player must publically slay the reviled child-molester in order to be accepted within the straight world -- and offering the tyke as a metonym for the innocent virtue of baseball. The "Daytime Stalker" -- the ultimate sexual villain -- is not so much a real character as the personification of an anxiety in Kate's city, emblematic of the perceived threats to all middle class institutions, including baseball. Nominally, he stalks daytime itself -- the preferred, innocent, natural setting for a ballgame. (*cf. Safe at Home*'s happy ending: "The sun was shining. It was a great day for a ballgame" (239).) Kate and her newspaper become proactive agents against a threat to a way of life: in order to save daytime, baseball and the children they must take the game out of the hands of the bigots. While the ever-ignorant out-of-town (out-of-T.O.) fans deride the gay ballplayer, the home-town columnists make fun of these fans and modestly try to influence the players (even the unremittant sexist character of "Stinger Swain") to bond like ballplayers.[40] By pre-emptively dealing with the homophobic underpinnings of baseball, Kate's beloved game can recede into the friendly confines of its self-referentiality. As Kate seriously

---

[40] Of course, in the real baseball world, such a story would be more aggressively forced by the media, and the fans would probably be less resolute in their anti-gay reactions. For example, fans would probably not be permitted to hang banners that say "Fairy go home" or "Queer City" (234) and might express their hostilities in less obviously redneck, but perhaps more insidious, ways.

concludes, "The teams are in a cocoon of schedules, routines, game times, bus times. Their only contact with the outside world is through the adoring fans, and that's not reality either" (239).

The third Kate Henry book, the underwritten *Night Game*, takes Kate further afield from the cast introduced in her series, nodding towards future Kate Henry books which will be less sports-orientated. The murder of "Juicy" Lucy Cartwright, a reporter and a "Baseball Annie," at the Titans spring training site in Florida, sets in motion another sex-crime plot that threatens to ruin the Titans' integrity. Predictably, the killer turns out to be Stinger Swain's wife who was seeking revenge for Stinger's infidelity. Again, the styling of the plot not only speaks of Gordon's experiences as a woman in the male sports world but carefully places baseball in light of a social inequality (a Latin player is unfairly accused of the crime) which must be remedied if we are to be able to enjoy the game in good conscience. The embracing cocoon which surrounds the players from "reality" is ultimately desirable as it leaves the ball-playing to the athletes and the social context to the reporter.

Donald Honig's Joe Tinker mysteries are probably the best work this sub-genre has to offer. Like the other serials, the plots are murder mysteries solved by a baseball writer but in the Tinker books, baseball is rarely used as an idealistic method of discourse. That is, unlike Duffy House or Kate Henry, there isn't much evidence that Joe Tinker even likes baseball as he gets stuck covering its beat for the paper he gets a job with. The 1940s, urban *noir* setting of the Tinker books offers some real challenge to the baseball pastoralist's vision of a cocoon-like refuge for the game, where baseball's sunshine and green form a reliable antidote to the transgressions of the city.

Joe Tinker is a New York sportswriter who has just come home from decorated service in the Second World War. Like Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins, Joe Tinker works in the late forties big city, before the flight to the suburbs. And like the typical *noir* hero, Tinker's return into society is not easy: despite his alienation from the normative institutions of America (Marriage, the Church, School, white collar job, popular entertainment) he is nonetheless active and determined not to fall into an inert state. With the need to stay ahead of darkness and meaninglessness, Tinker's job as a sportswriter is uncertain. The sports page's inability to address the concerns of the front page actually adds to the sense of encroaching despair. Rather than helping build the arcadian temple of the game, the more cynical investigator feels suspicious of the rhetoric of smalltown values and does not seek to restore the game to the sunshine. The city is full of people, but the detective is solitary and pitched against the societies that form to the left and right of him. (Ironically, New York becomes the place to go if you want to be left alone.) And despite

the threat of getting lost in the crowd, the ability to individuate *one* story from the setting, the "eight million people in the naked city," becomes the mark of a real city investigator. Tinker is not a team-player whose skill is reading others as *individuals* -- not as role-players within the frame of a pre-conceived quest. As Tinker has "clearly an urban face, open alert" (*Last Man Out* 13) not fully owned or claimed by one group, (the paper, the team, the police etc.) he is more likely to see who *really* did it.

The crime-solver reacts forensically and is suspicious of all attempts to accommodate a quick solution into the promotional myths of an entertainment industry. But attempting to solve crimes within organized baseball without indicting baseball itself is a difficult balancing act. The use of a third person narrative itself does much to bring Joe Tinker outside of the conventional, celebratory temptations of the baseball writer. That is, as Tinker's insights into the game are seen in direct contrast to "the real world," the totality of baseball cannot overwhelm his discourse. In *The Plot to Kill Jackie Robinson*, Tinker is blasé enough about the game to miss two World Series games in favor of a sordid affair. And while some of his disinterest is a sign of his professionalism, it is something which worries Tinker professionally, and he honestly tries to find his way out of the closed system of baseball and onto the live action of the front pages.

In *The Plot to Kill Jackie Robinson*, a racist's promise to assassinate baseball's first African American player already takes Tinker's story out of the sports page. The backdrop of baseball's overdue integration becomes particularly fascinating insofar as the arguments about the game's sacred "traditions" are fashioned as the property of segregationists. Robinson's entry brings a fear to the fans that attention from the political story will destabilize the "peaceful" league by introducing civil discord into the "apolitical" pasture of innocence. Tinker's agnostic (if you will) stance on baseball luckily keeps him less susceptible to racialized arguments about the game. Although he expresses an honest appreciation of the beauty of Ebbets Field -- even in the midst of his climactic attempt to locate the would-be-assassin in the crowd -- he is never overwhelmed by his own aesthetic response.

Last Man Out is a prequel to *Robinson* and as such more of its content is devoted to Tinker's return from the war and dissatisfaction with sportswriting. Although known as "slicker" in the army, Tinker (still in his twenties) finds it difficult to adjust to the reality of civilian life in New York. Baseball's undeniable post-war popularity[41] increases the sense

---

41 In his detailed recreation *The Summer of '49*, David Halberstam writes, "In the years following World War Two, Professional Baseball mesmerized the American people as it never had before and never would again. Baseball, more than anything else, seemed to symbolize normalcy and a return to life in America as it had been before Pearl Harbor"

of public pressure to return to "normal" activities which the experienced veteran finds depressingly artificial. Back at his sports desk, Tinker claims to be "dead to the idea of writing sports"(41) and in a Manhattan where even "the concept of a backyard seemed incongruous"(36) even the charms of the Polo Grounds may not have been the revitalizing tonic the backformations of nostalgia suppose. Throughout the plot (a young prospect is arraigned on murder charges of a downtown b-girl) Tinker's struggle is not with the devolution of professional baseball but with the maintenance of his own integrity. Absent of romantic affection for the old-time sportsdesker, Tinker is painfully aware of the *promotional* role sportswriters play for the major league cartel. As he notes to a real police detective with bitter sarcasm, "That's the way the relationship works. Baseball's pure and unrestrained image must be preserved" (146). Because the pastoral clichés of withdrawal into the fictional myth are honestly tempting with their lush pictures of unindividuated innocence, Tinker must fight the same urge that Kate Henry couldn't help but give in to at the end of *Safe at Home*:

> He wanted to write that ballplayers weren't real people to begin with, that they lived only when the sun was bright and the air warm, that the greater part of their lives was spent in the imaginations of other people, and when the season ended they became empty uniforms and were packed away in crates. (131)

He steers away from this desire and in so doing admirably checks his own disenchantment and actively attempts to break free of the protective walls which separate fact and fiction.

Conclusion

When a ballplayer in the creepy finale to *The Universal Baseball Association* contemplates the "death" of Damon Rutherford, he claims it "must have been a poet who shot him" (224). In murder mysteries, the dead body is the most obvious literary prop: nobody really *grieves* for the novel's slain but understands their demise as an invitation to the plot and that, of course, the writer (the poet if you will) has done it. As such, the initiation of mystery is no surprise, but part of a highly artificial yet quickly-understood literary convention. The neatness of resolution in mysteries (particularly in serial mysteries where the detective must return to do it all over again and again) may invite the invocation of a

---

(10). While it's nice to imagine that baseball occupied all of America in the late forties, it's not true. And this kind of historical gloss -- like imagining everybody in the sixties got naked at Woodstock -- often denies the conflicted atmosphere that bore out the need for an expression of normalcy.

simple, domestic order to signal that all unsettling suspense is over. In baseball fiction, the retreat into pastoral simulacra is also a literary convention which imagines an end to city flux. Given that readers of baseball literature are also likely to be heavy MLB consumers, it would not make much sense to promote detectives who will, as Roy Hobbs does in *The Natural*, walk away from the game. As Roy Hobbs dreams of a country past to escape the "shaking beat of his ambition," (18) the will-o-the-wisp essence of old-time baseball is reclaimed in order to prevent the city's social compromises from overwhelming faith in baseball's smalltown virtue.

The belief that baseball must somehow be virtuous (or that it once was) leads directly to the fascination with the pastoral Doubleday myth and the continuing faith that professional baseball is essentially a game and not an entertainment industry. The sharp simplicity of Doubleday mythology is not a conspiracy but a compelling ideology that is always being reaffirmed in a society eager to see positive values associated with its pastimes. The idea that baseball has a pastoral, literary form also tacitly declares the sport's cultural kinship with the great, improving works: even Harold Bloom, whose hostility to popular culture is fairly complete, allows the discourse of greenspaced ballparkerie to slip beneath his radar, declaring that if teams represented poltical ideologies "that would give us a form of baseball into which we could not escape for pastoral relief, *as we do now*" (31 emphasis mine).

There is probably too much baseball detective fiction, most of it forever lost in discontinued backlist limbo, to arrive at a complete understanding of the functions of the baseball P.I. But as far as we might generalize now, the baseball detective novel often elicits the same nostalgic voice which accounts for the popularity of *Field of Dreams* and the creation of Ken Burns' *Baseball*. (The same pastoral nostalgia that is interrogated in different ways by Malamud, Harris and Coover.) If baseball is dying it was once very alive, and keeping with the Luddite pretentions of baseball pastoralists, it was television, domed stadiums and free agency *et al* which killed lost golden age. The poet did it: mixing the sentimentalist's nostalgic belief that "it's only a game" with the unsentimental detachment of the old school P.I., he or she can walk away but only because "real" baseball has *gone Hollywood*; just as Roy Hobbs does or Bill Granger's Jimmy Drover does, "leaving behind the national pastime on network television. They were all tired of this stupid baseball game" (225).

Baseball fiction finally is deeply conflicted by expressions of pastoral yearning. This conflict is not a radical dualism which simply pits city mice against country mice, and depending on the author, giving the cheese to the most deserving. In the most determinedly urban texts, the pastoral vision of the lost beautiful game can serve as

restoring celebrations; in the lushest recollections of a grand old ballpark's sunny green can come the harshest reminders of the often harmful limitations of the game's myths.

FOUR

Everybody Loves Baseball:
Baseball Fiction and Difference.

Do you know baseball at all? Because centerfield is like some observation post, a kind of control tower, where you are able to see everything and everyone, to understand what's happening the instant it happens, not only by the sound of the struck bat, but by the spark of the movement that goes through the infielders in the first second that the ball comes flying at them; and once it goes beyond them, "It's mine," you call, "it's mine," and then after it you go. For in centerfield, if you can get it, it is yours. Oh, how unlike my home it is to be in centerfield, where no one will appropriate unto himself anything that I say is mine!

Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*

I cannot stand and sing the national anthem. I cannot salute the flag; knowing that I am a black man in a white world.

Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had it Made*

"What It Was Always Meant To Be"

Baseball's pastoral glorifies the familiar setting of the sport. Interrupting the Edenic reveries of the pastoral are the inevitable reminders of *the fix* and the very human, often unfair conditions of baseball's little world. Fictional ballplayers collide with the issues of real baseball (often interacting textually between the real and the fictional) and are forced out of pleasant green mythologies to confront the inequalities of the city.

Baseball is a social experience. It takes eighteen people to play a real game and a frustrating number to even stage a scrub game ("Town Ball" often took 15 people per side). Those who have ever played ball, even in the most casual recreational settings, will acknowledge that its play is complicated and energized by the social engineering that forms a team. The coming together of individuals in a competitive atmosphere often tends to exaggerate individual traits or even reveal previously hidden traits of those individuals. Those who really *hate* the game rarely do so out of a calculated disdain for the sport's "boring" aesthetic properties: their despair is often expressed as some kind of aversion to patterns in athletic socialization (*i.e.* stupid jocks, demanding fathers, trivial chatter of cranks, dumb drunks at a game, *etc.*). Individual differences and individual values then are often highlighted as the demands of the group or the team take to the field.

All team sports obviously require a commitment to the group. In baseball, the inclusion of quantified individual achievement within the context of a team's success is often hailed as an example of just how American the game really is. Rather than finding its social justification purely in the surrender of the individual to the team, baseball is ideologically enveloped by the promise of American capitalism. Politicians and Kiwanis club speakers, eager to find positive metaphors to illustrate their faith in American exceptionalism, can always be counted on to extemporize on the "character building" lessons of organized sports and how the victory of the local team thanks to the local superstar and the local role players is the perfect illustration of the truth of the motto *e pluibus unum*. And baseball, because of the wider historical swath it cuts (rather than just its mix of individual records within team success, a component of most team sports), becomes an unusually rich area of popular culture to interrogate the premise that out of many one can emerge.

Baseball is frequently celebrated as a real life demonstration of equal opportunity, often associated with the section of the *Declaration of Independence* which states "all men are created equal." While baseball is a social experience, the playing field represents a society where play is the only apparent context. The game itself is supposedly apolitical, defined by rules rather than birthright. The inequalities of birth are of no use on the field

where achievement is measured in equitable terms. Sporting goods manufacturer A.G. Spalding (the man most responsible for creating the Doubleday myth and for spelling out the tradition of how baseball mirrors the American spirit) writes that the ballplayer "may be a veritable Beau Brummel in social life. He may be the Swellest Swell of the Smart Set in Swelldom; but when he dons his Base Ball suit, he says good-bye to society, doffs his gentility, and becomes -- just a Ball Player!" (Spalding 7). Or as sportswriter Peter Golenbock, idealistically extending the embrace to the grandstands, puts it "No tie binds this country like Baseball. Black, white, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Moslem, gay or straight, pro-abortion, pro-life . . . In Fenway Park Harvard professors sit and talk the same language with the fans with the blue collars. All agree: Jim Rice never hits in the clutch" (Golenbock 6). Naturally this kind of image of a totally inclusive day-out-at-the-park is appealing in a country marked with severe social divisions, and baseball, particularly in its fictional representations, has become an auspicious pulpit from which to address these deep divisions.

Ken Burns' *Baseball* series, for example, went to great and solemn lengths to assert that baseball, despite its flaws, represents the aspirations of *all* Americans. The television series was particularly dedicated to historicizing the idea that baseball's social narrative is an improving one, unavoidably amending its forms toward racial and gender equality. Thus, in the PBS documentary, integrating the Major Leagues is usually prefaced by a John Chancellor voice-over *leitmotif* that claims baseball was in the process of becoming "*what it was always meant to be.*" The game itself, like the Constitution, is essentially correct, and in order to ameliorate America the essential truths must be heeded. The faults of the game are secondary corruptions of its primary moral value. It is reasonable to claim baseball as a meritocracy, a place that only rewards merit regardless of the background of the player. But the rationale of this image (and even its intermittent truths) can't help from being severely tested by the inequalities that have shaped the society where baseball is actually played.

"Official spokesmen for organized baseball like to boast of how the game has been one of the frontburners under the melting pot" (Zoss 125); however, baseball's status as *the* American pastime has placed it in an exaggerated position in terms of how it equitably facilitated ethnic assimilation. From "Chief" Louis Sockalexis to John McGraw to Hank Greenberg to Joe DiMaggio to Roberto Clemente to Hideo Nomo the game is spotlighted as the most likely place ethnic pride can be translated into *what's right about America.* The importance of baseball in the attempt of minorities to find acceptance is rarely as clear in the retelling of baseball's segregated past and of how important Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier was in popularizing the claims of civil rights leaders. As John Egerton

puts it in his study of the pre-Civil Rights South, *Speak Now Against the Day*, "In baseball, an institution of much greater importance to many Americans than politics -- the message of April 11, 1947, was not a whisper but a shout" (422). In *A League of Their Own* the achievements of what once may have been dismissed as little more than a novelty act are placed alongside the achievements of the exclusionary major leagues in order to question the very foundations of popular American sports.

TV & Equality

Going to the ballpark means interacting with thousands of people. (Hundreds if you're a fan of the Pirates or the Expos.) While the representation of the fan is often locked into polar expressions of either vulgar support ("kill the umpire") or potatoish inertia, the actual fan is often less dramatically committed.[1] Marxist readings of professional sport of course pay closer attention to the creation of a passive entertainment consumer as a measure of social control in a capitalist society. This reading, however limited, is useful in identifying official gestures that repeatedly approve of the social endorsements of professional sports. For example, the so-called "apolitical" status of the sport may make the fan unreceptive to change, even if it's clearly justified, as it challenges cherished ideas of what the sport is *not* supposed to be about (i.e. "I can understand why Indian groups are mad about the 'Tomahawk Chop' but, really, it's just a game"). Created "traditions" may not be motivated by a desire for institutional inequities, but they can become the most heartfelt entrenchments of stereotypes.

Fan loyalty is the main plank in baseball's financial success. Recreating an "apolitical" meritocratic text for baseball may serve the best financial interest of professional baseball, but does arise out of the fan's genuine affection for the sport. A fan might like to see some alterations to the game but would probably not petition to have seven outfielders. It is safe to assume that the writers and readers of baseball literature are also *fans* of the game. (The most stinging condemnations of the lies in baseball come from disillusioned fans who learned a thing or two about the truth along the way.) Officially, the role of the fan has been crafted, in part, as a scholar. Spalding's treatise sends out the casting call for the All-American fan:

---

[1] The financial success of concession stands, of mascots, of scoreboards, *etc.* are evidence enough that for a significant amount of time the fan is *not* watching the game.

> In every town, village and city is the local wag. He is a Base Ball fan from infancy. He knows every player in the League by sight and by name. He is a veritable encyclopædia of the game. He can tell you when the Knickerbockers were organized, and who led the batting list in every team of the National and American League last year. He never misses a game. His witticisms, ever seasoned with spice, hurled at the visitors and now and then at the Umpire, are as thoroughly enjoyed by all who hear them as is any other feature of the sport. His words of encouragement to the hometeam, his shouts of derision to the opposing players, find sympathetic responses in the hearts of all present. (11)

While the description sounds as confidently deluded as the *What Sort Of Man Reads Playboy?* series, it is surprisingly continuous with the contemporary understanding of what a fan actually is. And though early baseballers have been sharply criticized for being stuffy proponents of the "gentleman's game" the Spalding fan curiously seems more lively than the identity of the fan exemplified by the op-ed writers, politicians, or celebrities who provided the commentary in Ken Burns' *Baseball.*

What newspapers and to a greater extent television have done is create a larger nation of baseball critics and scholars. Media reproductions of the games have authorized a text outside the social demands of the game (a need to play, a need to attend) and allow the fan to contemplate the shape of the games at their personal leisure. In the same vein as Glenn Gould's claim that recordings take classical music out of the discomforting pretentions of concerts and actually offer the listener a better chance to hear the music, the media-reproduced baseball text gives the fan a chance to see and hear things about the game they would not be able to see if they were sitting in the bleachers or behind home plate for that matter. (The baseball stadium itself, with its luxury boxes, box seats, grandstands and bleachers is an affirmation of sharply delineated class divisions.)

Television in particular has radicalized the baseball text by making the truths of play self-evident, particularly with the use of instant-replay and graphic analysis and by extending the geography of the all important fan base. Of course it would be wrong to suppose that the pre-television crowd did not have its critics and scholars -- the television sports broadcast is a continuation of a form developed in radio. The literary forms of baseball, however, obviously can't be called on to recreate games with the same detail as a radio / TV broadcast. A transcript of a Vin Scully radio broadcast may seem poetic if it is the call of the bottom ninth of a Koufax no-hitter, but a transcript of a complete game would probably run over one hundred pages (and a sizeable fraction of this would be plugs for Farmer John's pork sausages). Baseball writers may (with good reason) wax eloquent about the mellifluousness of a Red Barber or an Ernie Harwell, but this one-of-a-kind performative discourse is rarely captured by the baseball author. No match for the voice

and the following camera that detail the real games, the literary artists must often polish the memories of the game we most likely saw on television.

A good deal of the best baseball literature takes place in the pre-television past not only for the obvious nostalgic reasons but because this past is ready to be visually reinterpreted (there are no instant replays of Ty Cobb going into the stands to beat up a spectator). Many viewers of Ken Burns' *Baseball* may have felt as I did that the series was at its best when dealing with the part of baseball history that had no existing video records and where Burns's signature montages of old photgraphs were transformed into a kind of video replay. The series' subsequent attempts to narrate an already adequately filmed history seemed less illuminating. What the Ken Burns series attempts to do is draw the 19th century spirit of baseball and the lost stories of its earlier games into *television history.* And by this I certainly don't mean the creation of a synthetic history, but the creation of a history which enfolds the often hazy developments of the past into the assumptions of the courted wide-audience. Hence, PBS's *Baseball* had little about the sport's rule, equipment and strategy changes and more about how the essence of the game is meant to embody American virtue.

In a compelling essay which tracks the development in football audiences from "the local rootedness" of fan support to the TV era , Michael Oriard writes:

> The change has not been simply one of loss. Nostalgic golden-agers too easily forget, for example, that segregation -- Jim Crow baseball and football -- was one consequence of tribal identification with sports. Television and the integration of sports advanced together and are more than coincidentally related. I would hesitantly suggest that television has by this time nearly deracinated the Black athletes who dominate football and basketball for young viewers such as my son. (38)

The "globalizing" effect of television broadcasts helped bring baseball out of its more embarrassing traditions, but baseball itself is struggling to maintain its appeal to new immigrants and traditional minorities. Baseball's fan base, along with its critics and scholars, is getting greyer, and I don't think it is cynical to suggest the interest in baseball's literary products is part of a nostalgia for the baseball that ushered in the television era. Texts like PBS's *Baseball* or *A League of Their Own* draft baseball into the service of representing America's idealistic meritocracy, but also think of baseball as an object of a better past -- admirable as it performed the virtues of America to its older, predominantely white and male crowd. Certainly *literary ball* is not as diverse as the game it celebrates. While there's considerable reason to dismiss many current baseball texts as flourishings of politically correct rectitude, the baseball fiction that highlights issues of integration can't be

so quickly labelled. For that matter, even the most clichéd distillations of baseball's approach to America's inequalities should not be dismissed, as these texts can sharply dramatize the conflicts inherent in the more sophisticated fictions.

Dr. Quinn, Mgr.

Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman is a CBS TV drama that is set in the late 19th century in Colorado. It episodically follows the story of the title character, an idealistic doctor who tries to find her place in the American frontier. The scriptwriting is unambiguously aimed towards the show's largely female audience and styles a populist working-woman's drama into the *Bonanza* formula. Mixing a *Waltons*-like faith in traditional values with re-evaluations about the west and the role of women, *Dr. Quinn* modestly wins its unambitious timeslot (it airs on Saturday evening when the number of television viewers is relatively low) and continues to maintain a respectable audience.

On September 30 1995, while Major League Baseball was winding up for a full slate of playoff games airing on other stations, *Dr. Quinn* countered with its own baseball text. In this particular episode, a group of travelling professional ballplayers arrives in Colorado Springs and challenges the locals to a "friendly" game. The travelling pros promise to split the proceeds with the needy townsfolk. Of course, while the pros claim they are "spreading virtue" -- and moral leader Dr. Quinn assents that the highly structured rules of baseball attest to its virtue -- they turn out to be slickers: the fix is in and they take the townspeople's money. The outraged Coloradans force the pros to accept a rematch, and in this contest the resolve of the townsfolk to play the game *as it was meant to be played* brings them to victory.

The arc of the plot works like any sports fiction quickie: a team is challenged by "bad" outsiders, and, while they experience early difficulties in meeting this challenge, by sticking to the true spirit of (American) play they are able to vanquish their corrupt foes. (This device is also a familiar one in basketball or football fictions where the team is always sadly down at halftime but after a rousing speech come back to prevail.) As Dr. Quinn, who takes up the manager's cap for the rematch, declares: "they have the talent but we have the heart. For them it's a mere business transaction but for us it means so much more. It's about saving the town's pride." The town's pride in *Dr. Quinn* extends further in its use of baseball as social commentary, as it makes an explicit statement about integration as the rational means to success. The hearty Colorado Springers beat the all white, all male pro team with a more demographically representative roster of townsfolk. On Dr. Quinn's team African Americans, Native Americans, women and children alike get their turn at bat.

As the constitutionally-minded Dr. Quinn herself points out to the disbelievers, "I'm a member of this town, show me where in the rule book it says *men only*." The advanced consciousness of Dr. Quinn is not just the doomed articulation of principle, it is integral to her eventual out-managing of the professionals. That the improbability of the townspeople's victory is preceeded by a hosannah for fair play is not news, but the show's retroactive integration of baseball is a fairly developed commentary on how multi-culturalism and feminism have been popularized. While one TV show does not represent anything like the "popular imagination" (and neither do the modest ratings of *Dr. Quinn*), this episode, taken in concert with an understanding of how baseball tends to reconstitute its history for the sake of the wide audience, is an ambitious attempt to fix certain baseball virtues in the popular imagination.

The *Dr. Quinn* game is less "melting-pot" and more "mosaic" in its view of on-field integration. Not only does the Native American player steal bases in a stealthy and stereotypically *mystic* way, the old and the children are introduced in roles (pinch hitting, pinch running *etc.*) that validate the wisdom of affirmative action in job placements. The travelling pros -- who anachronistically embody all the faults of modern baseball -- are representatives of all the unenlightened fixers who do not "get it." Fictional baseball texts have the luxury of using the traditions to mount a critique of the very same traditions; claiming it isn't about winning, all the while winning. Separated from its real history, and accommodated in a contemporary show about old fashioned values, baseball can look more like "what it was always meant to be."

In baseball fictions the subject of racial, ethnic, and gender tensions are continually drawn-out, not as a declaration that the game has been a sterling bulwark of American equality but because its real history as an all-white, all-male bastion makes it a dramatically imposing institution to challenge. The potential for strife in the heart of the game that is supposedly based on peacable, equitable rules makes the tensions of integration palpable. As sports are entrenched in their own back-formed rationales of ritual, of tradition, of deference to the *laissez-faire* idea that "it's only a game," there is a reluctance to accept change -- and demands to change can end up being read by the fans as un-patriotic spoil-sportism. So, instead of asking the game to change it is asked to be what it always was supposed to be.

The Jackie Robinson story is fascinating precisely because of the severity of the institutional racism that it historicizes. More than any baseball story it leaps out of the formal concerns of the game and into a real challenge for American society to change. *A League of Their Own* is amusing because it unfolds in sarcastic contrast to the more noxious macho myths about what it takes to play the game. And today, texts of

reconstructed gender roles in baseball may even be more subversive than desegregationist texts as they attempt to challenge the still-operative principles of "manliness" that underpins sport itself. The story of the gay player who must come out to his straight teammates is repeated in texts because of the obvious drama of unresolved conflict: placing a qualified gay athlete in a situation where the traditional homophobic bonds associated with sports may well supercede its traditional public declarations of "meritocratic" placement.

Baseball fiction cannot offer a reading list which reflects the totality of concerns about inequality and national identity. (For example, there is no great baseball novel about the Negro Leagues by an African American author.) As Cordelia Candelaria puts it, "Mirroring the pervasive ethnocentrism and male chauvinism of American society, baseball fiction is, with few notable exceptions, largely about white men participating in a closed activity of the dominant -- that is white, male, Christian and capitalist -- culture" (3). Though the list of exceptions has, I think, grown more notable since Candelaria wrote this, the declaration is an important one to keep in mind. By paying attention to the appealing trope of baseball as a pre-eminent example of *e pluribus unum*, we'll see that it is not without unresolved anxieties for different groups to *play America*.

The Mascot Issue

Establishing an explicitly American identity for baseball has always been a project for its most ardent boosters. Spalding's fostering of the Doubleday myth was inspired by the passionate nationalism of the sporting goods manufacturer and of his cronies. Over the years the Doubleday myth may have been discredited as official history[2] but the veneer of patriotic foundationalism in baseball has not. Claims that the game represents a kind of democratic ideal, where all will get their fair shake, is not the start of a promotional untruth, but is a continuation of attempts to assert the open Americaness of the game. This assertion, repeated in many ways from Spalding to Dr. Quinn, however, collides with the American sporting world's textual (mis)use of real Native American culture to establish a practise which some claim is founded on exclusion and privilege.

Certainly one of the most publicized issues from sports in recent years has been the controversy over the continued use of Native American mascots and logos by professional

---

2 The Doubleday myth has not disappeared completely. In the course of writing this study I have read countless articles and reviews and seen numerous TV clips which refer confidently to Doubleday's contribution to America.

and collegiate teams. While concern over the use of these trademarks is not entirely new,[3] it did nonetheless come into prominence as a media issue during the 1991 World Series as Native Americans protested these mascots in general and the Atlanta Braves' in particular. The Braves fans' use of the "tomahawk chop" and their chanting of an "Indian war song" to rally their team, continue to be singled out as particularly offensive, but the hurt feelings about this practise were not limited to Fulton County. From the Washington Redskins to the McGill Redmen, claims have been made that the use of these nicknames trivializes Native traditions and sanctifies harsh stereotypes about Natives and that these indignities would not be tolerated by any other identifiable ethnic group. Why not the Washington Negros? Or the McGill White Boys? As poet Deb Smith earnestly puts it,

> Tomahawk chopping cuts deep.
> I just thought I should tell you
> It's not just a game or a symbol to me (qtd in Davis 13)

The protests not only introduce a record of collective offence, but also address the systematic use of Native American stereotypes in creating an identity for American play. From games of Cowboys and Indians to the Indian-inspired rites of the American Boy Scouts, the reconstructed "way of the Indian" is deeply entrenched in the American history of play. These games have become associated with innocent child's play and American success, the protests were often seen as assaulting the sanctified "traditions" and "Americaness" which form part of baseball's (and the U.S.'s) ideological framework. In her essay, "Protest Against the Use of Native American Mascots: A Challenge to the Traditional American Identity" Laurel R. Davis characterizes the protest as a legitimate challenge to "a particular version of American identity, the version that is built on the prevalent mythology of the Amercan West" (16).

Given this sturdy foundation on which the stereotypes were built, the Native protesters found out it is difficult to break through the sports world's wall of protective traditions. Baseball, like sport itself, has no birthplace but the tradition of using Indian names and claiming the legends of the West as codes for play has made baseball feel more American, and challenging these names and codes might seem unpatriotic.[4] The popular

---

[3] In his essay, "Tribal Names and Mascots in Sports," Dennis J. Banks reports that the American Indian Movement (AIM) filed its first complaint about the use of mascots *etc.* in 1970. (5)

[4] The attribution of the "invention" of modern sports to the Olympics of classical Greek society reads like the Doubleday Myth of sports history. The need for myths of origin is understandable, but the transition from sports as religious or sacred ritual to secular pastime

stereotyes of Native Americans have translated well in the American sports scene and find their way into other racially motivated interpretations of physical performance. (The racist reduction of the closer-to-nature athlete is well known to many African Americans: when a white player excels it is often cast as the fruits of the *protestant work ethic* but when a person of color excels it is often reproduced as an expression of *god given talent.*) Native Americans, often romanticized for their physical prowess and bravery, could be "packaged" as indigenous good-luck fetishes (Slowikowski 24) and used to channel a stereotypical aggression (tomahawk-chopping) within the fans and players of modern American sport.

Opponents of the recent protests run hot and cold but, for the most part, are not terribly concerned with the historical grievances of the Natives. For the most part they tend to be dismissive (and not without some reason) that it is just the latest collegiate "politically correct" attack on their harmless fun. Why must we take everything so seriously? This defense is quite sturdy and difficult to penetrate as the aggrieved takes on the mantle of the victimized minority. As Cynthia Syndor Slowikowski says in her essay "Cultural Performance and Sport Mascots," "images that may be ideologically lethal or untrue can be projected onto physical culture because physical culture seems naive and standardized" (30). In a climate where "it's only a game" is the nostalgic antidote to all the compromises the fan perceives in the modern game, any "outside" disturbance can add to the sense that all our positive traditions are being dismantled. Even those who can validate the hurt feelings of the protesters may eventually start to wonder *where will it all end*?

Some at the University of Massachusetts may have wondered where it would all end when even the historically cherished nickname "Minutemen" was duly protested for its sexist, militaristic and colonial implications. The impression of a constant and humorless dissatisfaction coming from the usual suspects has made attempts to address the issue of naming and re-naming all the more susceptible to satire. Are all things subject to change once somebody claims to be offended? Would the San Diego Padres be forced to be renamed the San Diego Unitarians? Would the short protest the New York Giants? What about the Minnesota *Vikings*? Davis's assertion that "mascots that represent other ethnic groups do not tend to have the same association with aggression that the native American mascots do"(14) still does not account for the tolerance of the obviously demeaning moniker of the Notre Dame *Fighting Irish.*

---

is difficult to track. Claiming that there are vestigal ritual elements within baseball is a popular trope, but the moment where ritual ends and modern sport begins is not historically delineated nor is it determined that one is in fact the result of the other.

While provocatively stereotypical, the absence of a significant Irish-American discontent with the "Fighting Irish" nickname accounts for its durability. It wasn't long ago when the incredibly racist *Amos n' Andy* was one of the most popular radio programs in America and then became the very first television show with an all-black cast.[5] *Amos n' Andy* was at the centre of American popular culture. Yet when civil rights leaders compelled CBS to stop syndicating the show in 1966, *Amos n' Andy* began to disappear from the cultural landscape. As discredited as blackface routines, the show no longer has any claim to its place in the so-called "Golden Age of Radio and Television," and there is no discernable public nostalgia for the show. The disappearance of *Amos n' Andy*, while no loss to television viewers, gives the television industry a chance to reappraise its golden age without the embarrassment of truth. And as few people remember or refer to the New York Yankees as the "Highlanders" or the Dodgers as the "Superbas" as they were once known, it seems likely that in the face of concerned protest, team nicknames can change and the old names will largely be forgotten.

Perhaps the most intriguing rebuttals to the recent protests about the use of Native American images in sports have been in the assertions that use of these images is intended as a tribute to Native Americans. In his essay "Tribal Names and Mascots in Sports" Dennis J. Banks, who was an outspoken critic of the practice back in 1970, acknowledges that some Universities can be respectful, "there are many such schools. These schools, year after year, portray native people in real, positive images" (7). Here the issue is refracted in complexities which might not work as well as *Crossfire* soundbites, but begin to resemble careful *research*, finding what is objectionable not so much in the generalities of a tradition of representation but in specific practices by specific teams. Hence the use of the *Braves* name is perhaps not as problematic as the attendant use of "the tomahawk chop" (to say nothing of their erstwhile mascot "Chief-Noc-A-Homa".)[6] The use of Chief Illiwenek as the mascot for the University of Illinois is perhaps less disturbing than *how* Chief Illiwenek chooses to rouse support with stereotypical war-whooping (Slowikowski 27).

---

[5] The creators of *Amos n' Andy* -- and their radio voices -- were caucasian but they were put aside for African American actors in the TV series (McNeil 42). For obvious reasons, *Amos n' Andy* is rarely recognized as the first African-American television show as the more thoughtfully integrationist *I, Spy* and *Julia* are usually identified as black TV "firsts."

[6] The Braves attempted to rid themselves of the egregious mascot in 1981 but right after his dismissal, the Braves went into a slump and the fans brought him back for a few more seasons.

That "tribute" is a constitutive element of the development of the use of mascots makes it more important to read the complex interaction between the exploitational and the respectful use of Native imagery. Recognizing that white America has "a complex kinship (involving fear, reliance, friendship, dominance) to the native American cultures" (Davis 25) extends to the traditional use of mascots in baseball and, ultimately, to baseball-culture's newfound expressions of *united we stand.* The novels which pay tribute to the efforts of minorities to play America articulate this "complex kinship" with *the other,* and whether these texts are actually tributes or appropriations meant to feed the largely white middle class audiences' appetite for certain stereotypes might depend on who you ask *(Divided we fall).*

The Cleveland Indian

If the NFL's Washington Redskins are guilty of the most sharply racist use of Native American imagery, the mascot of the Cleveland Indians, Chief Wahoo, is the most painfully ridiculous. Chief Wahoo, a Sunday funnies character from the 30s, is a caricature of a grinning, big-nosed Indian that adorns the caps of the Cleveland franchise's players. (Chief Wahoo was reinstated on the Cleveland cap in the 1980s in keeping with Major League Baseball's trend towards "old-style" simulacra). That the Cleveland franchise would use such a demeaning caricature is doubly unfortunate insofar as the claim that their name is a tribute to Native Americans is perhaps stronger than any other sports organization. And this particular history has been popularized in defense of the traditions of these nicknames.

The story goes that in the late 19th century the Cleveland baseball franchise was known as "The Spiders," but the popularity of outfielder "Chief" Louis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian, was so strong that the team was renamed "Indians" in his honor.[7] It appears that Sockalexis was an outstanding player -- one account declaring that he "so electrified Maine's summer leagues that opposing manager Gilbert Patten, who would later write books under the name Burt L. Standish, modeled his Frank Merriwell character after the adolescent Sockalexis" (Rushin 101).

---

[7] Although it may be possible that the honour was bestowed in concert for more faddish reasons, *i.e.*"because several teams nearby were called the Redskins. Some say that the rowdy behaviour of members of the team at a party held by owner James C. Dunn also figured in the choice of nicknames" (McBride 118).

It could be said that Luke Salisbury's novel *The Cleveland Indian: The Legend of King Saturday* (1992) was published at the right time: in the middle of a public debate which helped to popularize this history of the Indians' nickname. Salisbury, the author of the non-fiction chronicle *The Answer is Baseball*, takes up the story of Sockalexis not so much to serve the need to reflect upon forgotten minority contributions to baseball, but to present the mercurial career of the ballplayer as the basis for an American legend. Sockalexis is veiled as "King Saturday," an outstanding former college athlete who has a brief but exciting turn in the pros. (Sockalexis only played 87 games in 3 years for the Spiders.) King Saturday is a hard living, hard drinking outfielder and sometime gambler whose attachment to the game is primarily mercenary.[8] Though his first characteristic gestures in the novel are to entice the narrator with whiskey and to cut off a man's ear with a knife, King Saturday is presented as much more than a stereotypical drunken savage. King Saturday is both Frank Merriwell and Babe Ruth, both Adonis and Lothario, whose insights into America lead him to the "heightened consciousness" of the fixer: -- "If he throws games, it's 'cause he's smart" (85).

The novel is told from the point of view of King Saturday's friend Henry Harrison, who describes himself as a "self-absorbed, hero-worshipping Harvard lawyer" (9). And in a baseball world where the "kranks" -- the 19th century word for "fans" -- are always "ready to yell at an Indian or a man with an education"(40) Henry invents a kinship with King Saturday. Henry's hook as a narrator is that he really wants to *own* a professional baseball team. It is an unusual insight for a fan, and for Henry it is almost spiritual: "wanting to own a ballclub gave me a secret, transcendent virtue" (49). He loves baseball but, by locating his vision above the playing field, Henry will eventually develop the cynical understanding of the game shared by all fixers.

The friendship between the white lawyer and the Native ballplayer obviously echoes the "Fiedler pair" of American adventure stories, where the native is less contained than his more European companion who seeks the liberation the native embodies. That is, King Saturday is a less repressed version of Henry. Henry turns his back on the Apollonian forms of his past (his crucial friendship with fellow Ivy Leaguer Ned Phillips) and becomes friends with the suspect, Dionysian Native. Henry casually admits that "Saturday could have been something supernatural -- a Caliban or Mr. Hyde, who acted

---

8 Saturday's Dionysian behaviour also echoes the alleged off-field behaviour of Sockalexis. The *Baseball Bibliography* -- a resource guide for sports journalists -- stoops to making the racist comment that Sockalexis died from "overexposure to firewater" (Smith 770).

my basest instincts" (27). While they both went to college, Saturday is cast more in the modern image of the varsity star (brought to school more specifically for sports) while Henry is a Harvard lawyer whose primary value to the Cleveland team seems to be his access to the talented star.

Athletic settings naturally highlight the physical and are particularly susceptible to racialized theories about the "naturally gifted athlete." The more King Saturday performs as an athlete the more allied he is to his "Indianess." Though Saturday is described as "a Catholic, connected more to the losing history of Canada than to Tecumseh's conspiracy"(188), Saturday's otherness becomes the signature that ties together all his athletic performances. His physical gifts and his sporting adventurousness, more than his heritage, define him as "Indian." King Saturday is so strongly typified as the American Indian that even when he is in Cuba and Mexico he is known as "*El Indio*"(243 f).

The difference that marginalizes Saturday in society is in turn eroticized by society. Erotically constructing Saturday's difference, Henry gushes "The Indian looked dark as an African: a sort of glistening, ebony Ajax"(33) whereas, his erstwhile Ivy League companion Ned is dismissed as his "porcelain friend" (47). Henry's personal indulgence in Saturday's sex appeal, observing that "Saturday's stomach was all one smooth flat muscle. He was one of the few men I ever saw who looked better without a uniform" (16), are measures of Henry's own repression. When Henry feels threatened by Saturday's powerful sexuality, he uses the same sexualized differentiations vituperatively against the man: "Saturday was a creature of the night: something horrible . . . I hated him" (221).

Baseball is a projection of civilization and urban settlement, and Henry's alliance with Saturday is a form of rebellion against baseball. (Without getting into the obvious etymological significance in "Saturday," naming the star "King Saturday" at least avoids the inevitable nickname of "Chief.")[9] Declared "a law unto himself since the day he was born" (194), the saturnalian Native not only challenges Henry's Ivy League roots and the stability of his understanding of what the game is supposed to be about, but modern America itself with its wars of aggression and its institutionalized racism. Henry's primary understanding is literary; he often designates his reality in a series of carefully drawn literary allusions. Characteristically distancing himself from the thoughts of "Mr. Henry James," the lawyer seeks the frontier adventurism of a Cooper novel, and tries to see in

---

9 This was the real-life nickname of Sockalexis and of several other Native ballplayers including the only Native American in baseball's hall of fame, "Chief" Charles Albert Bender, a Chippewa Indian who pitched brilliantly for Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics in the early twentieth century.

baseball the masculine energies and social escape traditionally associated with the west. When his former colleague Ned makes the political argument that "The frontier has gone. It's gone to Cuba, to the Phillippines, to China itself. The British sun is setting, ours is rising. This country won't be without a frontier long" Henry pacifically counters that "The frontier has gone to the ballpark" (124).

Henry's attempt to find the frontier (or a version of it) in the ballpark, is an exercise in literary sublimation. The frontier hasn't gone to the ballpark; the paradigms of American literature have. *The Cleveland Indian*'s sophisticated sense of history is held together by the narrator's desire to believe in the "safe" temporal space of baseball. Though Henry declares that "I wanted to share the dangerous freedom of ballplayers"(73), this freedom also threatens the safety he craves. And in dictating the terms of his rejection of all things out of Boston ("where they look down on Clevelanders as well as Indians"[188]), Henry may have to surrender his neat assessment of baseball's value.

Baseball is a window through which the Indian is reseen, imaginatively drawing the present day of the sport to the start of the frontier. The historical attention of the novel often allegorizes today's game and its faults. For example, the baseball in *The Cleveland Indian* is also backdropped by the news and events of "the flapdoodle of Hearst and McKinley" (51), the Spanish-American War. For the war, ballgames are reduced to garish pageants to help recruitment and stir up nationalistic passions. These kinds of ceremonies have been seen in ballparks during most major American military conflicts and is acutely reminiscent of Gulf War propaganda. Henry, sitting through a pre-game dramatization of the American stakes in the war, sarcastically assesses the patriotic excesses of the dumb-show; when asked "How can anyone sit when men are preparing to die for freedom?" he answers "I think they're preparing to die for sugar prices" (56).

Baseball fans are seen as natural suckers for this kind of show and a great source of revenue and cannon fodder, to serve in a war where "more men had died from Armour meat and malaria than Spanish bullets" (235). The kranks, "despite their ability to remember the most arcane baseball matters, are poor anthropologists" (59). Always on Saturday's side when he's performing some incredible feat,[10] the fans are also equally ready to start chanting "Injun! Injun! Drunken Injun!"(40). Nearly a century before the Atlanta Braves made it to the World Series, the "derisive theatre" (59) of acting out Native stereotypes, complete with "minature tomahawks"(101), compulsively draws on historical

---

10 Some of the novels most dramatic recreations are the tension-building preludes to Saturday's incredible feats: a long-distance throwing contest, leaping the gap of a rising drawbridge, hitting against a primitive pitching machine, an outstanding barehanded catch.

oppression all the while claiming immunity from history. The frontier of the ballpark is constructed as something removed from the effects of historical and political projects. "The past shouldn't depress a krank"(129) Henry says, keeping alive the frontier of baseball. Salisbury, who is himself what one might call a "radical purist" in his faith in baseball, stated in a keynote address to a society of baseball historians "I have a theory. My theory is baseball is its own self-contained world, and has been since 1876. Baseball is an alternative, imaginary world running parallel to this one. Safe, perfect, imaginary" (Salisbury, "Address" 238).

King Saturday and Henry are not fans. Saturday's game-fixing and Henry's plans for ownership naturally collude toward a cynical overview of the game which starts as a dismissal of the suckers but ends as a kind of apology for lost faith in the sport. Henry's "Half in and half out"(280) position allows him to maintain enough distance from the game's harsher realities but to profit nonethless, where King Saturday's fully excluded position means he must confront the very worst possibilities in order to get paid. In the end, Henry half-heartedly blames Saturday's depredations on a lack of love for the game: "he didn't love baseball"(284) Henry says as a kind of autopsy. He even reveals that Saturday loves "that gladiator's game"(98), football. Though Henry claims his baseball utopianism is part of his past, his continual evocations of what he used to believe still helps raise baseball's cultural capital:

> I used to say baseball was without sin and think the game -- green as spring, harmonious as Thomas Jefferson's mind, symmetrical as the Old and New Testaments -- was the best of us; Twain's river, the yeoman farmer clearing rocks from his field and prejudice from his mind. (142)

And then, even more surprisingly lachrymose for a cultivated man who wants to *own* a team,

> My answer to my disappointments had always been baseball -- baseball -- safe because it was its own world; its own country, green and separate. But Eden was for sale. (150)

The discovery that Eden is for sale is common in baseball fiction, but Henry's vulnerability to this discovery is surprising. Coming from a character who understands the real lesson of baseball is that "the strong usually beat the weak" (202), his statements about baseball's "green and separate" space are like catechisms which nominally rescue him from the anarchy of his Indian adventure.

Integration or assimiliation are not possible for Saturday, and his *finalé* in the football-crazy west assures that baseball remains "safe" in its civilized, East Coast quarters.

The fact that Saturday "didn't love baseball" suggests that he did not (and *could not*) love America and the Indian was destined to be subsumed by the nation's coarse hegemonies. Unlike the future generations of baseball-playing immigrants who have no style of play (there is no Irish style, no Jewish style, no Italian style of play), baseball fiction's native players, from Salisbury's King Saturday to Kinsella's Drifting Away of *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* to *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman's* brave, will often play *like an Indian* in the anarchic wild outside the white lines.[11]

The Cleveland Indian, it turns out, is not a tribute to the man who gave the Cleveland Indians their name. Salisbury's King Saturday is not composed only as a form of redress to past injustice, but as a way to bring the Indian adventure to baseball literature. Too wild to play by baseball's pure rules, and smart enough to expose its corruptible heart, the Indian retreats into a debased western scene. The Native American ballplayer, unlike the waves of immigrants that would be welcomed as baseball-playing Americans, can't be welcomed "inside" the proposition of baseball and remains on the outside of dramas of ballfield integration.

The Celebrant

Eric Rolfe Greenberg's novel *The Celebrant* (1983) is quite similar to *The Cleveland Indian*. Both are turn-of-the-century stories that frame a kind of celebrity biography. Some notable historical figures from the game (John McGraw and Patsy Tebeau in particular) appear in both books and taken together the novels interestingly form complimentary ideas about baseball from the turn-of-the-century to the 1920s. Both novels are about people who are outside the dominant culture, and the game of baseball becomes an important metaphor for the desirability and impossibility of assimilation. As such both are fascinated with revelations of "the fix" and how this challenges accepted notions of the game and, by extension, the promises of American democracy.

The Celebrant is the story of a family of Jewish New York jewelers and the life-long relationship the narrator has with New York Giants pitcher Christy Mathewson. Mathewson, whom Studs Terkel called "Frank Merriwell in the flesh" (qtd from Ken Burns' *Baseball*), is not just a fine pitcher but a moral paragon -- "The Christian

---

11 The film *Cooperstown* (1992) is a fairly sentimental baseball-as-zen-remedy-to-male-anger-weepie and features a gracefully nuanced relationship between a white and a Native American battery (Alan Arkin and Graham Greene). Of course it is the Native American who must return as a spirit to rescue his white friend's baseball dream.

Gentleman" who would not pitch on Sundays (Sher 416) and whose off-field dignity was as unimpeachable as his on-field play. According to sportswriter Jack Sher, "It was impossible for Mathewson to lie, alibi, or be dishonest in any way. The code he set for honesty still stands" (417). But *The Celebrant* is not strictly a hagiographic reconstruction of Matty, nor is it simply the story of the narrator's desires to be accepted as a full-blooded American: *The Celebrant* also contextualizes some of baseball's best and worst historical moments[12] and cleverly traces the institutionalization of merchandizing, PR work, personal agents, and World Series rings as part the game's development. It is one of the *best* baseball novels, as Greenberg has found in Jackie Kapp an impressive voice which, while never overloading on trivia, finds a way to recreate lost games and moments in a dramatic spiritual quest.

The Celebrant exemplifies the identity quests which often occur in Jewish baseball fiction. Historically, the emergence of the Jewish baseball novel is not surprising: some critics see it as the inevitable mix of traditional Jewish values of play and education or as an attempt to claim something that was "nurtured in American cornfields" ("Baseball's Jewish Accent" 86). But it should also be said that the emergence of a vibrant fan-base within America's Jewish communities, particularly around the great New York teams, is perhaps an equally important antecedent to the Jewish baseball novel. Baseball may have offered Jewish Americans a vision of cultural integration, but professional baseball also offered the Jewish communities of the east coast some of the very best manifestations of its product.

In the context of immigrant fiction, however, baseball is a metaphorically quick entry into American culture and, just as importantly, an exit from the Europe of the *shtetl* fathers. Baseball-obsessed and Jewish fictional characters, like Roth's Alex Portnoy, or Richler's Jake Hersh, often use the game to inspire a creative flight from their anxieties as members of immigrant families. For these characters, professional baseball displays what Clement Greenberg typified as the American Jewish novel's essential pattern, that is "a means of flight from the restriction and squalor of the Brooklyns and the Bronxes to the wide open world which rewards the successful fugitive with space, importance, and wealth" (qtd Atlas 15). But this kind of flight may also intitiate anxieties about the dissolution of cultural identity which may ironically compound feelings of restriction within society. W.P. Kinsella's romantic Iowa with its "heaping dishes of vanilla ice cream" (*IBC* 166) sounds just like Philip Roth's Iowa with its "cylinders of cranberry sauce at

---

12 i.e. Mathewson's no hitter, Merkle's boner, Snodgrass's muff, the burning of the Polo Grounds, and the fixing of the 1919 World Series.

either end of the table!" (*Portnoy* 256), but the latter declaration is a warning as well as an invitation.

In Philip Roth's short story "The Conversion of the Jews" (1959), a Rabbi's call to a free discussion is met with an awkward silence from a boy who is starting to feel the limits of his American right to question authority. Except for the success of a Jewish ballplayer, there seems little chance for the discussion to appeal to the boy's sense of freedom: "nobody this week said a word about that hero of the past Hank Greenberg -- which limited free discussion considerably" (144). Baseball becomes emblematic not only of acceptance within America but of potential conversion, where the attempts to "fit in" can become a culture erasing assimilation, and where red-white-and-blue baseball can be, as Peter C. Bjarkman has called it, "the ultimate *shiksa*."

According to noted baseball scholar Eric Solomon:

> The value of baseball was clear as an acculturating force, as a way of assimilation particularly for Jewish immigrants who, unlike many other groups, came to stay, broke bonds with *shul* and *shtetl* -- religion and community -- and who found in baseball a center for American religion, an American city. (Solomon 50)

Thus for the main character in *The Celebrant*, Jackie Kapp / Yakov Kapinski, baseball is an early break from the bonds of his European identity: "My lefthandedness, regarded by my parents as a devil's curse, turned to my advantage in the pitcher's box. I threw a submarine ball, my knuckles grazing the dirt as I released it. 'Get those knuckles dirty, Jackie!' my infielders would shout -- Jackie, not Yakov" (12). His "christening" as the ballplaying "Jackie" also attends on a hopeful transcending of his parents' belief in sinister devil's curses.

Adopting a new, anglicized name was common enough in American industries where name-recognition was thought to be important. And although this culturally-obscuring renaming is still routine in public professions (*i.e.* Winona Ryder from Winona Horowitz), for the turn-of-the-century story of *The Celebrant* it is part of daily survival: "My brother would always be put up at the best hotels, signing as 'E. Kapp.' The name Kapinski would not be welcome on those registers" (16). Hence, Yakov's new turn as "Jackie" is neither a whole-hearted desire to switch, nor a shameful maneouver of denial. His new identity is one that is to be negotiated: as Jackie proves to be a talented young pitcher and is offered a contract, he heeds his family's despair of the "undignified" new world profession and accepts his position in the family business as a ring-maker. Even though his arm eventually gives out and he comes to his own prominence as a designer, his

decision to accept his family's position remains a moment for sad reflection on the demise of youth:

> My youth had ended on a ragged lot by the Hudson when the curve ball had beaten my arm and my spirit -- no, when I'd folded the contract into a drawer and reported for work at Uncle Sid's shop. I was on the road, yes, but as an old man hawking samples in old men's hotels, learning how I might bet to keep old men happy. (26)

On the road to sell their line of jewelry the Brothers Kapp become pioneers in the familiar practise of entertaining clients at sporting events. Though his Jewishness is never openly declared around potential clients, Jackie is continually aware of his difference, and retains a fear of the violence within Gentiles alerted to "the spectre of ingratiating Israelite gem-peddlers"(39). They can change their names but, as Jackie ironically notes later on, "they might as well have tried to rechristen Sixth Avenue" (168). They can be confronted by virulent anti-semitism at any turn. For example, when the eager Jackie first tries to meet Christy Mathewson he is confronted by Giants' utilityman Sammy Strang who says, "Listen, Jew, . . . stay away from Matty, you hear me? Stay away from him!"(35).

Nonetheless, Matty becomes the focus of the ringmaker's fascination with baseball. While Jackie's brother Eli is interested in gambling and sees the ballplayers as peers, Jackie places "The Christian Gentleman" on a pedestal. The fact that Mathewson is a college man and a thinking player (as opposed to the hardballing Irishmen who define the American sporting character of the era of *The Celebrant)* is important to the sensitive ex-ballplayer. Mathewson is also a totem of virtue, always saying the right thing as surely as delivering the right pitch. In part a living statue, Mathewson is homoerotically imagined in a way similar to King Saturday of *The Cleveland Indian.* When Jackie is in the locker-room and, confronted with Mathewson's physique, is asked "you never saw such a body, did you?" he responds "Not of flesh, I thought; once in marble" (71).

Mathewson's gifts extend beyond the physical, and the star pitcher's kind thoughtfulness embraces the young ringmaker, eventually challenging Jackie's prejudices. As Jackie is initially predisposed to dislike baseball's Irish-types, Matty surprises him by measuring respect for legendary Giants manager John McGraw, "the nastiest, most pugnacious, lying, irascible SOB you can imagine" (Scheinin 71). Mathewson's McGraw is the positive embodiment of team-spirit, and it is McGraw who develops the complete definition of a team that is united and dedicated to winning: "the coaches, and the batboys,

and the clubhouse men, and the owners, and the ticket sellers. Everyone on this club is a champion. Every single person with this club is a world champion!"(69).[13]

Though Mathewson is dogged by Gatsby-like rumors that he's not all he seems and that he even once beat up a vendor (81) he always comes through for the ring-maker. Throughout Mathewson's career Jackie continues to design rings for him, and the jewelry brings a good deal of joy to Mathewson as he has a fine eye for craft. In Mathewson Jackie finds the embodiment of the virtues he enumerated as a young man: "Practice, dedication, clean living, and fair play -- these guaranteed success on and off the field" (13). And in the transcendental ballpark, where the fan can dream of "a world without grays, where all decisions were final: ball or strike, safe or out, the game won or lost without question of appeal"(128) Mathewson becomes a figure of spiritual clarity, whose religious sway may initiate a kind of conversion.

Jackie's spiritual dedication to Mathewson is subtly dramatized by his rejection of his father-in-law (Mister Sonneheim):

> It was our practise to worship with her family on alternate sabbaths, but even less traditional Reformed service observing the holy days of The New Year seemed interminable. Afterward I saw stark disapproval in Mister Sonnenheim's eyes when I turned down the invitation to his home. Instead I handed my tallith and yarmulke to Edith and boarded a northbound trolley. The Stars and Stripes waved from a hundred flagpoles above the Polo Grounds, that secular house of worship. (95)

In a sense, Jackie breaks with *shul* and *shtetl* in favor of Americanized replacements around the ballpark. It is not an abandonment of faith but a conversion to Mathewson's ability to embody something American -- mixing a secular tolerance and a faith in fair play.

Familiarly important, it is baseball -- and no other sport -- which is designated as the equivalent to such a spiritual longing. The standard anti-football diatribe is cleverly disguised as a discussion of the middle eastern game known as *bushkazi* -- a medieval polo / lacrosse mix that involves severed goats' heads. For Mathewson, such pre-civilized games are indicative of the old monstrous identities of the past, before the beauty of the nation and its great pastime availed itself to all. Football, as it is often represented by baseball fans, is seen by Matty as an atavistic enthusiasm, pulling us all back to societies

---

13 John McGraw was also aware of the box-office potential in appealling directly to the ethnic collage of the people in the stands. According to the game's greatest Jewish hitter, Hank Greenberg, McGraw "always made a big thing looking for a Jewish ballplayer. He figured a Jewish ballplayer would be a good gate attraction in New York" (Greenberg 308).

America has surpassed. Mathewson declares, "Games of possession, games of targetry -- they're all as obvious as *bushkazi*. [Baseball] is the most intellectual of the physical sports. It is totally artificial, creating its own time, existing within its own space. There is nothing real about it" (85).

Eli and Jackie Kapp's baseball-centered *entente* begins to collapse when their younger brother Arthur -- a true visionary in matters of how to market and sell sports-related commodities -- begins to restructure the family business. While Jack is mortified at the mere suggestion of exploiting his relationship with Mathewson, the pressure to conform to the demands of the business force him to compromise. His younger brother's machinations also lead to the dismissal of Eli whose gambling, while once the real entry the family had to the game, is a liability to their profits. The transformation of *Kapinski Jewelers* to *Collegiate Jewelers* obviously replicates Jackie's own renaming, but it also replicates the transformation of the game itself from the seemingly innocent to a more calculated and delineated business.

All the events in *The Celebrant* lead inexorably to the Black Sox scandal of 1919, and, while Mathewson helped expose the cheaters, in the end Mathewson is cheated out of a dignified retirement and is overwhelmed by moral outrage.[14] In a defiant speech, reminiscent of Christ overturning the money-lenders' tables, Mathewson says: "I damn the filth that corrupted them, the dicers and the high rollers. They will pay" (262). The unforgiving harshness of Mathewson's late speech surreptiously damns the excluded Eli whose failure to meet his debt margins leads him to suicide -- driving his car off Coogan's Bluff, the site of the famous Polo Grounds.

The Celebrant's closing sadnesses -- baseball bruised, Mathewson outraged, and Eli dead -- puts a melancholic spin on its overall affectionate feel for baseball. The final inability of the sport to contain spiritual meaning and to affirm good behaviour, makes Jackie's worship of Mathewson less noble and more disappointing. The pressures and anxieties of assimilation in America are not eased by the ballpark's appearance of equitable judgement, or through the "bittersweet trials of fandom" (Bjarkman 314). *The Celebrant*'s sweetness is not in seeing a solution to ethnic and religious strife, but in its offering an idea of an American social harmony within the body of the Adonis; *The Celebrant* articulates a

---

14 The Black Sox scandal was uncovered by sportswriter Hugh Fullerton who had Mathewson help him detect suspicious plays. The great fix, coincidentally, was also the spark of some anti-immigrant sentiment about the corruption of good "Christian" play. An October 1919 *Sporting News* editorial writes,"There are no lengths to which the crop of lean-faced and long-nosed gamblers of these degenerate days will not go." (quoted in Nathan 94)

vision of the republic, which it grasps at lovingly but must, of course, fall short of reaching.

Many of baseball fiction's great works are by Jewish American authors (Bernard Malamud, Mark Harris and Philip Roth), and in many of the works about the Jewish American experience within baseball there is often an emotional and strikingly patriotic effort to see the sport as an example of what is possible in the new world. In his essay "My Baseball Years," Philip Roth writes of the sport's appeal to the Jewish community and how "baseball was a kind of secular church that reached into every class and region of the nation and bound millions upon millions of us together in common concerns, loyalties, rituals, enthusiasms, and antagonisms" (180). The articulation of this secular church, however, can itself be a source of antagonism as it imagines cultural aspirations only within American (Christian) institutions and with their "Christian Gentlemen" leading the way. *The Celebrant* takes America's promise to immigrants seriously, but it too ends on a note of division, where baseball's secular service has ended and America is further divided.

The Seventh Babe: Barnstorming Metafictions

There is no African-American equivalent to *Field of Dreams*, nor is there an African-American equivalent to *The Celebrant*. The nostalgia which has become a characteristic part of baseball's literary discourse has not demonstrably appealed to prominent African American authors. Of course, in African American history, baseball's past is important and bittersweet. Imbued with a strong sense of a separate history, an African American baseball literature would find its own nostalgic legends in the Negro Leagues which simultaneously remind readers of harsh social inequalities as well as a proud self-reliance. While African American reflections on the game are not entirely absent of the usual idyllic riffs on youth, greenness, and fathers bonding with sons, indulging in nostalgia often courts a history that finds vicious and systematic racism as easily as it finds mythic moments of innocence. While Irish, Jewish, and Italian integration into the baseball mainstream is validated in baseball's real history, for African Americans baseball history replicates the racial discrimination that kept many of the game's very best players outside the professional ranks. The dominant historical legends of baseball fiction -- the fall from grace in 1919, the swagger of Babe Ruth -- take place within a system that officially excluded black players.

Baseball's celebrated sense of continuity has, in recent years, attempted to accommodate the achievements of the Negro Leagues into the establishment of organized

baseball.[15] Not only have Negro League stars been inducted into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, but the history of these Leagues has been popularized, to the point where souvenir simulacra (hats and jerseys) have become successful MLB merchandise. However, as most of the Negro Leagues were unable to generate the economic security that would allow for standardized statistics, achievements in these leagues are frequently measured in anecdotes and personal recollections. For example, anecdotes play a greater part in the commonplace discourse of Satchell Paige's or Josh Gibson's brilliance than do quantified achievements. There are no Negro League water marks like *61 home runs* or *20 strike outs*. As the Major Leagues have established their own standards, statistics in other leagues are often evaluated in terms of what they might be like if they were playing in MLB. (The statistics of current Japanese players are usually "translated" in this manner, *i.e.* how many home runs would Sadaharu Oh have hit off MLB pitching?) What is rarely suggested is that all MLB records are destabilized and maybe even invalidated by the presence of the Negro Leagues; how do we know that Hack Wilson's 190 RBI's is *the* mark, if many of the acknowledged best players were barred from competing? (cf. Candelaria 39-40)

The image of what it was like to play in the Negro Leagues that has emerged in film, television and literature is, for the most part, based on the traditions of *barnstorming* and *clowning*.[16] William Brashler's novel *The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (1973) and its subsequent film version (1976) are in some ways respectful of the real-life legends it bases its characters on, but book and movie celebrate the barnstorming aspect of the Negro Leagues as the dominant narrative reality. According to Negro League historian Donn Rogosin, "*Bingo Long* was not really a Negro League story at all but a representation of the Tennessee Rats, the Zulu Cannibal Giants, and Miami Clowns, and a plethora of obscure teams that more properly belong in the history of black entertainment than in the mainstream of Negro League baseball history" (Rogosin 150). This representational shift of focus does not help establish a statistical veracity to the segregated leagues but places a narrative premium on stunts, aphorisms and unusual anecdotes as the actual substance of Negro League play. Hence, it is still more likely one would hear about Satchell Paige calling in the outfield and sitting them down than it is to hear about *how* he would pitch to a certain batter. Fictionally then, the Negro leagues

---

15 The phrase *Negro Leagues* denotes any aspect of professional, all-black play in organized baseball from 1862 to 1955.

16 A tradition that is still represented by basketball's Harlem Globetrotters.

become -- most often for white authors -- a different baseball frontier where the fix hasn't quite caught up, and where the high spirits of gamesmanship are always placed ahead of financial reward.

If the taste of nostalgia is bittersweet in African American baseball narratives, there is a sense that baseball itself is part of the African American past, particularly as there is a prevailing sense in much of African American culture that baseball is passé and increasingly irrelevant to the struggles of American minorities.

> What's going on? As it turns out, this may be less a result of bigotry than of baseball's fading image in the eyes of black children. Former Dodger catcher John Roseboro (now a minor league instructor for the team) says "Football and basketball are the glamour sports in the ghettos now. Minorities are aiming at them instead of baseball. Little Leagues aren't that good in the ghettos anymore. Everything's too expensive -- bats, balls, uniforms, fixing the fields." (Johnson 41)

Baseball once dominated the sports scene, and its best players were some of America's biggest celebrities. And although few Major League baseball players are in danger of going hungry, baseball players are rarely celebrated as emblems of the hopes and aspirations of traditionally disadvantaged minorities. Now it is a basketball player -- Michael Jordan -- who has become "The DiMaggio of Our Generation."

If baseball is perceived as a "white man's game" one may have reason to doubt that promoters of the game will rush to remedy this illusion. The black inner city is often perceived as a threat to the picturesque suburbanism that illustrates professional baseball's current brochure. Whatever well-meaning efforts there are to harmonize African American baseball achievements within the achievements of MLB, the inner city audience is certainly not being courted by organized baseball. Now in America's underprivileged inner cities even knowledge of baseball's rules can't be taken for granted.

One of the strongest non-fiction baseball books of recent years is Daniel Coyle's *Hardball* (1993), an account of a coach's effort to shape a little league team in Chicago's notorious Cabrini-Green housing projects. What is particularly striking about the book is the attention to the practical social skills it takes to organize a team, particularly in an atmosphere where the definition of "team" and "gang" are fluid. (Apparently one street gang, the Deuces Wild, began as a baseball team [80]). The spirit of *Hoop Dreams*, where there was an overriding faith in basketball itself, is realistically dampened by *Hardball*'s young ballplayers, who do not dream of glory or speak of celebrity. It would be tempting to see the team from the projects as part of another another frontier league, where capitalist hypocrisy of the town is bypassed and the game can revert to its original form, but the ballplayers in *Hardball* want to compete. Unlike the frontiersmen /

barnstormers who make the Negro Leagues an engaging fiction to escape the fix, the non-fiction little leaguers don't mind a taste of the suburbs. Baseball becomes a bread and butter issue; the fields, the equipment, even the knowledge of the rules do not come by magic.

Jerome Charyn's novel *The Seventh Babe* (1979) is a satirical metafiction about life in baseball's Negro Leagues. Thematically, it is also not that different from *The Cleveland Indian* : an educated, Ivy Leaguer turns his back on society and seeks the frontier as embodied in the sports skills of "the other." Charyn's novel is a burlesque work that, like Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973), skewers familiar legends and mocks the official establishment of baseball. A Jewish author who is more popular in France than in America, whose "each new novel seems to require a whole new set of rules for the reader" (O'Donnell 87), Charyn obviously knows the rules of baseball and uses a fairly sophisticated understanding of its history as the base of his Negro League satire. Furthermore, according to Eric Solomon, *The Seventh Babe* also strongly resembles the drama of *The Celebrant* insofar as "outsiders actualize Jewish angst" (56).

The central character, Babe Ragland, (called "the Seventh Babe" because he is the seventh player to try to cash in on the popularity of the Babe moniker since Ruth hit it big) is a Harvard educated son of a wealthy Texas copper miner. Born Cedric Tanhill, like Jackie Kapp in *The Celebrant* he changes his name to suit his ballplaying persona. But Babe Ragland is a more outrageous conceit on the idea of "fitting in" -- he is, after all, trying to escape the anxiety of growing up rich and educated. As the title might indicate, a good deal of the satire is based upon the Ruth legend. While Christy Mathewson could stand tall as a living monument to the educated moralism of the ideal athlete, Ruth trounces this kind of hero. The Ruth paradigm is roughhewn and dirty-faced, lowclass and disdainful of anything remotely upper class and "sissified." Ragland's new baseball identity is a "slumming" alibi, but no different than the downwardly mobile excuses all around; his best pal, Scarborough, is a hunchback mascot who turns out to be sporting a prosthetic hump. Ragland's secret eventually comes out; he is mercilessly ragged in other cities as a "lying prince," and his days as the league's only left-handed third baseman seem to be numbered as he becomes linked to various scandals. Set up by the natty gambler Billy Rogovin in a Boston bar, Ragland is eventually expelled from the game (of course) by Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Exiled, Rags -- whose style it is said has already been copied by Negro League "clowns"(102) -- takes up as the sole white member of the barnstorming Cincinnati Colored Giants.

Unlike *Bingo Long,* which is fairly respectful of the legends brought to bear, *The Seventh Babe* wildly extrapolates the outlaw / barnstorming image of the Negro Leagues.

The Cincinnati Colored Giants are the picaresque heroes of life ouside the pompous rules of MLB. Everything is exaggerated and hyperbolized: the Giants travel in a caravan of Buicks with a squad of carpenters and groundskeepers who can create a grandstand wherever they are. The best player is another left-handed third baseman, and the team always travels with a witch doctor whose phallic "root" is the source of miraculous healing. The team has no home field and plays for reasons which are beyond the statistical imperatives of the seasons, placing Rags in the mythic realm of baseball's "timelessness": "Nigger baseball took Rags out of any specific order of time. Seasons didn't count" (253).

Charyn's relentless comic tone brings the representation of the barnstormers to a level so ridiculous it chisels away the template of these representations. Taken out of context, a sentence like "It was unheard of to function in the Nigger leagues without a witch doctor to chase the storms into another district, cast a spell on your enemies, and heal the lame"(275) might sound shockingly racist. But in the context of the extrapolations in Charyn's book this kind of articulation satirically exposes the racism which created separate leagues in the first place. Ragland's Colored Giants embrace their unscrutinized separateness, and their "clowning" ultimately questions the seriousness in which official baseball has enveloped their product. Even though Ragland is white he still fits in: "None of them smirked at the kid's white hands. They sucked Rags into their scheme of liquid motion. Legs and arms would melt around a ball" (234).

Ragland's final reinstatement in the official, finally desegregated Majors is accompanied by his displeasure with the officialness, rather than the whiteness, of it. He and Scarborough come to the realization that "They were a couple of barnstormers"(325) and that the quest they are on (so very different from that of the real barnstormers) rests in the motto "Fuck the receipts" (328).

Fuck the receipts is, of course, the moral of many baseball fictions. To a certain extent we can see the trope of outsiders playing the game in order to validate the affirmative essence of what we might like to believe the game says about America. Using the text of Negro League era barnstormers, or of the cultural integration of first wave European immigrants, baseball's audience can be reassured that the game preserves its essential identity as something above commerce, as something which is corruptible rather than corrupting.

Baseball fiction is not an organized political response to the problems baseball engages, and it offers no answer to the racial conflicts in America. From a sociological perspective, the African American *objet d'amour* in Peter Lefcourt's *The Dreyfus Affair* (1992) provides a stronger text to examine racial difference in baseball than *The Seventh Babe* does. Moreover, the relative dearth of baseball fictions by African Americans about

African Americans leaves a fairly open space from which we may interpret the demography of baseball fiction's audience. Some may even read (unfairly, I think) the mood of nostalgia for the good game of days gone by as a covert yearning for a segregated America. What is undoubtedly true is that the contribution of African American athletes to the game of baseball is more considerable than other minority groups, and perhaps because of the unresolved nature of the struggles of visible minorities to enter into America's middle class, baseball is not as easily used as a literary trope to sell America's meritocracy within these groups.

In Ken Burns' TV documentary, Jackie Robinson's crossing of the color line in 1947 is seen as the fulfillment of baseball's moral destiny. In this narrative, the issue of acceptance in the Major Leagues is "solved" in a way so the game can properly deserve the affection of good Americans. Moreover, Burns's overconfident reading of baseball history is extended, by implication, to all future tests of the game's cherished inclusiveness. What remains unresolved in baseball, and strongly tested in baseball fiction, is the issue of how the baseball as "open for all" trope accommodates gender differences, particularly in light of feminism and gay rights and the codes which may underwrite sport itself.

Baseball's *Semi-Tough*: Finding the Locker-Room

In the late seventies, three baseball novels were published that used nearly identical cover blurbs. John Craig's *All G.O.D.'s Children* (1975), Marty Bell's *Breaking Balls* (1979), and Jay Cronley's *Screwballs* (1980) were respectively promoted as "baseball's zany answer to *Semi-Tough*," "baseball's answer to *Semi-Tough*," and "the *Semi-Tough* of baseball."

Dan Jenkins' *Semi-Tough* (1972) is one of the most influential sports novels ever written. A raunchy, behind-the-scenes comedy about high-living, oversexed pro football players, it was a huge bestseller in its time and was eventually turned into a successful Burt Reynolds film (as opposed to a successful film starring Burt Reynolds). Baseball's *Ball Four* (1970) is the non-fictional prototype (one *New York Post* reviewer called *Semi-Tough*, "*Ball Four* with cleats on"), and *Semi-Tough*'s success can in part be explained by the way *Ball Four* "softened" the market for this kind of sports novel. What could be called the "locker-room style" of *Semi-Tough* reappears throughout sports fiction generally, not just in the three now-out-of-print books I named earlier. From the legendary hockey film *Slapshot* to David Carkeet's more high-concept novel *The Greatest Slump of All Time* (1984), *Semi-Tough*'s formula keeps getting replayed, and I believe still has some appeal to the core of sports fiction readers. Moreover, this macho locker-room style

may also vouch for how sports fiction gets dressed in the gendered discourse of boys will be boys, and how claims that baseball is for all of America still struggle to get beyond the appeal of this discourse.

Semi-Tough also appeared at the right place at the right time. The Super Bowl narrative of "Billy Clyde Puckett, the humminest sumbitch that ever carried a football"(3) takes place in a sportsworld turning a corner in public perception, when the sports industry was becoming more vertically integrated into existing entertainment industries, and when "there were more hell-raising agents in the dressing rooms than there was tape" (4). The text brims with what readers might feel is an unmistakable *seventies* style; CB lingo, country songs with long ridiculous titles, and bright polyester pantsuits; the styling of Billy C's racism (played for laughs *à la* Archie Bunker) and the crude sexual revolution antics also make *Semi-Tough* a retro object as sure as "Disco Duck." The comedic directness of Billy C.'s monologue (the narrative device is that Billy C. is recording his thoughts so they may be turned into a book by an established author) was still too shocking for filmmakers to use in 1977 movie version. The humor of the book is in the confident replication of Billy C.'s rap -- he's on a roll in a pre-literary mode, and he's obviously not censoring his thoughts for autograph seekers. In the contemporary atmosphere of polished and studiously inoffensive writing about sports, and in the midst of political drumbeating for athletes to be "role models," this once popular novel begins to read like a real scandal. In the face of the official, sunnyside-up sports story, the crudity of *Semi-Tough* is more than just laughing at *verboten* epithets but a devastating alternative to the pretentions of the middle class, who in the course of the book are more intractably and deviously racist and sexist than Billy Clyde.

Much of contemporary baseball literature, in the attempt to look "serious," has given up on the *Semi-Tough* formula. (None of the out-of-print books I mentioned before perhaps even deserves the promotional comparison. As a limerick must be dirty and funny to be successful, so would the son of *Semi-Tough*. *All G.O.D.'s Children*, while an underrated baseball book, is not quite in Jenkins' area of lewdness, whereas *Breaking Balls* and *Screwballs* aren't nearly as humorous.) The reflective voice of Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* has become more influential; Henry Wiggen-like Kevin Costner / Crash Davis isn't a typical jock, but is carefully articulate, has read "books without pictures," and is progressive on political and social issues. Billy Clyde, however, reviles the "literary," characterstically complaining that "trying to write a book during the biggest week of my life is probably less fun than being next-to-last on a high school gang-fuck" (42). Billy Clyde uses his sense of what guys are really like to puncture the kinder and gentler representations of what constitutes the American athlete's experience. Billy C. admires the

writer who will put together the book-form of his musings because he's the kind of writer who sees *Sports Illustrated* as "a cookbook for the two-yacht family" (43). The uncensored locker-room is the place of working class authority, the truth behind the clichés that serve the demands of fans, and as such *Semi-Tough* is an indispensible introduction to sports fiction. The success and appeal of the book's perspective in a way hangs over the very gendered discourse of how sports are represented in contemporary film and literature.

In popular culture the locker-room is often a nasty place, where unspeakably uncivilized things occur, where brute force is the norm and where sensitive "literary types" ("tootie frooties what write books" [135]) are bullied and humiliated by towel-snappers. But it is also the place where the project of the team is finalized, where Knute Rockne gives the inspirational speech, and where the special place of athletes is reinforced. *Ball Four*'s and *Semi-Tough*'s smelly little worlds may challenge the wisdom of the locker-room but do not deny its cultural authority. The main characteristic of what we think of as the locker-room is *talk*. And while locker-room talk by definition is unfit for polite society, it too can offer its own transcendence. Whatever racial outrage or wife-swapping occurs, the team is brought together in the locker-room and in the bond of locker-room talk. As Shoat, coach of *Semi-Tough*'s Giants puts it,

> You're just guys to me. And athletes. We've got to trust each other and be honest. And get drunk together, and get fucked together. That's the only way we can win together. (9)

This message of male-bonding is the glue that allows the Giants to transcend the liberal use of what Johnnie Cochran called the n-word and every other crude put-down imaginable.

When speaking about a locker-room culture which bonds men together in dramatic ways, we should be careful to remind ourselves that the alcoholic bonds, sexual anxieties, fistfights, and profanity exist within female locker rooms as well. That much being said, the capital-L Locker-Room, as it is defined in *Semi-Tough* or *Ball Four* or even *Bang the Drum Slowly* for that matter, is systematically identified as male. Increasingly the locker-room is seen not as a fun *rite-du-passage* where boys-will-be-boys but as a crucial underpinning of patriarchal enforcement of male exclusivity and as an indoctrination to what one critic goes so far as to call a "rape culture" (Messner 50). Hyperbolically extended, the locker-room is located somewhere near the Old Boys' Club, metonymically housing America's bad men. There is more than enough research in sports sociology to run a commentary about the function of locker-room talk in differentiating gender roles. The recent case of Lisa Olson, a locker-room reporter for the *Boston Herald*, whose encounter with lineman Zeke Mowatt led her to publically declare the encounter as a form

of "mind rape"[17] and who, for this declaration, was vilified by Boston sports fans, is a reminder of the locker-room's status in separating the boys from the girls.

In his essay, "Baseball: Our Game" John Thorn writes, "Baseball in no small measure defines us as Americans, connecting us with our countrymen across all barriers of generation, class, race and creed" (1). While this hope for the game is severely tested on each count, it is perhaps most telling that Thorn doesn't even attempt to suggest that *our* game helps *us* transcend gender. Whatever success baseball's meritocracy has had in overcoming racial and ethnic divides, bridging the gender gap has not been one of the noted public claims of the game. There has never been a female Major Leaguer and there isn't likely to be one in the near future. Recently, the best female hardball talent were brought together to play as the Colorado Silver Bullets, a barnstorming team who would earn their pay by taking on all-comers, including men's teams. Expecting a big pay day, the Silver Bullets have survived but have failed to become a national *cause celebre* as they would rarely win (they went 11-44 in 1995). It's almost too obvious to say, but *winning* is baseball's primary strategy for securing market-share. However, the economic survival of the Colorado Silver Bullets, despite their on-field difficulties, has depended on the controversial question: can this team successfully represent the idea of gender integration in organized ball? Barbara Gregorich, author of the what if? novel *She's At First*, makes sure contact: "If baseball had been open to women for the last 150 years, we would have already seen female major leaguers. The game is closed to women not because women can't play, but because the men in power don't want women around" (206).

Women have followed baseball since the popularization of the game and now form a significant part of its fan base. According to an influential marketing study, "although 48 percent of adult men follow National Football League games on TV, about 30 percent of women are also interested. Additionally, women account for about 40 percent of professional baseball, 39 percent of professional basketball" (Burnett 24). There are many assumptions that can be drawn from the more equal percentile found among baseball viewers, some of which may unintentionally echo the macho myths found in *Semi-Tough.* But any declaration that women prefer baseball because it is less obviously macho is not completely reliable.[18] In his essay "Expansion Draft: Baseball Fiction of the 1980s"

---

17 "Mowatt, who was not wearing a towel, walked toward Olson...he was joined by other players who were also naked. Mowatt turned to Olson and said "you're not writing, you're lookin," then smiled displayed himself in a sexually suggestive manner and walked away" (Kane and Disch 332).

18 Given that many women have probably played a form of baseball (softball) in their youth and have probably not played football, getting more adult women acquainted with the

Christian K. Messenger ushers in one set of stereotypes to illustrate (what else?) baseball's pre-eminence among literary sports by writing that "baseball appears to be the team sport most congenial to women athletes, with its lack of aggressive physical contact and premium on attributes other than size and strength. Competition and heroic striving are present in the fiction but are integrated with the team's other potentials: nurture, family growth" (70). Assurances that women couldn't really be interested in "size and strength" may sound familiar, but this kind of certainty underwrites much of the anxiety about women asking for their own access to the locker-room. The perception that baseball's less violent on-field presentation is more attractive for women has, however, become an interesting marketing tool. In fact, early baseball's "rough and tumble" image was altered in part as a business decision to create a "gentleman's game" in part to promote itself outside of male-only audiences: "Baseball's clubs and promoters wanted women at games as evidence of the game's popularity" (Goldstein 38). Similarly, those who are arguing for baseball's natural suitability for literary representations may want women's texts to serve as evidence of the game's ability to transcend the merely physical and to further the claim that baseball isn't like that nasty violent game, football. This is precisely the stereotype Thomas Boswell refers to in his famous essay "99 Reasons Why Baseball is Better Than Football," when he writes, "No woman of quality has ever preferred football to baseball" (31).

However, the popularizing of baseball and other sports with female audiences may also benefit from the sex appeal of male athletes. The access of female writers to the erotic discourse of sex appeal in fact can bring baseball literature (crossing over homosexual panics) to places where straight male writers generally will not go. As poet Elinor Nauen succinctly puts it, "We may be relieved at baseball's gentleness -- no one tackles or punches or fouls anyone. Women may in fact, have more [to look at] than men, who mostly aren't interested in ogling. 'I watch baseball for the butts,' a friend said. 'What do men look at?' "(xii). This kind of commentary not only says something uncommon in baseball literature but, ironically like *Semi-Tough*, humorously punctures the transcendental hyperbole of the literary enthusiasts and slyly imagines how "size and strength" are not insignificant considerations in baseball.

Undoubtedly the baseball literature of the late eighties and early nineties is a different kind of sports literature, and some of this difference is due to an increased sensitivity to the concerns of feminism and the related decline in a kind of "mens magazine" fiction market (*i.e.* Dan Jenkins wrote about sports for *Playboy*). Along with much of

---

rules of football is probably more on the mind of televison marketers than assuaging fears about the pattern of football *machismo*.

baseball lit's finely distilled pastoralism and formalism, the sex-drive of the game's athletes has receded to the background. Not that anybody is desperate to hear George Will's take on the sexuality of Jose Canseco, but baseball's erotic invisibility, like Thoreau's sexless stay at *Walden*, will not often admit to the most obvious components of desire. (And desire can't be contained by the rhetoric of transcendence. The lovely quote from *Portnoy's Complaint* which I have used as an epigraph for this chapter, where the post of center field is romanticized as an unanxious free space where "if you can get it, it is yours" (76-7), does nothing for Portnoy's compulsive masturbating. In fact, his baseball glove is memorably defiled in one of his auto-erotic episodes [146]). Movies like *Bull Durham* and novels like *The Dreyfus Affair* comically re-introduce libido into the mix of baseball, but much of the contemporary reification of baseball is constructed as pre-sexual, where innocent boys' play is transcribed by harmless monks compiling stat books, avoiding the problematized spectre of the naughty locker-room.

All-American Girls

Patricia Highsmith's delightfully creepy story "The Barbarians" (1970) brings the locker-room into the daylight, as rowdy local baseballers terrorize gentle neighborhood souls, eventually forcing a sensitive painter to contemplate murder. Highsmith's ballplayers are swine: trampling the low rent neighborhood's plants that are "struggling for survival," ignoring the "tiny gesture toward beautifying something that was essentially unbeautifiable" (245). The pillaging of these barbarians is frustratingly difficult to prevent because their physical destructiveness is validated by society; a policeman is of no use to the gentle hearts of the neighbourhood because "the policeman was the same kind of man the ballplayers were, only in uniform" (246). A sensitive artist in the neighbourhood turns his life work into a rebellion against this brutishness; a "gesture of defiance, just that bit of beauty launched again in their faces" (254).

While the harshness of the Highsmith story is not typical of women's baseball fiction, the terrorizing of the locker-room as it manifests itself in her story is often present. This testosterone-filled menace may appear as the mocking fans in *A League of Their Own* (1992), as the uncooperative dicks in Alison Gordon's Kate Henry mysteries, as the disapproving families in Nancy Willard's *Things Invisible to See*, as the horrible teammates in Barbara Gregorich's *She's On First* (1987), or as the misunderstanding boyfriend in Linnea A Due's *High and Outside* (1980). While the bonding of the locker-room can suddenly erupt into threatening postures, women's baseball literature itself, like most baseball literature, consists of honest reflections on the experience of being a fan.

And as far as one can generalize, if baseball literature itself is inordinately filled with apologies for its literary passion, women's baseball writing is doubly apologetic.

However, the Highsmith story, and a few of the other pieces in the anthology *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball* are fascinating in how they can bring the experience of baseball beyond the interests of the mere fan. And the ability to freely express a disdain for or a hatred of baseball and still keep a mainstream voice is something which is exceedingly rare in baseball texts written by men. A man's dislike for sports can more easily be dismissed as the sour grapes of a malcontent. The freedom women have to access an anti-sports rap, to view skeptically the spectacle of male bonding through sporting events, can give women's baseball writing a deeper range and a greater potential for satire. (When men like Dan Jenkins express their disdain for baseball, it is often to declare that the game has been tainted by East Coast scholars and is too *unmanly* to admire. It's not surprising then that reviewer Will Manley, in a column titled "Why I Hate Baseball," declares "the real threat to baseball comes from the *effete* snobs who want to *emasculate* the sport. I never thought it was possible, but academic intellectuals are ruining baseball like they have ruined many great books" (emphasis mine).

Accepted at the ball park and welcomed as consumers of the product, American women are part of baseball's current mix. While professional baseball's Hall of Fame and Ken Burns' *Baseball* have attempted to integrate women in the fan base by highlighting the achievements of women's professional baseball, it is in the movies that women and baseball have been conceptually linked at the forefront of popular culture. Poet Elinor Nauen, editor of *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend*, makes the connection directly:

> Not long ago my scorekeeping made a lot of men nervous. They would quiz me --"How many lifetime homers did Mel Ott hit?" and that sort of thing -- as if I couldn't be a fan if I didn't know everything. That's changed. These days, in the same way that women can be in the workforce with mid-level ambition, we can like baseball with haphazard interest. Out at Yankee Stadium a couple of summers ago, I looked down the row and noticed that all the women were keeping score and none of the men were. No one mentioned it: no one seemed to notice. Where women *are* noticed is at the movies: check out Susan Sarandon as an intelligent groupie in *Bull Durham*; and Geena Davis in a *A League of Their Own*, based on the true story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, set up in 1943 because the boys were off fighting World War II. (xii)

The Sarandon role as Annie Savoy[19] in *Bull Durham* undoubtedly brought much of that film's enduring success, and *A League of Their Own* is one of the most popular baseball movies of all time. As former league player Marie Mansfield Kelley puts it: "It was because of the movie, not the display in Cooperstown, that everybody in the country now knows about the league" (Johnson 264).

The concept for the big-budget Hollywood feature was informed by the success of a 1988 documentary film with the same Woolfian title. The documentary followed the establishment and dispersal of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League, which was established by chewing gum magnate Philip K. Wrigley whose "aim was not to restore the game of baseball to women, but to entertain fans during a time when many major leaguers were off to war" (Gregorich 84). The league was located in the farm towns around Lake Michigan (Racine, Kenosha, Rockford, Peoria, South Bend, Fort Wayne, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids) and survived for eleven years; developing from a game with rules closely resembling softball but finishing with a major league style of hardball.

How much of the reality of the AAGPBL is preserved by the film version is, like all texts of bygone play, uncertain. But unlike the very literary adventures of *The Cleveland Indian* or *The Seventh Babe*, the historical text of *A League of Their Own* is reproduced in a straightforward and populist way. The screenplay (by TV comedy veterans Babaloo Mandel and Lowell Ganz) contains the story of the league within the tight narrative focus on the development of characters. *A League of their Own* has an advantage insofar as the historical reality it builds on is not a well known one, and it does not have to find (or fight) its way through alternative strategies of interpretation.

The history of the AAGPBL is condensed within the story of the pennant race of the Rockford Peaches and their star catcher Dottie Henson (played by Geena Davis). Based partly on the Peaches' legendary first basegirl (as they were called) Dottie Kamenshek and first-season catcher Dottie Green, the Davis character is a war-bride from the farm (where else?) who comes to the midwest with her sister Kit (played by Lori Petty) to play in the newly formed professional league. (In the movie, the Wrigley name is never used.) It is not the historical curiosity but Davis' dignified performance and screen-appeal which anchors the comedy. While the line "looks like Garbo and plays like Gehrig" is used as a throw-away line in the movie to indicate 1940s sexism, it is still speaking to the

---

[19] Annie Savoy, the "knowing Annie," is a deconstruction of the "Baseball Annie" -- the traditional nickname given to female baseball groupies. In baseball fiction "Annies" are everywhere: from Ray's understanding wife in *Shoeless Joe / Field of Dreams* to Francis Phelan's deserted bride Annie in *Ironweed* to *The Cleveland Indian*'s Annie Gears.

contemporary audience -- looks like Geena Davis, plays like Eric Davis. After all, the ballplayers are told by the scouts the new league wants "lookers" -- and unlike most films, *A League of their Own* at least has a credible rationale for why all the lead characters are better looking than most people. (There is no explanation for why the Black Sox are so hunky in John Sayles' *Eight Men Out*.) The film's persistent mockery of the league's concern with its players appearing "feminine" at all times, as if this was a long forgotten concept, ironically distances the viewer who may have his or her own gendered anxieties resolved by the presence of Geena Davis. After all, it was the "sexist" forties and fifties that could breathe life into such a league while the liberated women of the nineties must be content with a movie version. In the film, the promotional lines of old newsreels sound painful, but viewers are not as removed from those newsreels as they might think. Interestingly, a 1946 professional baseball fan guide published in Racine, called *Major League Baseball: Facts and Figures*, features a detailed section on the AAGPBL which is absent of tortured apologies for the presence of women in professional baseball. Instead, the fan guide optimistically declares a "place in the sun has been found for American women in sports" (138).

In *A League of Their Own*, the introduction of the Marla Hooch character (played by Megan Cavanaugh) -- a hard-hitting but unattractive infielder -- gives the attractive Dottie / Davis character a chance to make a stand for baseball's meritocracy. When a scout tries to pass on Marla, Dottie and her sister refuse to go to Rockford unless the talented hitter is brought along. But it is the pathos from Marla's father that makes Marla a Peach: "I know my girl ain't so pretty as these girls" he says, "but, that's my fault . I raised her like a little boy. I didn't know any better. But, she *loves* to play -- don't make my girl suffer because I didn't know how to raise her." It's a sentimental moment in the film, but a strong reminder that female athletes frequently find their interest in sports through their fathers. And this dimension of the initiation and training of female athletes remains important. (In a questionnaire put to former members of the League, "a typical comment was 'father was supportive, mother was not'"[Weiller 49]). After the principled stand, Marla's story is backdropped to the Dottie / Davis text who stands tall and feminine, connected to the land, a glamorous *Natural*, a female Redford.

If the sexuality of adult men has been backdropped in fictions of baseball, the sexuality of adult women can be feared. The pre-sexual dream of an innocent game of catch is threatened by female sexuality. In Linda Mitzejewski's poem "Season Wish" an adult sadly recalls her father's interest as a confused and doomed bond: "The cap might keep my hair / forever clipped; holding the glove / against my chest might stop my breasts" (96-7). In the same sense that we say *baseball is American*, we are reminded of how

baseball is also *male*. The bonds that are taken for granted suddenly become complicated when the maleness of its identity is challenged. *A League of Their Own* comedically steers clear of overt sexual situations and uses the character of a promiscuous centerfielder, "all the way" Mae, as a decoy. (This device is layered even more comedically by the obvious casting of Madonna in the role.) Mae's promiscuity is less a function of desire than of establishing a liberated identity for the league that is besieged by old-fashioned villains. The official voices of sexual restraint then become stereotypically embodied in repressed "little old ladies" who take to the airwaves to denounce "the masculinization of women." (The same caricatures who take to the airwaves to denounce Dizzy Dean's fractured grammer in *The Pride of St. Louis*.)

The woman's sports market has become more dramatically integrated within popular culture. However, much of this integration is still tracked within traditional divisions, where individual sex appeal is promoted ahead of participating in spectator team sports.[20] All-girl competitive team sports have no reliable audience and little attraction for advertisers. The more popular women's sports, like Olympic gymnastics or figure skating, are disturbingly similar in format to beauty-contests, where merit is quantified subjectively by a judge. The sexism of the czars of the sports world, the anxiety about the womens' locker-room, continues to make sport and baseball a source of division between American men and women. Although substantial progress has been made in normalizing the idea of women in sports, the idea that American women should have an antagonistic relationship to spectator sports hasn't exactly been depopularized. For example, in the incredibly popular Carsey-Warner TV shows (*The Cosby Show*, *Roseanne*, and *Home Improvement*) sport is often used as the wedge which divides the gendered spaces of the American household. Typically, Cliff, Dan and Tim want to watch -- and scheme to watch -- "the game" when Clare, Roseanne and Jill want to communicate to their husbands about their relationship. This impasse (one which I'm sure has its objective correlatives) is generally solved by the husband's final acknowledgement of emotional immaturity but never by the wife's decision to watch (and enjoy) the game too.

A League of Their Own does not attempt to break free of the gender divisions which help define sport in America. *A League of Their Own* has no ideological certitude

---

20 During the Atlanta Olympics it was common to hear of how women's sports would be more "interesting" to advertisers if they wore garments which could be sold to American women. This is not entirely sexist. Certainly the great success of Michael Jordan in promoting the NBA has come from his ability to get into households to sell a product many American men want to buy: high-top sneakers. As Dwight Gooden put it, "I don't see any kids walking to schools in spikes" (Verducci 21).

about a woman's version of baseball, but it knows where its laughs are and where its pay-offs are. Responsible for at least one *classic* line, "there's no crying in baseball," the text of the film plays most of its scenes towards sitcomic gags.[21] So, while it would be a stretch to pin the success of the movie on its impassioned feminist reclamation of the national pastime, it does manage to make a coherent and enjoyable statement about how difficult it is for women to *play ball* -- then and now.

The meritocracy of the ballfield and the comradery of diverse players is once again cast out as the fundamental experience of baseball. The official line, as expressed in the league song, is drawn around the familiar principles of integration:

> Oh, we're the members of the All-American League,
> We come from cities near and far.
> We've got Canadians, Irishmen and Swedes
> We're all for one,
> We're one for all,
> We're All-American.
> Each girl stands,
> Her head so proudly high,
> Her motto DO or DIE,
> She's not the one to sue
> Or need an alibi.
> Our chaperones are not too soft,
> They're not too tough
> Our managers are on the ball.
> We've got a president who really knows his stuff.
> We're all for one
> We're one for all
> We're All-Americans. (Johnson 252)

While "Canadians, Irishmen and Swedes" is perhaps not the world's greatest slogan for diversity, the ideals of the melting-pot are expressed in terms that have become commonplace enthusiasms in baseball literature. And the presence of such reassurances, by neccessity, corroborate the presence of division. According to historian Susan Johnson, in the AAGPBL

> The players who came from California were regarded with suspicion by some. They were thought to be cocky and rowdier than anyone else, and besides they had an unfair advantage: they could practise their skills all year round playing softball. Sis Waddell had never met a Canadian before and

---

21 a) The formula was disastrously reformated as a sitcom in 1993, with producer Lowell Ganz displaying the same deft touch that brought America sitcoms like *Busting Loose*, *Makin' It* and *The Ted Knight Show*. b) The coinage "sitcomic" comes from David Marc *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*.

> Nickie Fox remembers having to explain that not all Canadians were French Canadians. Cuban Isabel Alvarez felt isolated, her ethnic difference from the other girls heightened by a language barrier. (112)

The AAGPBL was also racially segregated and remained so even when the Major Leagues had integrated. This fact is acknowledged in the movie in a brief scene between Dottie / Davis and a hard-throwing, African American on-looker. The rationale for the continuation of a whites only policy is credibly explained by the League's obsessive concern over "ladylike" comportment, which is defined by the czars of the league as *white* (Johnson 112). The women of the league came from diverse backgrounds, but they were young and *part* of late-forties / early-fifties culture, not a group of trailblazers who looked on the societal "rules" of the day with universal disapproval.

Rather than lock all the decisions the characters make in *A League* within the confining regrets of contemporary embarrassment, the film affords Dottie / Davis a dignified subjectivity. Choosing to leave the league in favor of returning to married life on the farm, Dottie / Davis's decision could be played as the patriarchal *fix*, but the character knows there's more to life than baseball (a subjectivity painfully absent in many sports-lit characters) and she has the freedom to choose. It establishes an independence for the character within the historical framework, rather than leave her as an agent of the "olden days," inextricably caught within the perceived limitations of pre-sexual revolution consciousness. Dottie / Davis *does* return to the league in time for the big game and the moment of dramatic suspense (safe or out?), but it is to express loyalty to a locker-room whose sway is never absolute.

What *A League of Their Own* does avoid, however, is any hint that some of the ballplayers might be lesbian. Given the way the spectre of lesbianism is used to alienate interest in the straight audience, many texts of women in baseball want to ease the mind of the straight market. Barbara Gregorich reminds us that as far the AAGPBL went, "The 1940s and 1950s were a time of complete silence about the topic of homosexuality; homosexual behaviour was so stigmatized that no one even spoke of it. . . . To this day no player wants to talk about the existence or impact of lesbians in the League" (115). Considering the intensity of the taboo, their reluctance to talk about it is also understandable.

It is undeniable that professional sports has been a field of endeavour where lesbians have found a high level of community acceptance and success (tennis stars Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova were the first real celebrities to come out as lesbians), but the stereotypical image of the women's locker-room as an initiation to butch lesbianism

retains its influence. In their study *The Sporting Woman*, Mary Boutilier and Lucinda San Giovanni write,

> Of all the stigmas noted, that of sexual preference has a special significance for sporting women. The issue of lesbianism remains a dormant but ever-present and undiscussed topic. . . . The myth of masculinization of athletic women has always been a societal concern. Mere participation in sport can cast a woman's sexual preference into question, just as participation in ballet can for men. What makes this issue particularly problematic is that the lesbian athlete is rarely a feminist. (qtd Zipter 145)

This problematic conflict between "jocks" and "feminists" is often popularly spelled out in a "softball lesbian" vs. "literary lesbian" dichotomy. In her energetic celebration of softball, *Diamonds Are A Dyke's Best Friend: Reflections, Reminiscences, and Reports from the Lesbian National Pastime*, Yvonne Zipter transcribes a fairly lively series of "I hate to generalize, but" insights into this dichotomy[22] and tries to see the game as essentially unifying, unlike Camille Paglia who writes, "An odd phenomenon, over fifty years old, is the cultishness of male homosexuals around female superstars. There is no equivalent taste among lesbians, who as a group in America seem more interested in softball than art and artifice" (54). Paglia's statement not only arrogantly drives a sharper wedge between identities like "literary" and "softball" lesbians, it is painfully unaware of the artistry in softball or that lesbian softball can at the very least claim some of the cultishness stereotypically attributed to the gay male's Judy Garland. For Paglia, an interest in softball somehow excludes American lesbians from the locker-room of artists and critics, curiously replicating traditional warnings against female participation in sport. One may suspect Paglia's essentialized advice would not differ from the Rockford Peaches' alcoholic coach Jimmy Duggan / Tom Hanks, who scornfully advises Dottie / Davis to "stop thinking with your tits."

Conceptualizing baseball as a social project invariably articulates a desire to reconcile the antagonistic relationship between different groups: natives and non-natives, Jews and Christians, immigrants and the dominant class, blacks and whites, men and women, even "softball lesbians" and "literary lesbians." The spectre of lesbianism may drive women's locker-room discourse underground, and often the literature is unable to

---

22 Briefly, the feminists see the jocks as *jocks* -- whose crude anti-intellectual locker-room talk replicates patriarchal oppression: whereas the jocks see the feminists as inhibited snobs whose understanding does not extend beyond the suburbs and the universities (Zipter 131-54).

articulate its diversity in the face of the homophobia that draws women away from sports.[23] So, mainstream texts like *A League Of Their Own* and even the anthology *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend* avoid mention of lesbian desire. However, the wish remains that the game can exert its own levelling certainty. Yvonne Zipter's vision of the "lesbian national pastime" is familiar and inviting:

> Country dykes, city dykes, dykes with four-year degrees, dykes with no degrees, dykes who are feminists, dykes who aren't, dykes of different races and classes, dykes who have been athletes their whole lives, and dykes who are just discovering, or rediscovering after years, the values of athletic endeavors -- there are softball players among their ranks. (14)

The vision is not very different from Albert Goodwill Spalding's early celebrations of the game's social compass.

All-American Boys

Dave Pallone, a major league umpire who was forced to leave baseball in the wake of his alleged involvement in a sex scandal involving teenage boys, told his own story in the revealing biography *Behind the Mask* (1991). The bio not only sets the record straight about the allegations, it is also the first behind-the-scenes baseball story from the perspective of a gay man. According to Pallone, his dismissal was purely a case of how "baseball had found me guilty of being gay" (21). While the book is finally more interesting in its perspective on the umpire's life than it is in its detailing of Pallone's developing homosexual consciousness (certainly Pallone's sexuality is less "abnormal" than his desire to be an umpire), its unique status as the only bio about a gay man in baseball says something about the pressures to remain in the closet in the community of baseball. And considering the unlikelihood that Pallone has been the only gay man around

---

23 Julie Croteau, one of the best female ballplayers of the last 20 years, recalls that when she was working her way up as a player, "They called me 'pussy,' which they thought was the most insulting thing you could call someone. They called me a dyke, which is enough to deter a lot of young heterosexual girls" (Rounds 45). Certainly more needs to be said about homophobic reactions from women about sports. If raunchy humor is the homophobic glue of the male locker-room in *Semi-Tough*, a common trope with female comedians is the shaming of football-watchers as latent homosexuals and of women participants as "future gym teachers." It is as if the homosocial orders of sports must be mocked because they lure men and women away from the promise of heterosexual intimacy.

the national game, the pressures not to tell are obviously still intense. As Pallone says, "The problem wasn't being gay; it was the fear of people finding out I was gay" (283).

As a literary product, however, *Behind the Mask*, has a discernable *hook* that can distinguish it in the marketplace and naturally avails itself to publicity in newsmedia and talkshows. (The book also works in concert with the great success of Ron Luciano's *The Umpire Strikes Back* (1982) which humorously details the life of an umpire.) The presence of the hook does not alter the reality of the discourse, but in a competitive publishing atmosphere probably any revelations of homosexual activity among Major Leaguers -- even Umpires -- is instant copy and money in the bank. In fiction the story of the homosexual major leaguer is a reoccuring theme because this hook is a particularly strong and interesting one. Recognizing that homophobic definitions of masculinity are often standard practice of the locker-room, the gay athlete's disruption of these concepts makes the story worth repeating, yet difficult to sustain.

In *Safe at Home* (1991), an Alison Gordon mystery novel that I previously discussed, the Majors first gay ballplayer has to deal with a fairly intense fan reaction to his disclosure, "Everytime Joe came to bat, the chants started: 'FAG-GOT, FAG-GOT' "(235). This representation of how fans might react to the yet unheard of situation is perhaps the most important textual gesture in this working of the baseball story. The severity of the public's reaction is where the real drama of the gay ballplayer's story is. In the representations of the crowd's reaction America is tested; is the country virulently anti-gay or is it, as congressman Barney Frank puts it,"much less homophobic than it thinks it is" ("Snapshot" 24)? The easy-to-imagine hostility to the gay ballplayer and the attending hope that the crowd will someday "get over it" keeps the hook sharp as this conflict is not at all resolved and asks baseball's future to consider "the gay Jackie Robinson."

Baseball novels that use this hook do so with diverse estimations of how traditional homophobia might be expressed in the event of a player coming out. They also vary insofar as to how cynically or earnestly the hook is employed. Steve Kluger's *Changing Pitches* (1984) is, to my knowledge, the first such novel and is the most understated and direct in concept. Played as a traditional love story with a twist rather than an examination of the socio-political implications of that love, a pitcher falls in love with his catcher. De-emphasizing the potential gravity of the situation, Kluger creates a playful narrative that credibly incorporates different techniques (newspaper articles, dramatized mound conferences, bubblegum card info, fan letters, and personal lists) to move the story along, mixing a flair for gentle humor with the more difficult romantic storyline. It is also a book with considerable insight into the game, and it has a nice, original appreciation of its history. It is conceived as a book-in-progress (like *Semi-Tough* or *Bang The Drum Slowly*

or *All G.O.D.'s Children*) where Scotty MacKay, an aging lefthander,[24] develops a relationship with new catcher Jason Cornell.

Their love affair starts as a friendship and is modulated through the "special closeness" of the battery. A replicated newspaper item, complete with awful pun, speaks of this traditional bond: "It's often been held that the cornerstone of a truly great team will invariably be traced to an unbeatable battery. Scotty MacKay and Jason Cornell, obviously sent to us courtesy of Duracell" (123). But Scotty and Jason develop a true *relationship* beyond baseball, one that is intellectually stimulating for Scotty beyond the relationship he has with his pretty wife Joannie. Jason corroborates the specialness of the pitcher-catcher romance by ironically stating,"Outside of you and me, Scotty . . . who else counts?"(157)

Scotty's voice is initially hostile to the whole notion of biographical introspection,

> I've never been too hot on autobiographies, particularly when they're written by athletes. A full length treatise on some neurotic childhood or kinky sexual proclivities has no place on contemporary bookshelves -- unless it's filed in the card catalogue under "social aberration." (4)

But as Scotty develops romantic feelings for Jason he starts consulting a psychiatrist and confronts the presence of his father and coaches within the formation of his psyche. Still he is worried about his feelings (which are always romantically idealized rather than sexually explicit). And his worries are well founded as he knows that "If they knew they'd revoke my rosin bag" (214).

Whereas much baseball literature avoids the topic of the sexuality of ballplayers, Scotty states what seems obvious to him,

> Sexuality and baseball have been mutually inclusive terms since the days of the Polo Grounds, the American Association and Charlie Ebbets. It's probably the nature of the sport that has perpetuated the relationship between the two -- curfews have grown looser while our uniforms have grown tighter. I would be a liar if I said that the below-the-belt attention constantly focused on us is anything but an essential part of a player's ego. There's no such thing as lack of appeal, and performance anxiety is a foreign term. If you wear a numeral, you're hot sex. Period. (140-1)

But this confession is never an excuse for license. Scotty's interest is expressed in romantic ideals rather than moments of lust:

---

24 In his unkind review of *Changing Pitches*, Christian K. Messenger notes the obvious parrallel: "Henry Wiggen and Bruce Pearson would blush" (67).

> It's not as if I thought, "Boy, does he have a cute ass." Nor did I notice anything else about him that is usually reserved for discussions behind closed doors. What I saw was, having spent my life thinking I was the solitary piece in a different jigsaw puzzle, I had found someone who was the interlocking piece. (216)

But he does acknowledge the fear of his changing (or finally acknowledging) sexuality with this memorably humorous passage:

> I've spent most of the evening with an old copy of *Playboy*, praying that my biological reactions to Miss October remain what they have been since I discovered her eleven years ago. On one hand I'm pleased that everything still works. On the other hand she also keeps growing a catcher's mask and the number 8. (158)

Despite Scotty's fears, love turns out to be stronger than his inhibitions, and it (of course) turns out that Jason knew all along and is gay too, but this development is ironically acknowledged in the context of a dramatic late inning miracle -- a staple of baseball fiction. When the Senators win and Jason acknowledges Scotty's love the next day's headline is the luridly ironic page-sized exclamation: "THEY DO IT!"(248)

Peter Lefcourt's *The Dreyfus Affair* (1992) models the same romantic angle (one teammate falls in love with another) as *Changing Pitches* but has a more slick, commercial design on its storytelling. The *hook* is paramount in *The Dreyfus Affair*; you can almost hear the sharpness of the screenplay pitch -- "What would happen if a shortstop fell in love with the second baseman?" It is a high-profile book from a major publisher, almost guaranteed of reviews in national magazines, while *Changing Pitches* is just another small press item. As Lefcourt's title indicates, the novel also uses the parodic device of the historical Dreyfus affair with its characters sharing similar functions and names as the historical players. Nonetheless, it is still the best-written of the coming-out novels and, for all its sizzle, manages to make a significant point without seeming overly earnest. Lefcourt, an Emmy-Award winning author and producer, most notably for the police drama *Cagney & Lacy*, has a punchy, unsentimental style that is reminiscent of *Bull Durham*. (The financial rewards for screenplay rights could make the prospect of a baseball story an appealing venture for anybody with a pen.) Unlike the developmental staging of *Changing Pitches*, *The Dreyfus Affair* comes out with its propostion right away: "Randy was falling in love. And it wasn't with his wife or with some bimbo he'd picked up on the road. It was with his second baseman" (13).

Again, the special relationship between players -- this time between SS and 2B -- is the basis for a loving relationship. The object of Randy's affection, D.J., is gay as well,

but he has accepted his sexuality and has decided to keep it to himself out of fear of what the game would do to him if his sexual preference were known. Randy is thrown into a panic ("He didn't even want to think about *that*"(3)) by his sexual feelings for D.J. and, like Scotty in *Changing Pitches*, he seeks remedy. He nearly replicates Scotty's "Playboy Test" by the numbers:

> He sat down and grabbed a copy of *People* magazine. Every few minutes he glanced up at the red light as he tried to immerse himself in a story about Pia Zadora. She sure had a nice rack. It was comforting to realize that he could still appreciate a nice rack. He wasn't that far gone yet. (27)

But Randy is not sensitive and likeable in the upstanding way Scotty is. He is full of the prejudices and locker-room talk of his surroundings, is the insincere "author" of the tell-all *Free Swinger: My Life in Baseball* and is a prominent L.A. celebrity.[25]

In representing Randy's high-style life in the San Fernando Valley, *The Dreyfus Affair* is an uncommon baseball fiction in that it casually reminds readers that contemporary ballplayers are extraordinarily rich. Randy is not much for contemplating the Euclidian properties of the sport but is living the good life associated with Los Angeles: Neiman Marcus, charity fundraisers, designer clothes, fast cars, lunch at Nicky Blair's. Significantly, *The Dreyfus Affair* is one of the only west coast novels in baseball literature, a geographical act of subversion to the east coast / Ivy League establishments which, to a certain extent, have put their *imprimateur* on baseball lit.

It's on a shopping spree at a Neiman Marcus in Dallas that millionaires Randy and D.J. share a kiss that is captured by security cameras, with the videotape functioning as the *Bordereau* (the name given to the document that was used to "prove" Alfred Dreyfus's treason). What happens when the story comes out is, in baseball terms, apocalyptic. According to the narrator, the special place baseball has in American history has awarded a double standard:

> Ballplayers were far from perfect human beings, but they were not sexually deviant with one another. They could cheat on their wives, patronize whores, carry on with women on the road, but they could not succumb to

---

25 In his essay " "Forget it means fuck it": Representations of Spanish Speakers and of the English Speaking Community in Baseball Writing" Timothy Morris briefly takes *The Dreyfus Affair* to task for its stereotypical depictions of Hispanic characters, particularly in the framework of a story in some ways meant to dispel prejudice. (This essay would serve as the basis for the third chapter of Morris's study *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction.*)

> the charms of their fellow players. Not in America. Tennis players could. Even football players. They were just athletes. Baseball players were knights of the royal garter. (140)

Revelations of the affection the stars have for each other (who are also an inter-racial couple) provokes inchoate redneck rage all over the country but especially the south: "one man in Mobile Alabama, lifted the TV set up and threw it out the window; another man in Little Rock, Arkansas, went out to his pickup, got the shotgun off the rack, and poured fifty rounds of ammunition into the side of the barn" (185). The rage spreads to a mocking locker-room and to the stands, "compelling" commissioner Esterhaus to expell the homosexual players from the game. Articulating the hidden agenda(s) behind baseball's propaganda, Esterhaus says

> Baseball is not just a sport. Baseball is the expression of this country's most cherished values, among which heterosexual relations and monogamy figure prominently. What happened in Dallas is a violation of both these values and therefore of baseball itself. (197)

Of course sports writer "Milt Zola" has a grandstanding rebuke of the specious argument and is instrumental in having the players reinstated.

The Dreyfus Affair's characters, however, are not radicalized by their experience ("Dreyfus was no *Dreyfusard*" [Gilbert 62]). Though in the novel's *finale* Randy Dreyfus is shot by a crazed fan from the stands, the "lesson" he learns is one of uncomplicated sexual elementalism: "baseball had nothing to do with where one puts one's penis" (281). The novel avoids over-complicating matters by turning them into "issues," and some obvious inconsistencies get excised in favor of the hook. For example, much hinges on the shocking oddity of the revelation and ignores the fact that Randy can't be the only gay man in Los Angeles, and his fame would certainly make his case a matter of public interest for activist lawyers and protesters. For Randy, the only positive news he gets is the certainty that this hook can be sold; Dreyfus's agent tells him "CBS wants to make a TV movie about you. Maybe even get Costner to play the lead" (210). Winking to the screen prospects of his own book, Lefcourt avoids making a working political resolution about the issue of gays in the locker-room.

In contrast, Bernie Bookbinder's *Out at the Old Ball Game* (1995) is the most political of the coming out novels. It is quite different from *Changing Pitches* or *The Dreyfus Affair* in so far as the central character (the hard hitting and ridiculously named role model, Dick Toote) is aware of his sexuality and makes no effort to conceal it. In the course of the action, the dominant political issues for gay men are central beyond the hook.

The fear of AIDS, same sex spousal benefits, right to free speech, protection from hate crimes, the institutionalization of help-organizations like PFLAG to secure rights in a homophobic world, are all contigent on the main plot.

The narrative hook in this case is altered, since *Out At The Old Ball Game* is about the first gay *team* in the majors. Relying wholly on the 1-in-10 theory, Dicke Toote informs the owner of The New York Gents that many of the best players in the league are gay. So the team owner exploits public homophobia to low-ball other owners out of their players to put together his exciting new team. This strategy is in essence not an attempt to integrate but to express pride through direct competition. Interestingly it recalls how, long before Jackie Robinson, "when the Negro League owners contemplated integration, they thought almost exclusively in terms of putting an entire Negro team in the majors" (Rogosin 187). This hope of a team rather than individuals on a team gives fans a chance to imagine the team playing for common values (*us vs. them*) but may also indicate how the ideals of integration are almost impossible to contemplate. By resting on the hopes of an all gay team, the desired effect is socially transformative: "In living rooms throughout the country, families watched their TV screens transfixed as stereotypes of effeminancy and deviance evaporated" (231). The play is transformed into a battle of contesting ideologies: an all-gay team avoids the issue of articulating itself within the space of the locker-room and in order to "win" must contrast itself against teams that are defined on principles of homophobic bonding.

The ill will of the masses is precisely what team owner Scrappy Schwartzenberger[26] is counting on: he says, "Who paid to see Liberace? They'll even pay to see ya if they hate ya. Go take Muhammed Ali. They hated him for being an uppity nigger and they made him a millionaire" (59). Elsewhere, in the course of the Gents' season, the "hate sell" is aggressively courted: "One inventive team publicist even promoted a banner and effigy day with a homophobic theme" (82), and this, after declaring the all gay team was "the worst disaster to befall baseball since, and possibly including, the notorious Black Sox scandal of 1919" (81).

---

26 The novel's penchant for corny / inventive names unfortunately did not stop with "Bernie Bookbinder." While these names are fine in a burlesque like Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*, they tend to undercut the themes of pride and community self-reliance in favour of a more predictable camp. While suggesting the loudspeakers of Gents' homegames play a "medley of Judy Garland hits"(138) can help in establishing how the Village's culture is appropriated to sharpen the hook in an unpretentious way, the dumb names make all the characters (even the central ones) seem incapable of being anything but the limited agents of an unserious cause.

In his famous essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" Leslie Fiedler writes: "The existence of overt homosexuality threatens to compromise an essential aspect of American sentimental life: the camaraderie of the locker-room and ball park, the good fellowship of the poker game and fishing trip, a kind of passionless passion, at once gross and delicate, homoerotic in the boy's sense, possessing an innocence above suspicion" (529). And it is this sentimental life, which is often alluded to in baseball fiction, that is challenged and reclaimed in baseball novels that declare the presence of homosexual desire. Throughout, the homophobic conjectures of the locker-room are important revelations in a critique of the heterosexist definitions of the wide-open ballfield. The exposure of sentiments like "nothing has ever meant more to me than beating those degenerate, limp-wristed homos"(267) is not far-fetched; however, it is difficult to imagine this type of sentiment would ever erupt as publically as it does in *Out at the Old Ballgame*. What is happening is an attempt to expose and shame the locker-room's influence by forcing its cherished prejudices to erupt. But, by definition, what is said in the locker-room is bound by a code of silence and tends not to appear in the official transcripts. (In the Pallone biography, the mementos of rednecks' epithets are not nearly as chilling as the frightened, bourgeois public assurances of "your private life is your private life" which refuse to confront and thus dramatize difference in advance of certain ostracization.) And in baseball, this code is, so far, still intact.

The central characters in *Changing Pitches* and *The Dreyfus Affair* both express anxiety about the strength of this code, but their narratives reaffirm the primacy of a *don't ask-don't tell* policy in terms of sexual identity. Reading no cultural difference into the characters of Scotty and Randy (they "pass" as heterosexual) they can serve to say its "none of our business" because baseball is baseball, overiding the country's most regularly enforced taboos. Triumph over homophobia as it occurs in *Out at the Old Ballgame*, however, is of a community pride that expresses cultural difference and wins, like the game in *Dr. Quinn*, as they refine their part in the "mosaic." *Out at the Old Ballgame* actively politicizes the hook, ending with the gesture of taking in the first female pro ballplayer for the game's full gender integration (with the help of the been-there-done-that Gents). By now what she wants is unimportant -- she is not so much a girl who wants to play the game as an untested concept, another hook to test the limits of tolerance and the sway of the locker-room in America's meritocracy.

Conclusion

Baseball's positive qualities are often unquestioningly institutionalized. In baseball literature, it's usually enough that Walt Whitman actually said "It's our game -- the American game. It will take our people out-of-doors, fill them with oxygen" (Goodman & Bauer 227), never mind if there's any enduring relevance in the statement. (The enduring irony in Whitman's statement is that his rhapsody to clean living and exercise is made a motto to validate the passion for spectator sports -- the faith of fifty million couch potatoes.) Similarly, the usual hosannas about baseball's ability to bring a diversity of Americans together are not usually challenged or properly modified to account for the sport's limitations. Baseball is not a perfect meritocracy and, considering its place in society, it never can be.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s inspirational recollection that "Jackie Robinson, with his powerful bat and calm spirit . . . remind us that we need not wait until the day of full emancipation" (212), also reminds us of how identity can be validated through sport celebrity, but also of the historically particular circumstances of the Robinson story. There are many Jackie Robinsons, but only one favorite national pastime with a segregated history. The historical importance of the Robinson story is a testament to the popularity of baseball; NFL football was integrated in 1945, but the Los Angeles Rams' Kenny Washington and Woody Strode are not exactly household names (Egerton 422). Stories of finding or losing minority identity in baseball are true enough but also are unevenly dispersed and offer no real guarantee of success to current day newcomers or groups which find themselves on the margins of the dominant society. Baseball literature's celebration of the sport's meritocracy is inevitably compromised not only by the commercial limitations of baseball but by the commercial limitations of mainstream American fiction in appealing to minority concerns equitably. For example, there are more Hispanic players in professional baseball than any other recognizable ethnic group but a dearth of literary reflections about their experiences. "Hispanic" fictions like T. Coraghesson Boyle's short story "The Hector Quesadilla Story," and Bill Granger's novel *The New York Yanquis* (1995) (a novel similar to *Out at the Old Ball* game insofar a corrupt Steinbrenner figure -- "George Bremenhaven" -- makes a deal with Castro and stocks his entire team with low-paid Cubans) are, like the "black" baseball novels *Bingo Long* and *The Seventh Babe*, notable for how the spectacle of difference is used to make a point about the corruption of the once great game. In his critical study of baseball fiction, Timothy Morris takes Bette Bao Lord's children's book *In The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* to task, insofar as the ostensibly affirmative assimilation drama connecting a Chinese American girl with the Robinson story, also "employs a move so common to the baseball novel as to be almost one of its defining generic features: it makes scapegoats of Spanish Speakers" (93). For

Morris, the construction of meritocracy as a metaphor is a patriarchal code that "rationalizes inequality" (6) and is marshalled to legitimize what he sees as the hispanophobic and homophobic impulses of the baseball novel.

While paeans to baseball's tradition of integrating America will continue to be written, contemporary baseball literature frequently asks too much of the sport. The "perfection" found in the placing of first base ninety feet from home is sought out repetitiously in socio-political realms. That much said, it is also worthwhile to note that sometimes an important message (the need to at least try to find places where we can get past our differences) does get through. However sophisticated the projection of a fully integrated baseball team can be, it has never been as successfully amplified as it was in the popular movie *The Bad News Bears* (1976). *The Bad News Bears* in fact has *everything*: integration, crudity, snotty children, alcoholism, a love story, ethnic and gender integration, patriotism and the immortal line, "you can take that trophy and stick it up your ass!" The seventies raunch of *Bears* is reminiscent of *Semi-Tough*, while its goodwill is reminiscent of the baseball episode of *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (Gretton 70). As the popular television version is edited, *The Bad News Bears* now has more of a reputation as a simple flag-waver, the uncensored version is quite shocking by Disney standards. A characteristic exchange from the unbowdlerized *Bears* goes like this:

> Tanner:
> Well what do you expect? All we got on this team are a bunch of Jews, spics, niggers, pansies --
>
> Timmy Lupus:
> Hey!
>
> Tanner:
> -- and a booger-eating moron!"
>
> Ogilvie:
> Tanner, I think you should be should be reminded from time to time that you are the only member of this team who isn't a "Jew, spic, nigger, pansy or a booger-eating moron," so you better cool it or we may be disposed to beat the crap out of you.[27]

The John McGrawesque Tanner is well-advised and the Bears excel under the leadership of juvenile delinquent Kelly Leak / Jack Haley and pitcher Amanda / Tatum O'Neal. The key

---

27 In the novelized version Tanner's racist diatribe is cleansed to read "jerks, foreigners, sissies, nose-pickers, delinquents and clumsy little runts" (Woodley 32).

to the movie is not in overcoming these differences but that kids without "positive male role models" do the impossible: look at Walter Mathau as a father figure and *win.*

As Vince Lombardi is quoted, "Winning is the only thing." Typical of the sports classics of the seventies, the explosive vulgarity of *Bad News Bears* is accompanied by a sense of an opening in the discussion about who gets to play. As the baseball fiction of the late eighties / early nineties begins to exaggerate the openness of baseball, the metaphor of the baseball child closes in on itself and the *Bears* become more about innocent tykes again. The wide-eyed kid becomes a baseball text to express nostalgic feelings of cultural loss, rather than admitting that kids too have a deep desire to win.

FIVE

Is That Good Enough For You, Pop?

Generational Conflict in Contemporary Baseball Novels

"The ball once struck off,
Away flies the boy
To the next destined post
And then home with joy."

-Anonymous (c.1774)

"America is not what you are but what you may be; America remains what Emerson called, one hundred and fifty years ago, 'the country of tomorrow.' "

-Ronald Reagan

Baseball's Greying Fan Base

Though professional baseball remains a billion dollar business, the prognosis for the industry's future health is uncertain. The erosion of baseball's television audiences after the players' strike of 1994 was not just the sudden pique of cheesed-off fans but a precipitous turn in a long-tracked decline. A major factor in this decline has been the relative inability of the sport to appeal to younger viewers and to reactivate its fan-base. In a *Variety* article which tries to delineate FOX-TV's new strategy for delivering baseball to advertisers interested in younger viewers, the current reality of baseball's television demographics are revealed:

> baseball is -- and will be for the near term -- one of the oldest skewing TV sports, right up there with bowling and golf. With a demographic profile heavy on 50ish, modest income men, baseball has simply proved less attractive than the NBA and NFL to the core athletic shoe and auto advertisers that networks covet. (Levin 1)

For advertisers looking to align a product with the youth market, the phrase "up there with golf and bowling" can hardly be comforting.

The profile of baseball's aging TV audiences also outlines a profile of baseball literature's readership. I believe parts of *Variety*'s demographics ("heavy on 50ish . . . men") would also be accurate when used to describe a potential consumer of, say, George Will's *Men at Work* or David Halberstam's *Summer of '49*. Particularly as baseball's literary products are linked to an interest in MLB, the apparent aging of baseball's fan base may also account for some of the thematic repetitions of baseball fiction. I would also argue that a demographic profile of baseball literature's readership would be further skewed on class lines, as we can assume that "literary" products generally engage a market characterized by more than just "modest income."[1] That golf (and not bowling, its alleged companion in unfashionableness) is baseball's greatest rival on sports lit bookshelves likely has something to do with the disposable income associated with playing the links. The

---

[1] I'm identifying a "literary" product here as a book which announces itself as existing within the traditions of "literature" as opposed to books which exist outside this framework (i.e. picture books, cookbooks, how-to books, *etc.*) This distinction, of course, is further problematized when the "literary" distinguishes itself from existing literary forms. Hence, romance novels are not quite "novels," and if you want to find Jane Austen in a bookstore you don't look in the "fiction" section; you look in the "literature" section. Baseball fiction's increased visibility in the late eighties / early nineties is, I believe, part of this market segmentation; baseball novels are part of the section aimed at an interested, but more college-educated crowd.

emergence of baseball literature has not coincided with any wider interest in the sport itself from the working class and, some would say, the emergence of baseball literature is symptomatic of baseball's decline in popularity. As one baseball-lit nay-sayer puts it, "It's ironic that while all this hay is being made of baseball in academia, many sportswriters think that the game is in big trouble today with its pot-bellied, beer-guzzling fan base" (Manley).

Baseball's perceived generation gap presents a considerable background for baseball fiction. Though it should be said that interpreting a demographic pattern in the marketplace for baseball fiction certainly does not limit the readership solely to the parameters of this so-called target audience. (That target being male sports fans, over 35, probably with some college education.) Just as millions of adult men watch afternoon television dramas and millions of adult women attend sporting events; baseball literature, or any cultural product, is not owned by the center of its marketplace. But these centers do obviously exist and are a complex, informing part of the historical process where influential patterns of consumption (i.e. soap operas by women, professional ballgames by men) are reinforced.

Despite the presence of a target audience, there is also no reliable "formula" for baseball fiction, and using a baseball theme brings no guarantees of commercial success. For every *Shoeless Joe*, there is a *Getting Blue*; for every *A League of Their Own*, there is *The Scout*. Baseball fiction's financial rewards, even in the case of a Kinsellian serial approach, can hardly match up to the windfalls awaiting the outputs of popular literary megastars like Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Anne Rice, John Grisham and Tom Clancy. As I mentioned previously, baseball lit's marketplace is dependable rather than lucrative. And the selling of baseball's cultural products is also affected by changing consumer moods; the potential backlash from strike-wearied and increasingly bored fans who respond negatively even to the suggestion of "baseball" is probably of some concern to baseball fiction publishers. As the subject of baseball may scare off potential buyers, it will remain difficult for baseball's cultural products to appeal to those outside of the traditional fan base. However, few of the baseball novels I've discussed in this text are transparently determined to "cash in" on the popularity of the sport, and even if one wanted to cash in there is certainly no blueprint on how to collect.

Baseball has never bound all Americans together as an audience to a single drama, and baseball remains as socially uncohesive as it ever was. And the generation gap revealed in baseball's television audiences manifests itself in contemporary baseball fiction, particularly the baseball fiction of the Reagan / Bush years which comments not just on

"traditional" American values but the once liberal values of aging baby-boomers.[2] The nostalgia for a game that metaphorically exaggerates the connection between fathers and sons informs a discourse about the anxieties of "50ish men" -- often as they approach a reconciliation with their fathers and look towards the prospects for their sons. The game of catch with Dad, of course, is not just the transmission of athletic skills but is the training ground for a new generation of fans; the image of the game of catch is becoming increasingly important as new generations seem to be saying they don't want to watch their father's game.

Fathers & Sons

Fathers playing catch with sons is a durable trope in all representations of baseball. The image, indelibly linked to the transmission of proper values and authority, is so widely disseminated in art, politics and popular anecdote, it is perhaps best thought of as an American secular icon. Invested in the father and son's game of catch are many cherished values: the passing on of skills from one generation to the next, an affectionate male bonding, a recognition of parental responsibilities and the gentle passing away of summer hours.

The icon is so pervasive and so generally accepted that "playing catch" is one of the most recognized "duties" of American fatherhood. Similarly, the image of the sports-dad whose belittling sideline crudities rob the youngster of his innocence has become the dark mirror image of the heart-warming icon. For example, in the film version of *The Natural*, the father and son tossing the baseball signal a healthy restoration to the best things of life; whereas in the biopic *Fear Strikes Out* (1957) the competitive antagonisms of Jimmy Piersal's / Tony Perkin's father is the background of the son's mental collapse. (Sharply defined in the film by having Piersall / Perkins madly climbing the backstop to yell at his father in the stands: "How was that? Was it good enough?").

The icon is present in life as well as art. After all, the emotions that the image elicits are real and that's what makes it such a reliable cliché. And this resource of real feelings is being continually redrawn in the literary trope, sampling common experiences as well as unexpressed emotions within father-son relationships. And, the father-to-son dynamic in the male relationships of baseball stories is, of course, not limited to fathers and sons. In

---

[2] Interest in regular season TV games has eroded to the point where, in 1995, the Friday night Neilsen-ratings average for NBC's national broadcasts of selected baseball games were getting handily outdrawn by the ABC sitcom *Family Matters* (Levin 69).

baseball fiction, we have already seen many relationships which can be interpreted as sublimated father-son relationships. Even the Presidential ceremonial first pitch can be seen as the institutionalized form of the American patriarch's duty to indulge his children in the game of catch.

Assessing the pattern in *Shoeless Joe / Field of Dreams*, Roger Angell writes,

> the dreamy field, it turns out, is needed so that Ray can be reconciled with his late father, a fan and would be pro-player who idolized Shoeless Joe; there was a falling out ("When I was fourteen, I started to refuse," Ray says. "Can you imagine an American boy refusing to play catch with his father?")
>
> [W]hen Ray asked what American boy wouldn't want to play catch with his Pop, I quickly thought of Ty Cobb and Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio and, yes, Lou Gehrig, and a million more who never did and (sorry) who never said they'd missed it. (344)

The testimony of the professional players, however, is no match for the image of the game of catch, and Kinsella's skill, in the passage in question, is in capturing the resonating sentiments and guilt associated with this image.

The obligatory game of catch has become a social contract written in the long established forms of American popular culture. The thematic dominance of patrilinear narratives in sports history obviously invites inquiry into how masculinity is expressed (or performed) in baseball's literary representations. Doris Kearns Goodwin says bringing her boys to a game at Fenway is not just a day out but "an anchor of loyalty linking my sons to the grandfather whose face they never saw but whose person they have come to know through this most timeless of all sports, the game of baseball" (28). The complex association of a vision of normal masculine progress with the icon of the game of catch is a done deal, the icon's centrality reaffirmed with each assurance of its ordinariness.

Paradoxically, as baseball's core audience gets older, the genuflections to the game as essentially "for the children" have become more prominent in conventional American sport ideology. This deference to "the kids" is often dedicated to an idea of how the game should be and is usually informed by *fin-de-siecle* misgivings about the way things seem to be. For example, in an op-ed for *Sports Illustrated* Michael Bamburger writes: "During the 1994 baseball strike -- while watching the Ken Burns series oozing sentiment on PBS -- I reluctantly concluded that a great, long running opera, the one about baseball and fathers and sons, was finally over" (88). While it's ironic that Bamburger complains of Burns's ooze, his concern -- that the game is not fit for the youngsters anymore -- is common and understandable. However, "the opera" of fathers and sons is still going strong as elements of tragedy and doom have been introduced into -- if you will -- the libretto.

The moral authority of "kids" in American sport paradigms is a longstanding one. In a provocative essay concerning the reasons why the less detailed game of baseball outstripped cricket for popularity in mid 19th century America, Melvin Adelman postulates that it has little to do with overt patriotism and more to do with the "American belief that ball playing was a pastime for children and small boys" (100). The more adult gatherings of cricketers may have inhibited its natural growth within the country as cricket's more rigid system of rules and membership assured serious, adult participation. And throughout its development into a billion dollar business, organized baseball has maintained its assurances that it is, after all, a kid's game. This is not a recently developed advertising ploy, but it has had its role in the marketing of baseball as a family-friendly business. (Despite the joy a youngster may experience at the sight of the park, the team mascot, a hot dog, attending a professional baseball game is often an endurance test for the young as today's games are frequently longer than the opera.) The positive associations with the sandlot or the little leagues as the real source of the game's authenticity are still quite strong in American culture.

In baseball, it's important (and profitable) to be a kid. While critics of the celebrity culture of athletes may reasonably be dismayed by the juvenilization of grown men, it is important to remember that much of this is a service to the fans who prefer to see their ballplayers that way. For example, Ted Williams studiously adopted the nicknames "The Kid" and "Teddy Ballgame" even though few would describe his approach to the art of hitting as carefree or childlike. Likewise, the great Brooklyn Dodgers teams of the 1950s became immortalized by Roger Kahn as *The Boys of Summer.* Today, Ken Griffey Jr. -- baseball's current (and some would say only) hot property, trades heavily on his identity as "Junior" and has so far avoided the scorn heaped upon Barry Bonds who is strikingly similar as a player but less able to sell youthful enthusiasm. In the cultivation of "boys at play" as the source of baseball's appeal, the title of George Will's *Men at Work* is a well-intentioned purpose pitch.

"The kid" as a baseball-lit archetype often represents the interests of the adult fan, while "the fan" is largely vilified in baseball literature as the source of unseemly, pre-violent, alcoholic, prejudicial, mob behaviour and harshly judged for his impotence in the face of players' strikes and million dollar salaries. As "the kid" though, the fan's voice is uncorrupted and can still connect with the spirit of play. When baseball owners or media pundits make appeals to athletes to be "role models," they are not really talking about disappointing children, but about disappointing paying fans. The unworthy "fan" is transformed into the innocent "kid": the kid who gets to say "say it ain't so Joe," the kid

who almost wins it in *The Bad News Bears*, and the kids who romp around the bases at the close of Ken Burns' gusher.

"The catcher is the father, the son is the pitcher."

In an essay titled "Emotionality in the Stands and in the Field: Expressing Self Through Baseball," Bob Krizek details the affective bonds that following a baseball team might bring to a father and son. Relating the personal motivations behind an otherwise information-orientated sociological essay, he recreates the harmonies of the father-son game of catch in the context of adult fans:

> I never truly grieved for my father when he died. I kept busy with funeral arrangements, financial matters for my mother, my marriage, my school work, and on and on. I never really took the time to say goodbye to my dad or allow myself the warmth and contentment of recalling the good times we had spent together watching baseball. In fact baseball at Comiskey was the backdrop for the most genuine interactions I had with my dad. He was removed from the pressures of work, and we were clear of the relational tensions of home. At Comiskey, our tenuous relationship was at ease. When Old Comiskey closed, I was forced to face the reality of having lost my father. (317-8)

For better or worse, sports has become the *lingua franca* for millions of American men. Though it might be reasonable to suggest that it was the limitation of Comiskey Park as the place for this "genuine interaction" that caused a "tenous relationship," the stress-free harmony suggested by this baseball memory is unpretentious, and an equally reasonable recognition of the pressures put upon working men. But the overriding sense of the memory is bittersweet: within the nostalgia is melancholic regret about the relationship's narrow avenues for connection.

The pattern can be found in other sports replications, but baseball's imposing historical status with its assumptions of patriotism, positive values, and even literary hegemony makes it the most likely setting for this kind of reflection. Obviously, the same issues Krizek raises would be more problematically mediated if the setting was a rifle range or poetry readings. (Again baseball has become a "safer" place to contemplate traditional masculinity: divested of the aggressive, violent make up of the "bad sports," football, boxing, *etc.*, but still not effeminate like poetry or the arts.) The traditional cross-generational popularity of baseball has helped bring the fan's articles of faith to the patterns of the household and to the idealized socialization of the American male.

In the course of this chapter, I will be discussing a selection of contemporary baseball novels, all printed in the 1990s, none definitively established as a baseball classic,

to illustrate how the interests of the fan are currently being mediated through the image of father-son games. The novels do not reach a unified resolution but the highlighting of issues of fatherhood in contemporary baseball fiction does, I think, locate a deeply felt conflict in recent history. This thematic grouping in baseball fiction celebrates baseball and fatherhood, but in the middle of an unresolved debate about the place of fathers in contemporary American society.

Moreover, the attempt to repair the American father and son relationship with a game of catch may be further understood in light of aging baby boomers, trying to find in baseball a kind of *rapprochement* with the generation of Americans it figuratively turned its back on. The emergence of baseball literature as a respectable cultural product could only come in the Reagan / Bush era with its politicized formulations of nostalgia, its cultural pinings for the imagined harmonies of the fifties, where all the green lawns in America were crowded with fathers playing catch with their sons.

Responding to the advances of feminism, increased divorce rates, and the collapse of the manufacturing economy, sports texts can reach back and find in the game's gloried past an implied regret about the way things are. In the throwaway comedy film *Celtic Pride*, the basketball-obsessed character played by Daniel Stern tells his son, "At one time in this country, sports were glorious, that's when things were in proportion. By the way, your Mom and I are getting a divorce. See ya!" (Kertes 64). Similarly in much baseball fiction the pining for clean lines, rules, and the tradition of heroism comes in the sphere of acknowledging that the values of the past -- specifically fatherhood -- are less important in the daily life of Americans.

The Eighties and the Performance of Fatherhood

Before trying to generalize about the spirit of a time that has not quite passed, one should be mindful of how generalizations of past decades are easily reduced to units which convert the most obvious clichés of the day into monoliths of historical fact. For example, the 1950s were not just drive-ins and sock-hops, but *The Fifties* itself has been transformed into a cultural unit which is constantly repackaged and repopularized on the basis of its appealing clichés. The commodified version of *The Fifties* then becomes a memorable nostalgic commodity of the 1970s, cashing-in with movies such as *American Graffitti*, *Grease* and the television show *Happy Days*. Similarly, the 1960s were not just war-protests and Woodstock; it was also *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Sound of Music*. While "the silent majority" Richard Nixon defined had their day at the polls, their tastes in

popular entertainment are rarely represented as a meaningful part of *The Sixties*.[3] In popularized formats, the nostalgically reconstructed decades become typically non-confrontational. *The Fifties*, minus segregation and Communist witch hunts, becomes *Happy Days*; *The Sixties*, minus the drugs, becomes *The Wonder Years*. (In each case, a sentimentalized vision of the past is authorized by the narrative of the young man.) Likewise, when starting to speculate on why baseball literature came of age in the 1980s, it's important to keep in mind the complexities and contradictions which cannot be held by the definitions of the spirit of the times, but it is also important to see how the frame of *The Eighties* is set -- and how this frame is made with its own nostalgic imperatives.

At the end of Peter Abrahams' *The Fan*, the derangement of the lead character is in part a failure of contemporary society to value children (and baseball). The novel's brief articulation of how little league ball made a brief comeback in "the Reagan years" ("The high school had already dropped [baseball] a year or two before. This was after they closed the mill. We had baseball a while during the Reagan years, but now it's gone" 325), suggests how the patriotic nostalgia associated with the Reagan presidency strategically reaffirmed baseball as a normal stage in a successful American boyhood. Of course the Reagan presidency is just a part of the 1980s, and the ideals of the Reagan campaigns were not uniquely all-embracing. But when we start to consider *The Eighties* as a cultural unit, we can start to see the outlines of how the literary embrace of baseball is partly linked to the nostalgia which is at the core of Ronald Reagan's political success.

As we have seen, baseball nostalgia is rooted in pastoral conventions. The premise that the contemporary form of the game is inferior to the game of the past is written into supportive legends of baseball's pre-eminence and continually enriches the sport's history. Similarly, creations like the "morning in America" campaign of the 1984 election are illustrative of the pastoral nostalgia of Reagan's presidency: expressing disdain for current developments by yearning for an apple pie tableaux of the past. Composed with a tacit hostility to the other popular cultural expressions of the decade (sex and violence on TV, the rise of rap music, the rise of afternoon talk shows, video rental stores, computer games), the "morning in America" vision speaks its discontent metaphorically. Although

---

[3] The anti-establishment recollection of *The Sixties* has made the era a less likely venue for baseball nostalgia. In feel-good texts like Ken Burns' *Baseball*, it would almost seem like "selling-out" to Billy Graham and Lawrence Welk to talk of this decade as a great time for baseball. It is said then, for good reason, that America's attention was elsewhere. This skipping-over to the more nostalgically attached forms professional baseball would take in the 1980s acknowledges baseball's conservative function in the performance of nationalism: asserting *something went wrong* with American culture in the 1960s that baseball seeks to cure.

baseball literature does not hold one political line, metaphorically, baseball often proposes a conservative agenda just by the mention of its name. (We aren't likely to think of diabetes when we hear "apple pie.") While it may be debatable to what extent the Reagan years restored pride in America, the fact that so many Americans felt their national pride was restored speaks of a certain poetic success.

Packaging decades has a normal historical function, and generalizing about cultural trends is not a cynical advertising campaign for future sitcoms. We can obviously learn something about the 1920s from *The Great Gatsby*, but we can also learn something about the 1950s from *Happy Days*, and something about the 1980s from Bruce Springsteen's album *Born in the USA*. And in illustrating the background for baseball's modern lament for fatherhood, I will draw less on the political and economic developments of the 80's -- the fate of Michael Milken, the Grenada invasion, Iran-Contra, etc. -- to briefly detail the sentiments of the most popular television show of the decade, *The Cosby Show* (1984-92).

The Cosby Show -- an affirmative sitcom about an African-American middle class family -- is not much of a document of how the 1980s played out for the average American or for the average African-American. *The Cosby Show*'s faith in the system to reward hard work and its lack of communication with the "off stage" difficulties of the working and poorer classes distinguished it from the increasingly "real" issue-orientated fare which characterized successful early 70s sitcoms like *All in the Family* or *Good Times*[4] and from the more determinedly non-political late 70s sitcoms like *Laverne and Shirley* and *Three's Company*. *Cosby* was, in many ways, a return to "traditional values" -- so much so, that the commonplace observation about the show was that it was a revision of the fifties "classic" *Father Knows Best*. The comparison may not be totally off target; however, it's not made in deference to broadcasting history but to offer a critique of *Cosby*'s social and political look back to the past. *The Cosby Show* arrives on the cultural scene to celebrate the family and the responsibilities of fatherhood, precisely when the public may feel these values are increasingly strained.[5]

---

[4] cf. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s opinion: "The social vision of Cosby, however, reflecting the miniscule integration of blacks into the upper middle class, reassuringly throws the blame for black poverty onto the impoverished" (qtd Jhally & Lewis 3).

[5] Accordingly, the 1980s saw a drastic reduction from the previous decade in the percentage of households with fathers at home. According to *The World Almanac*, for whites the percentage dropped from 90% to77%; for Hispanics from 78% to 64% and for Blacks it dropped from 59% to an alarmingly low 36%.

The popularity of *The Cosby Show* does not mean there was a universal endorsement of the social vision of the program, but, nonetheless, the show's championing of the responsibilites of fatherhood is an example of the nostalgia associated with the Reagan revolution, and is, I believe, indicative of the spirit which helped foster baseball literature. The cachet of the traditional icon of the father and son game -- believed to be under stress from the developments of the sixties and seventies -- is tacitly placed within the larger context of a debate about what the role of fathers really should be. As Bill Cosby's Heathcliffe Huxtable character was a former track star for Temple University, sport in the *The Cosby Show* becomes an important repository of male virtues and vanities. Heathcliffe may not always be literally playing catch with his son Theo, but he is figuratively presented as the classic American patriarch through his continual and often humorous re-telling of his athletic career. We can thus feel safe in assuming that Dr. Huxtable did make the time for pitch-and-catch in the pre-dramatic text to *Cosby*'s debut. (In the series pilot, Cliff takes up Theo's baseball bat for effect when he delivers the show's first catch phrase: "I brought you into this world and I'll take you out.") Always present, assured in the rewards of the system, patient with the restlessness of youth, *Cosby* humorously deflects anxieties about parenting by reaffirming the paradigms of the Cleaver household, where the revelation of Theo's dyslexia is not dramatically unlike Wally coming home with a "jelly roll" hairstyle.

The yearning for the gender-role stability of the past as imagined invariably comes with a recognition of the faults of past systems. Psychologist Dr. Alvin Poussaint, who endorsed Cosby's bestseller *Fatherhood* (1986), writes "fathers who think they should get involved only when they can begin to teach their child (usually the son) sports are way off base" (Cosby 168). The reduction of the function of the father to ball-tosser may indeed be part of the American father's prosaic destiny: imagining the American father's responsibilities to a son outside of the world of play is not that easy. In a brief essay on gender history, critic Michael C. Adams more explicitly problematizes the historical limitation of sport and play as the natural American father-son dynamic in a way that could serve as a kind of prologue to Peter Abrahams' *The Fan*:

> Fathers could not retrieve their authority over children who enjoy a freedom in America unknown elsewhere in the Western world. Child rearing experts have encouraged fathers to be pals, playmates, or big brothers to their offspring, offering friendly advice and companionship, but not trying to impose behaviour patterns. Many have tried to do this and sought warmer relationships with their children. But it has been difficult to achieve parity with mothers in the role of caregiver. Even today, most fathers spend less hours at home than mothers and their time with children is often play time, made up of ball throwing and Little League coaching. (Adams 17)

In the lost-past atmospheres of Ronald Reagan and *The Cosby Show*, baseball becomes a likely stage to perform ideas of what we may think constitutes fatherhood. As baseball becomes less interesting to the younger generation, its representations may speak of "traditional values" that are threatened in the contemporary landscape.

The Fan

Peter Abrahams' novel *The Fan* (1995) is a quick-paced thriller whose inventive crossing plot lines made it a natural for cinematic treatment. The action takes place in the modern sports world with the aggressive patter of talk shows, million-dollar contracts, expensive tickets, and the pervasive interest of the media. The narrative also describes events typical of modern economic disempowerment: corporate take overs, the threat of job loss, and the insecure identity of "bread winner" long held out as the role for American patriarchs. *The Fan* is the story of two men, both fathers: one a desperate knife-salesman whose interest in sports is a barometer of his increasing powerlessness, the other a millionaire slugger whose talent is more than equalled by his spoiled adolescent obsessions.

The background for both narratives in *The Fan* assert the emotional primacy of father-son relationships. For Gil Renard, the son of a proud creator of a line of knives that has since been merged into a corporate entity which has co-opted the Renard name to sell shoddy Ginsu-like knives, the failure of his own career as a salesman is connected in his heart to his undeveloped little league talent. In the downward spiral of his career, he becomes the archetype of the *bad* sports-father -- alienating his own son with his temperamental desire for victory. For Bobby Reynolds, the home run hitter whose success has allowed him to get whatever he wants, a confrontation with an image of doomed youth puts him in a serious slump which compels him to place his own "childhood" ahead of his son's. In both cases, complex issues of sport and masculinity turn the plot developments into a sad devolution of powers sacrificed to the over-arching importance of the game.

Like J. Henry Waugh of *The Universal Baseball Association*, Gil Renard's consciousness is overwhelmed by fantasies of baseball. His recollections of his own little league moments are played back in his mind over and over as if they were World Series memories. These fantasies are not easily dismissed as Walter Mittyesque escapes or as harmlessly anti-social. The other components of Gil's life are menacing: first of all, he's a

knife salesman who knows everything about the product, except how to sell it.[6] The inherent capacity for violence in his knowledge of the weapons sets Gil up for the calculated drama Abrahams is interested in. (The reader is always ready for Gil to use the "thrower" he straps to his leg.) Secondly, he is recently divorced and finds it difficult to deal with his ex-wife, her new boyfriend, or the needs of his son, Richie.

The path of the thriller is set up quickly and with memorable precision: Gil's degeneration is caused by socio-economic stress rather than mental illness. For example, the restraining order placed upon him by his ex-wife is indisputably well deserved, but it is part of the way the stakes are raised against the character and how his dangerous reactions becomes harrowingly believable. Gil Renard is his father's son; the knife company his father built is described in terms of an artistic achievement, and Gil's interest in baseball shows a similar dedication to detail. The take-over of the company is in some ways a parallel to the "sell-out" of baseball as a professional industry.[7] It is baseball that Gil remembers, and it is in this compromised industry that his rage will be played out.

In his daydreams of his little league glory ("stealing home" of course) Gil usually remembers an image of his father, who was dying in the hospital at the time, saying something like, "C'mon Gil" (39). His recollection of a day at the ballpark with Dad is a notable inversion of standard celebrations:

> Remembering the first time his father had taken him to a ball game, and how they had all booed some player, how he had stood on his seat so he could see, hands cupped to his mouth, laughing and booing with the rest. (188)

It is telling that Gil's first instruction is learning how to jeer failure; it is perhaps more telling that it is *the* stand-up event where he must strive to see "like the rest." While the aim of attending is ostensibly to cheer the home team to victory, the moments of disappointment or failure can be just as binding. Moments where fans do engage in derisive behaviour, like chanting "Dar-ryl, Dar-ryl" over and over, are often moments when, as they say, "nobody is going for a hot dog." The lesson learned at the game with Dad is one which Gil

---

6 The company's knives ironically retail at $80 while scalpers selling tickets for opening day are asking $150 per (14).

7 As one of the knife company management figures tells the hurt Gil, "Your father made beautiful knives. Cincinnati made it a business" (116). Here, the use of "Cincinnati" as the eponym for fatal commercialism may be a nod to the legend of the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings as baseball's first professional team (Goldstein 5) and to Cincinnati as the place where the commercial form of professional baseball flourished.

eventually interprets criminally: America doesn't love success as much as it loves to despise failure.

When Gil goes to see his son play baseball, he brings along the shame associated with his failures to maintain his father's creative integrity. Apoplectic with the need to see him *not fail*, Gil begins cursing in the stands, telling his son, "Get your fucking glove up" (72). His damaged sense of self overrides his awareness of his son's lack of skills, and in praying for his son's unlikely success, Gil is driven further to the edge. His way of trying to bond then becomes an exaggerated show of masculine virtues he does not possess:

> He thought: *Be a hero, boy.* He saw himself up there, powerful, coiled, murderous: driving one over that fence, over that church, over those trees. Grand slam. *Be a hero, boy.* (248)

The desire in Kinsella's *Iowa Baseball Confederacy* for baseball to express itself magically by extending its lines and transcendental possibilities is turned into something "coiled" and "murderous." The desire to get beyond the limitations of physical realities (and economic ones) are a natural source for fantasies or daydreams, but for the dispossessed Gil these limits (the fence, the church, etc.) are cruel reminders of the broad definitions of failure. Gil Renard's devolution into a psycho-fan who goes on a robbing, killing and kidnapping spree is his attempt to be heroic.

The narrative of the superstar ballplayer who is pulled in the downward spiral of the fired knife salesman is also a story about the failure of baseball to be a source for positive values. Bobby Rayburn is the quintessential spoiled superstar who plays around, gets taken by his agent, is pampered by the press and is ungratefully dismissive of the fans.[8] His story is one of a long, protracted snit as he tries to use his status as high-paid slugger to wrest the lucky number eleven from a less-glamorous teammate who has a prior claim to it. As a professional athlete he is used to getting his way, and the mix of Rayburn's huge salary with his arrested adolescence becomes a tacky spectacle of indulgence and naiveté. When he explains to one of his conquests that he was on the phone conducting business, the woman expresses the traditional objection of the fan: "'Business?' the girl replied, as though struck by the possibility she'd made a horrid mistake. 'Aren't you a ball player?'"(51).

Of course not all professional athletes behave like spoiled kids. The spoiled athlete is one type of the baseball "kid." If the kid gets to speak the fan's interests for a clean,

---

8 When asked about the fans, Rayburn replies, "What about them?" (26).

family game, the spoiled athlete becomes the scapegoat for the fan's distaste or boredom. As such, the Bobby Rayburn character is no less trapped in the patrilinear sentiments of baseball fictions. While Gil Renard is unable to retain the promises of his father's creativity so that he lashes out, Bobby Rayburn's ability to maintain the life of a protected child (*be a boy, hero*) makes him ill-suited for adult compromise or the ability to see beyond the ballpark.

In *The Fan*, it is a female sports writer named "Jewel" -- reminiscent of the sportswriter/sleuth of Allison Gordon's Kate Henry mysteries -- who connects the narratives and gets to solve the crime. She's cynical enough to realize "ball players: they got all the sleep they wanted, like babies" (257). Yet -- like *Hoopla*'s Luther Pond -- she makes her own enabling contribution to the star's hype; her article on Rayburn begins "If the phrase 'All-American boy' still has any meaning at this late date, it surely applies to Bobby Rayburn" (259). Further, it doesn't prevent Jewel from becoming sexually attracted to the All-American myth and, through her wise affection, she educates him out of his stupor in a way which says "We're thinking of a Susan Sarandon type for the movie."

Rayburn's relationship with his son Sean is less dramatic than the Gil / Richie relationship, but it is as important in the pattern of finding the adult voice. This plotline starts with a take on the famous Babe Ruth / Johnny Sylvester story[9] when Rayburn visits a hospital ward and meets a child, also named Sean, who has lost his hair from chemotherapy and who asks his hero to hit a home run in that night's game. Rayburn fails to hit one, and the boy dies just after listening to the game and realizing Rayburn has let him down. The encounter weighs heavily on Rayburn, and he blames the meeting, in part, for the slump he gets mired in, later referring to the sick child as "Chemo Sean." This event becomes so overwhelming for Rayburn, a man who is living a childhood fantasy, that rather than confront the suggestion of death and unfair rewards he tries to avoid it, going so far as to suggest his own son use his middle name so Rayburn wouldn't be reminded of "Chemo Sean" (198). As Gil reacts violently to the unfairness of life, Rayburn acts childishly; both are avoiding their responsibilities as parents because of their inability to locate themselves beyond their baseball "careers." Surrounded by inflated sports myths of responsibility to children, both fail to step aside from these myths and toward their sons.

"The catcher is the father, the son is the pitcher" (175), Gil reminds himself of the dynamics of the game of catch. The battery (catcher & pitcher) is an important relationship

---

9 And so the story goes: Sylvester asks Ruth to hit a home run, Ruth does, kid gets better, Ruth is commended for what he did for Johnny Sylvester and Ruth says "who the hell is Johnny Sylvester?"

in baseball and particularly celebrated in representations of the game. Whatever the importance of the relationship on the field, in baseball fiction the intimate communication within the battery makes it an obvious relationship to exploit.[10] The father-son battery as recollected through Gil's mantra, strategically reasserts the primary importance of their game of catch. By obvious extension it becomes a metaphor for initiation into proper manhood: the receiver -- the patient interpreter and reader -- helps the son channel the youthful strength inherent in his arm. But it is the metaphor -- not the actual father and son -- which is important to Gil.

Like any good thriller, *The Fan* does not labor its action with long philosophical expositions on the social conditioning of the characters. Unsurprisingly, there are a few sideswipes aimed at academics who "read too much" into the game and who are adding to a sense of pathological dependence on sport for cultural validation. For example, a dubious psychiatrist comes on the phone-in sports show Gil obsessively listens to in order to plug his book *Three Dreams You're Out: Freud, Jung, Baseball* and declares, "The ball symbolizes the family gene pool" (34). But the narratives in *The Fan* cross-hatch well because the use of the baseball setting is immediately suggestive of its issues; the possible embrace of conservative, middle class norms in the game is -- as always -- contrasted by the failures of ordinary Americans to live up to its exquisite and excruciating paradigms. Father-son issues in *The Fan* are echoed in contemporary baseball fiction as the sentiment can be measured against the real emotions inherent in the sport-based relationships of millions of American men. In Gil's violence or Rayburn's selfishness we can see exaggerated versions of father-son relationships that are largely mediated through sports.

By bringing the complexity of the intersecting dramas to the moment of "the catcher is the father, the son is the pitcher" the novel ironically engages the sorrows inherent in valuing the "family gene pool" in terms of baseball success. At first Gil brings his disgust at his son's lack of on-field prowess to bear on his ex-wife: "Was there a baseball gene that a few had and most did not? It wasn't fair. Well, Gil had that gene, didn't he? It was Ellen who had screwed things up" (304). But later Gil denounces his own gene pool with disgust, asserting he is "Limp like three limp generations: his father, him, Richie; versus Rayburn's father, Rayburn, Sean" (316). The narrative does not explicitly disavow the genetic argument (Rayburn's gifts are in fact scientifically corroborated in an eye-exam),

---

10 For example, Crash Davis and Nuke LaLoosh in *Bull Durham*; Henry Wiggen and Bruce Pearson in *Bang the Drum Slowly* -- in each case a coming together of opposites: intellectual wash-up v. superficial phenom; Yankee star v. hick jouneyman.

but it is Gil's faith in this code which dooms him as the economic factors of his life drive him to murder.

The Fan is one of the few baseball novels which chooses to contrast the economic circumstances of the fan and the player. Gil Renard becomes the displaced "angry man," who is lost in the take-over economy, whose divorce settlement has alienated him from his child(ren), who sees few signs of things getting better. Whereas in *Bang the Drum Slowly* Henry Wiggen's insurance-selling may have made him look crudely capitalist, he is still living in a world where this kind of extra money is important to a ballplayer. Bobby Rayburn's enormous wealth is entirely *unearned* -- acting out his physical gifts, he can only imitate "business," get ripped-off by money-savvy agents with regularity, and live in ignorance of his own son's needs. The sportsworld has not rewarded either protagonist with wisdom and keeps them both enthralled to a juvenile vision of themselves which is indulged and exacerbated by the game.

Whatever its modernities, the movie version of *The Fan*, even though it was full of star power (Robert DeNiro and Wesley Snipes as Gil and Rayburn), failed to appeal to audiences. There are, of course, many reasons for a film's poor showing, the nausea of seeing DeNiro play yet another psycho undoubtedly being one. But I would also suggest that, even considering ill-will of baseball fans post-strike, the public is probably not that interested in nasty movies about baseball. It's more likely that the misgivings of fans will be exploited by pictures of uncomplicated affection for the game.[11] It certainly can be argued that *The Fan* just was not the vehicle to express anxiety about the celebration of sports by American men; baseball fiction more often succeeds when it tries to resolve its conflicts with an evocation of generational harmony.

Dying Children

Michael Shaara's novella *For Love of the Game* (1991) is an attempt to bring the sentiment of *The Old Man and The Sea* to baseball literature and is a fair example of how baseball is used as a literary device to transcend "unpleasant" developments in history and to imaginatively return paternal value to a contemporary landscape.[12] An aging pitcher, ready

---

[11] It's rumored that Kevin Costner will be following his past successes in *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams* by starring in the film version of Michael Shaara's sentimental *For the Love of the Game*. It will be interesting to see if this lower-profile movie will succeed where *The Fan* failed.

[12] Published posthumously, the novella's weaknesses may have otherwise been corrected, had Shaara more time to work on the manuscript. Readers of Shaara might

to make the ultimate pastoral escape by moving to New Zealand, ends up struggling through a tough game (and some tougher sentences) to pitch a glorious no-hitter. The pitcher, named "Billy Chapel" (conflating the juvenile strains of *Billy Boy* with the necessary solemity for the "Church of Baseball") is connected to the better past; a "throwback" whose virtue is secured with the ultimate compliment -- he is "insulted" by a *lawyer* who says "you never came out of the goddam eighteenth century" (21). (A compliment Crabbe Evers' baseball P.I. Duffy House is routinely paid.) Billy is almost completely infantilized by his wife: "Billy bless your head, you're more fun than any kid I've ever known. And you're such a lovely boy. A sweet, sweet boy"(36), and he is motivated throughout by the voice of his father: "Pop would say: 'Play your heart out Billy. Give it all back, Billy, everything you've been given. Give it all back . . . out of the golden arm . . . the golden arm God gave you'"(56). Billy Chapel's impending athletic "death" is foreshadowed by the motivational assurances of idealized childhood.

For The Love Of The Game works through the conceits of baseball's literary province and comes up once again with the idea that, deep down, it's a kid's game, and all the things which remind us otherwise are not only bad for the game but implicated in the *fin-de-siecle* anxieties which grip America. The maintenance of the sentimental lexicon of "The Boys of Summer" is, of course, dependent on the inevitability of "Winter" -- and adult maturation in the sportsworld is the first sign of "death." It's often said an athlete must die two deaths, one of them being the day of retirement, usually at an age when most people are starting to get settled in their career paths. This metaphoric death of the final game for Billy requires one last heroic struggle reaching back not just to his arsenal of pitches but to his proper initiation as an American son of baseball. In contrast to the messages of father / son apocalypse in *The Fan*, Billy Chapel's father's advice allows the pitcher to stay in his thoughts, assured of the primacy of the baseball action and unaffected by the noise which surrounds him. Aiming for the absolute focus of Santiago in his struggle with the big fish, Chapel's focus, however, seems unrealistically located in the more literary conventions of stream-of-consciousness and creates a pseudo-mythology about baseball's purity which is mostly based on baseball's *literary* reputation.

---

agree with *Publishers Weekly*'s *de riguer* but apt simile for the book as, "best compared to watching a gifted young player whose promise slowly fades with every strikeout and weak groundball, despite occasional flashes of potential. Shaara, who won a Pulitzer in 1975 for *Killer Angels*, died just after the book was finished, and one feels he might have liked to give it a rewrite" (44). As it is, the book is not only subject to an "unhealthy number of baseball clichés" (44), but also plagued by simple technical errors, none as egregious as the claim that the subject -- an aging pitcher -- was a threat at the plate.

Predictably, the tag line of the novella is to have Billy's wife say, on the completion of his career, "you grew up" (152), signalling his stage-exit and his readiness for the "death" of New Zealand. By asserting the life of the child (as opposed to the more problematically sexualized identity of the adolescent -- the characterization behind baseball's *Ball Four* or football's *Semi-Tough*) as the ideal state for the ballplayer, "growing-up" and adulthood become ruthlessly synonymous with death. The only way to stay alive in this peculiar economy is to remain an innocent child. Ironically then, the old sports-bio hero (where questionable off-field behavior is sloughed off as the behavior of a "bad kid") has become prominently relocated in the pages of serious, adult mainstream fiction. Without stating its chronology, the novel despairs of the usual villains of real baseball (TV games, night games, the press, etc.) and Billy's sudden no-hit outing is part of a heroic resistance: "Baseball was changing but he did not change with it" (94). The catalogue of the grand old game's dissolutions rejoins vague memories of a past that may have never existed but actively needs to be reclaimed. Billy Chapel's choruses of "I'm a kid. A ballplayer"(82) are a performance of transcendence and reach back, away from recent developments, to a harmonic vision of professional sports as a way of living-out father's counsel.

In contrast, Rick Norman's *Fielder's Choice* (1991) offers a less serious (and, I should say, a truly funny) use of the child's vantage-point to affirm baseball's emotional currency. *Fielder's Choice* is a dramatic monologue (in the frame of a letter) modelled after Lardner but composed with a more lasting sympathy for the speaking rube. Dedicated to all of baseball's grand losers -- Fred Merkle, Heinie Zimmerman, Mickey Owen, Bill Buckner and so on -- it is the story of a Southern ballplayer's relationship with his family after a legendary boner play chases him out of the game and into military service. The novel aids in the construction of the innocent child's game as the essential baseball game but does so in a way which interrogates the national interests hidden within this establishment. Set around the period of the Second World War, the preface by the narrator's erstwhile catcher "Neckless" Womack reminds us of a time "before designated hitters, batting helmets or gloves, exploding scoreboards, artificial turf, and prima donna ballplayers with pants tighter than Mikhail Bulge-itnikov's" (7).

Unlike Billy Chapel, whose father's ancient spiritual advice still motivates him on the mound, the narrator of *Fielder's Choice* --"Gooseball" Fielder -- had encouragements which were less golden:

> Then Paw says that I shouldn't be worried about my skinny body, what with having a head shaped like a potato. A potato! I couldn't hardly believe

> it. I never knew exactly what was meant by it, but I can tell you I never was the same afterwards. (24)

What is interesting about this exchange is the quick sensitivity of Gooseball, more so than the "cruelty" of the father. The relationship to the father is not the crucial baseball relationship; it is his relationship to his brother, Jugs. As indicated by the brother's nickname, a certain *cutting down* is part of an affectionate need for bonding, but also indicative of the intensity of sibling rivalry. The humor of the book actually is most often found in its details of competitive and unrelenting practical jokes which are aimed every which way and sometimes with disastrous consequences.

To every affirmative Cosby comes the eventual Homer Simpson (whose only game of catch with his son Bart ended when Homer took the first pitch to the head). And while the emergence of "negative" role models is a constant irritant to both right wing and left wing cultural reformers, the represented father figure is sometimes more effective when the portrait is recognizably flawed. Just as Donna Reed and Betty Furness have become synonymous with an impossibly outdated social definition of femininity, the self-consciously constructed "positive male role model" of the attentive game of catch may be rewarded with future disbelief. (Certainly *All in the Family*'s Archie Bunker is more "loveable" than *Father Knows Best*'s Jim Anderson.) In *Fielder's Choice*, "Paw" is not an instructor of virtue but the most enticing target for a practical joke, given that he is so much bigger than the boys. And the exposure of Paw's failures does not warp the boys, who are, after all, busy growing up. Paw's failures make him more sympathetic and end up connecting him to a real, adult world. Gooseball's reaction to seeing his father after he's moved in with his mistress, avoids disillusioned contempt in favor of noticing positive change: "Paw would act like a kid. He'd crack jokes and shadowbox with me, and do other stuff I never seen him do before. He even smelled different" (31). Gooseball Jackson may be the rube in the story, but his sensitivity becomes the source of genuine heroism.

There is a typically anti-intellectual temper to the humor in *Fielder's Choice*, and the father in the text is spared the kind of evil that overwhelms the suspiciously educated youngest brother, Jude. Confronted with a newsreel about a Yale professor who explains the physics of baseball, Gooseball quips, "he also said a curveball didn't really curve. I remember after I heard him say that, I wasn't so sorry I hadn't gone to college" (76). More seriously, and unlike Lardner's rubes, this rube's voice is honorable, and his insights, like the one about the curveball, have popular opinion behind them. And this may spell trouble for a variety of organizationally "made men" -- whether they be made in the university, the military or in baseball.

The central action of the novel takes place overseas. After his monumental choke (balking home the winning run in a pennant-deciding match) Gooseball takes refuge in the military, and his plane is shot down over Japan, where he is captured, imprisoned, cruelly tortured and nearly killed. Recovering from a particularly vicious attack, he is assigned by an American educated, baseball savvy Japanese Admiral to teach his teenage son Yoshi the secrets of the "Gooseball." The Admiral tells him, "This war will not last forever. Someday the bombs will stop falling and the baseballs will fly again" (143). Gooseball realizes, "I liked this kid. We spoke baseball" (151), and in this suddenly equalizing language of baseball he rediscovers something important about the game and something new and destructive about nationalism:

> I couldn't hardly believe it. What was a baseball diamond doing in Japan? . . . the Japs was big baseball fans with their own professional teams that wore uniforms just like ours. Why, Babe Ruth and a bunch of other major league players had been to Japan before the War to play the Japanese All-Stars.
>
> All at once I got to thinking that maybe the Japs was human beings. (105)

The military narrative forms an important contrast with the baseball narrative, and the tension between them is one that occurs in few baseball novels. On one hand, the military and baseball seem incompatible: *play* is supposed to be the opposite of *war*, and baseball's song of itself luxuriates in its pacific reputation. (Hence, the constant reviling of football's martial implications by baseball enthusiasts.) On the other hand, both baseball and military service are patriotically encoded as part of the normative rituals of American male authority, and, historically, official baseball has been enlisted to endorse the military under implicit fear of losing its patriotic reputation.

In teaching baseball to Yoshi, the young American lives out the *Catcher in the Rye* dream -- catching children before they fall over the edge into adulthood -- but the realities of the war force him to confront his own limitations: Yoshi is slated to enter the doomed but proud service of the *Kamikaze*. Yoshi's father is not worried about this but is proud of the maintenance of the honorable veneer of service. Gooseball's sentiment, one which perhaps comes with an insight into the limitations of the father, leads him to the realization: "I did not know how a father could send his boy off to die, but then didn't my mother send me? . . . I made up my mind in the Admiral's front yard that I would never send my son off to war, at least not until the Huns crossed the Mississippi" (156). This isolationist's mantra, one which would be echoed by Muhammed Ali as he was imprisoned for refusing to serve

in the Vietnam War, remains a compelling slogan, but in Gooseball Jackson's case it is part of his ability to see the person beyond the traditional role imposed from without.

When the war is over and Jackson returns home he finds he is not protected by his service or his forgiving love of baseball. There couldn't be a better tag line for this love than: "I've smelled perfume from Paris and barbecue from Beaumont, but there ain't no better smell on God's good earth than a well-oiled baseball glove" (144). Suspected by military brass of "aiding and abetting the enemy" while instructing Yoshi in baseball, Jackson is unfairly blackballed from the game by the very same stateside "patriots" who have cashed-in on turning baseball into "America's game" and who saved their war-time business operation by using their games as morale boosters. Gooseball's recollection that he "survived the last two days" (of a brutal solitary confinment sentence) "by pitching ballgames in my head "(124)[13] is less a declaration of his Americaness, and more of his heroic decency. Baseball is not a performance of the virtues of American boys but at heart an expression of the *universal* value of play: "Sure I throwed the baseball with a Jap boy, but I don't see how that aided and abetted the enemy unless we was planning to play Japan a seven game series for the Pacific. Which probably would have been a better idea" (179).

The co-opting of the play of baseball to support official versions of patriotism which can be used against citizens is an important consideration in the study of how baseball imagery is worked out in literature, particularly as the pain associated with the Vietnam war motivates much of the "back to the fifties, back to *America*" sentiment of the Reagan / Bush era. Does baseball afford a return to more harmonious days when Willie, Duke and The Mick patrolled centerfield, or does the sport itself embody the force of institutional, corporate middle America which was brought along to boost the effort for an unjust war? As baseball fields all over the United States were used to solemnize the war effort in Vietnam,[14] American popular culture aligned war protest with the vital youth segment of the marketplace and the status of baseball became, in a way, more "old-fashioned," and more definable as a pastime of Nixon's silent majority. Newspaper

---

13 Gooseball here is not unlike the Steve McQueen character in *The Great Escape*, who takes his severe sentence to the cooler not with a stiff upper lip, but with American good humor because he has a ball and mitt to bide the time (See also David C. Voight's essay "Getting Right With Baseball," where the McQueen character is mentioned as the "individual's identity quest"[28]).

14 As sportsfields would be stages for Gulf War boosters down the road. In a funny essay about the pieties assumed by sportswriters and sportscasters during the Gulf War, Michael A. Griffith writes "when a vicious ferret like [sportscaster] Mike Lupica starts sounding holier-than-thou, thou gets antsy" (13).

columnist James Reston's declaration that organized sports were in 1966 "a unifying social force, and a counter to the confusion about the vagueness and complexity of our cities, and in this long-haired age, even the confusion between our sexes" (qtd in Leverett T. Smith 3), sounds more like an example of the irreparable divisions of Reston's time than an example of generational cohesion. And given the perceptible depth of such a generational rift, reconciling the game between father and son will always be an enticing proposition.

In *Fielder's Choice*, baseball is not a sure-fire remedy for generational conflict. The hero does not find or validate his own father in discovering the non-verbal values of play. In fact, Gooseball is severely punished by his fatherland for taking the universal message of play outside of America's borders. Whereas in *For The Love of the Game* the sentimental hubris of "one last go round for the kid" is the final answer to the father's wise advice, and the protagonist's determination to hold onto his childhood is his great heroic act. Life is over after thirty, or at least after the athlete's peak years, and the hero can leave the noise of the USA for a vision of pastoral bliss, somewhere out west.

The Brothers K

David James Duncan's *The Brothers K* (1992) is one of the most ambitious and finely detailed baseball novels published in the last decade. Essentially the saga of the passing of a generation of a large family in an Oregonian mill town, it is also much more: a meditation on the pursuit of spiritual wealth, the maintenance of dignity, the finer points of baseball, the power of the state, the violence of war and the limitations of the family. While some of the commentary on the book has focused on the parallels the novel draws between baseball and religion (one substituting for the other in a Kinsellan way) -- or as professor Joseph Price puts it, the "celebration of the sacramental character of baseball" (307) -- the connection that is made between the two is often casual and diverted by the inadequacies of either sport or religion to fully address the complexities of the family.

The novel's first sentence, "Papa is in his easy chair, reading the Sunday sports page" (3), presents an image so common it is nearly a cliché; dated "1956" (the year Elvis Presley broke) it goes on to present the head of the nuclear household as both standard ("plaid shirt, brown leather belt, baggy tan trousers") and as an awesome force ("a region, an earth") to the young narrator. The subject of the narrative is the Chance family, headed by father Hugh, a minor league pitcher who works in a mill outside of Portland. The mother, Laura, is a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church (an evangelical, American-born, strictly sabbatarian, sect who are anticipating the Second Coming of Christ), and the trappings of her faith bring a sharp intellectual and literary passion to the

household as their children navigate their own course between the earthy influences of the cigarette-smoking, beer-drinking, ball-playing father and the devout, demanding mother. Also present in the family sphere is Hugh's mother, a sincere Darwinian atheist whose presence calls into question all the social implications of faith, or as one of the children puts it, "This means she is basically against most things, such as war, Sports, and God" (61).

The Chances have six children who all are tested by the conflicts inherent in father and mother / baseball and religion. The oldest boy Everett is a passionate and rebellious intellectual who ends up going to Canada to dodge the draft. Irwin is a pious Adventist, who eventually serves in the Vietnam war. Peter is a once promising ballplayer, who gives up the game to go to Harvard and pursue his interest in the poet-saints of India. The youngest son is Kincaid, who narrates most of the story and is less implicated in the drama. He is followed by twin girls Winifred and Beatrice ("Bet" and "Freddy"). As the title might indicate, it is Kincaid's narrative of his older brothers' stories that forms the action of the novel. The title puns Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) -- a book which is frequently quoted in the text -- and alludes to the use of "K" in baseball to signify a strikeout, the ultimate success for *Lucky Strike*-smoking pitcher *Hugh Chance*, but the most obvious failure for a batsman. As Joseph Price guesses, the K is "suggesting the ways in which each of the Chance brothers . . . somehow strikes out with his family after striking out from home" (303). This theory is corroborated by the novel's author in a *New York Times Book Review* interview: "the main thing I was thinking is the baseball statistician's lingo -- a K is a strikeout which is a personal failure" (Hunnewell 14). For each of the brothers the influence of father and mother / baseball and religion extend outside the family and have implications which are not always rewarded in the outside world.

The "average" Pop figure of the first page is soon tempered by the knowledge that Hugh Chance is a ballplayer, connected to youth and the outdoors:

> I think I remember the tall men with caps and gloves running over the grass . . . throwing and hitting baseballs and singing *Aaaaa! Aaaaa!* and *Hum Babe!* and *Hey, Batter!* My oldest brother, Everett, showed me how they sing. He said that *Hum Babes* are special, because Papa is the pitcher and it's his pitches that hum. They call Papa a *babe*? (5)

Kincaid's surprise that his father could be associated with any sign of youth jolts Hugh out of the more staid identity of working-class bread winner. And it is the heroic vision of the father as ballplayer which becomes the mental exit for the Chance brothers from their demanding circumstances. As Kincaid, named for the town of Kincaid, Oklahoma, a place where Hugh played for a minor league team called the "Cornshuckers"(13), says, "I'd

never seen him play baseball, but from what I saw of him at home and gleaned from Everett's and Mama's stories, I believed Papa was Bob Feller, Solomon and Pecos Bill rolled into one" (102).

Papa Chance, however, has little good luck. In a mill accident, the thumb of his pitching hand is crushed and along with it his hopes of a major league career. The more obvious symbolism of a working class impotence is important to consider; for all the Chance brothers the father's crushed thumb puts them more directly under their mother's thumb. The accident is a kind of death, ending fantasies of what their father could be. A letter to Everett from one of Papa's coaches (given the ultra-male name of G.Q. Durham) claims,

> You me and your Papa are 3 of the tiny percentage of souls on this miserable earth who've figured out that playing ball is the highest purpose God ever invented the human male body for. The rub is, once you've known & done it what you go through when you lose it is a death pure & simple. (13)

Withdrawing from the game has profound implications, and for Papa Chance, his identity is overwhelmed with unkind self-pity. "A white mill nigger, he called himself" (27), Kincaid recalls, as his father depressively reminds him of what could have been -- "millwork isn't baseball" (109).

In contrast, the world of the mother and the church is, except for Irwin, a burden whose ultimate value is how it shapes the discourse of the boys -- especially Everett -- who are weary of regular church attendance. The weekly sermons of Elder Babcock, stressing the presence of Satan in our midst, becomes an opportunity to discover hypocrisy, ultimately with tragic consequences. Mama's faith is something that is not shaken by the eventual estrangement of her own children from the church; in the aftermath of a dinner table fracas caused by Everett's mildly agnostic grace,"Dear God, if there is One"(185), she eventually accuses her sons of being in league with Satan.[15] The religious authoritarianism retains for the mother an armor of seriousness, which can always cast shame on the boyishness associated with baseball and the brothers Chance. Recalling an

---

15 By the end of the *The Brothers K.*, the rationale for Mrs. Chance's fierce piety is explained as the tribute she gave the church for taking her in after she was sexually molested by her father (704) -- a reasonable source, to be sure, but with the disclosure coming so late in the book, it comes off a bit like pc theatre; ablution of behaviour with "abuse-excuse."

argument between his parents, Kincaid is particularly struck by the level of his mother's seriousness:

> Then Papa smiled his nicest smile, and she saw he was pulling her leg and broke out in a grin, and I thought the fight was over. But then -- I don't know how or why she did it -- Mama just amputated her grin, and looked at Papa like she hated him. And his smile fell off his face like ice cream off a little kid's cone. It made me sick. (19)

The "civilizing force" of the nuclear family also has a Medusa stare; this fifties mother is not June Cleaver.

In his bestselling history, *The Fifties*, David Halberstam writes "One reason that Americans as a people became so nostalgic about the fifties more than twenty five years later was not so much that life was better in the fifties (though in some ways it was), but because at the time it had been portrayed so idyllically on television" (514). Likewise, baseball nostalgia is, in part, television nostalgia; the dream of the game as a compass for the passing of generations is in part a dream sponsored by the memories of times when "everybody" was watching the game. Similarly, the passion for the order of the middle class family of the fifties, when men were valued breadwinners and carjacking was something a gas station attendant did when you asked, is often a recasting of the economies of television families. When Dan Quayle initiated the "family values" debate by assailing plot developments in the CBS comedy *Murphy Brown* he picked the right target; the modern show was easily held in contrast to the sitcom values of the fifties.

The Chance family of 1956 is nothing like their televised counterparts (or no more so than the way my life resembles an episode of *Seinfeld* or *Friends*), and Everett mocks the distance by reasonably questioning a paternal demand with the rejoinder, "What is this *Father Knows Best*?"(33). The Chance household does watch television, however, and their viewing habits are characteristically family-inclusive and social; the Chase family is gathering around to watch *The Ed Sullivan Show* (what else?) which brings forth unthreatening interactions which help differentiate the tastes of the viewers.[16] To a small town like Camas, television is obviously an important service for a national culture; and the broadcast of big league baseball games helps establish the cultural dominance of the Major Leagues (and its big city teams), as Kincaid eventually realizes: "You've got to pretty much

---

16 So, even the pattern of television consumption in the 1950s is idealized. The pleasant image of the middle class family gathered around the tube to laugh at Uncle Miltie, is a sharp contrast to what I think is the dominant image of TV-watching today: the unsupervised child watching violent television alone in the dark.

love New York and kiss off Kentucky to admire the way big league baseball operates" (560).

One of Kincaid's formative memories is how he once managed to escape going to church and stayed home with his father to watch a game between the Yankees and the Indians.[17] The excitement of the specific game is great luck for the boy, allowing him to experience the emotional resolutions and disappointments of a game. It is also warmly educational, his understanding aided by the low-brow play-by-play offered by Dizzy Dean.

> (Dizzy) tells you things you hadn't noticed, and things that have nothing to do with what's happening, and he gets mad at umps, makes fun of bad plays and players, he calls errors "eras" and basemen "sackers," tells lies, brags, invents fake statistics to win arguments, and generally grates on Pee Wee's nerves till you feel you're really living through a flesh-and-blood ballgame instead of sitting in your house staring at a box. (30)

The *talking* is valued as much as the play, and it is this part of the game that Kincaid can only find with his brothers. Talking baseball is in some ways a bridge across the traditionally gendered division in the domestic spheres between the male and the physical and the female and the verbal. His taciturn father is a physical *player* rather than a talking fan; whereas his mother is piously dedicated to *The Word* and maintains a strong suspicion of the physical, so by talking baseball, Kincaid can justify his love:

> There are, as far as I can tell, just two types of people who can bear to watch baseball without talking: total non baseball fans and hard-core players. The hard core player can watch in silence because his immersion is so complete that he feels no need to speak, while the *persona non baseball* can do it because his ignorance is so vast that he sees nothing worthy of comment. (167)

The knowledgable commentary on baseball dope in the *Brothers K* is memorably bright and original. What emerges is an articulation of a baseball philosophy which often runs contrary to recent *apologias* for the history of the game. One of the many bold strokes of the novel, according to reviewer Bill Kent, is that it "goes so far as to mark the beginning of the turbulent 60s not with the Kennedy assassination or the arrival of the Beatles but with the day Roger Maris became the assassin of a legend, hitting 61 home runs and breaking Babe Ruth's single season record" (14). Presenting such a detailed case

---

[17] The use of the two teams is metaphorical, and gives Kincaid a chance to express a proto-consciousness of the "issues" about the Tribe's name 40 years in advance --"what if there was a team of Negroes and Indians called "the Cleveland White Guys"? I think a lot of pale-faced folks wouldn't be all that thrilled"(33).

against Roger Maris, *The Brothers K* goes against contemporary attempts to reassess Maris's achievements as baseball's establishment has come down with a case of the guilts about the so-called asterisk that appeared by Maris's name in the record book to note he took 6 more games to set the record, thus diminishing his achievement in the eyes of the fans. The story of Maris's debasement by the rapacious New York media and the Babe-loving fans of Gotham has become one of modern baseball's great anecdotes, complete with details of Maris's hair coming out in clumps and a final confession that he wished he never broke the record at all. The case Kincaid and his brothers present against Maris is not out of fealty to Ruth; it is a signal that baseball had suddenly become unworthy, and at the start of the sixties could no longer hold their interest. It is a signal for professional baseball to get off the center stage of American cultural life until it can be reclaimed. It is a sign of the end of his father's generation. Maris's success is a statement about the game not being what it used to be: "the game we'd once seen as the heroic enactment of a living American mythology seemed to devolve overnight into that branch of the Entertainment Industry catering to those unable to outgrow their grammar school fascinations with hitting, spitting and throwing" (298).

"There is something about Roger Maris that makes even his homers boring"(40) Kincaid says as a young boy. And while he grows up to respect the indignity of the asterisk Maris was collared with, he makes an interesting point about the single-minded pursuit of a technical achievement: "If Ruth was the Sultan of Swat, Maris was the Technician of Boink" (300). Kincaid sees this technical advancement as a dangerous "subterranean" pursuit that takes one away from the well-rounded requirements of the earth (of the blue collar world of his minor league father). The distinction is also one that signals Kincaid's relative immunity to the kinds of "underground" disappointments his brothers would suffer in the 1960s.

Kincaid's philosophical despair of Maris as technician is a refinement of his father's baseball philosophies. Rather than argue for the repetition of technique, Papa Chance argues *baseball-mind.* He theorizes that the umpire's subjective discretion is the real author of the game, and, resisting the more heroic discourse of raw talent, he claims that players succeed when they can influence umpires with "voodoo" (147). He even goes so far as to suggest that Red Sox legend Ted Williams was heavily reliant on "voodoo." Following-up Williams' claim his secret weapon was the "eyes," Papa Chance retorts "nobody has ever said anything like this! Hell, Ty Cobb hit .367 lifetime, and even he admitted that a good fastball was a blur and that every swing he ever took was an educated guess" (147), suggesting Williams was trying to tell the umpires he could really *see* what they couldn't and therefore deserved the benefit of the doubt on balls and strikes. These baseball lessons

are not presented merely to cast a different light on the achievements of known legends but to bring the focus to the hidden, but plausible meanings in ordinary achievements.

Kincaid's "say it ain't so" challenge to his dad's departure from baseball, despite the injury to his thumb and his blue collar job at the mill, enrages Hugh enough to get him to stop smoking and to start working out. Later, Hugh submits himself to an experimental surgery that transplants one of his toes onto his destroyed digit. Entertaining thoughts of a comeback, Hugh builds a shed to house a mound where he can get some practice throws in private. Hugh is not interested in passing on his baseball skills to his son; the commencement of an unlikely return to baseball is also a revanchiste gesture to reclaim the authority he had as a hopeful player. The construction of a gross-smelling shed to practise in is perhaps an ironic comment on the grand gesture of *Field of Dreams*. But unlike W.P. Kinsella's Ray Kinsella, who builds his Iowan ballpark as a metaphorical gesture to confirm the poetic correctness of the nostalgic voice that asks him to build, Duncan's Hugh Chance is building a shed to save himself: "This was no harebrained fraction of an imaginary ballpark. It was something perfectly practical -- assuming that its builder was a pitcher" (122). The commencement of his "shedball" routine puts Hugh Chance back into the realm of practice and drills, not into the "heaven" of baseball.

> The reason my father did not wax lyrical about warm spring nights or baseball fever was that he wasn't the poet, he was the topic. Papa didn't present the case for baseball, he *represented* it, and to stand in front of him wondering if the scent of mown grass and plum blossoms made him think of baseball was like asking a blood-stained man with a fly rod and ten dead trout on a stringer if he ever thought about fishing. (138)

Of course, the grafting of one's toe as a thumb, the spending time away from your rather large family in a shed to practise throwing a baseball in the hope of maybe, just maybe, hooking onto a minor league team is not purely practical. Whether baseball voodoo, or the practise of *baseball-mind*, the gesture insists that without baseball Hugh Chance is not quite alive. To put it in other words, it sounds crazy to me.

The extent to which the strong and silent Hugh Chance needs to play the game places him in the same struggle his sons are in. The confident assertion of his friend GQ -- "What I'm gonna do, my onetime ballplayin friend, is die lovin the game of baseball. An' what you're gonna do, if you betray that same love, is die confused" (284) -- undoubtedly resonates within the skeptical millhand. And as Hugh eventually works his way to becoming "Papa Toe," a coach and "stupid situation" relief pitcher for the Portland Tugs, he is actively working himself out of the household, just as his boys are talking their way out of Oregon. With significant physical gestures, Hugh removes himself from the

restrictions on his life, which makes him a more sympathetic character to his sons. It becomes plain to Kincaid as he listens to his father practice in his shed that "Papa was throwing more than just adrenaline: he was throwing his frustration, his anger, his dissolved hopes, his fear, his fatigue; he was taking everything inside him and just slinging it, helter-skelter, out into the night" (130).

The baseball lesson Papa Toe Chance teaches is not the archetypal game of catch -- what New England poet Donald Hall calls "the profound archaic song of birth, growth, age, and death. This diamond encloses what we are" (30). There is no actual teaching of the game to his kids, only the overriding sense that baseball is preferable to the alternative enclosures life relentlessly constructs. Baseball is not an exercise which will actually ease the pain of the past or help ride out the difficulties of the future, and Papa Chance's career serves modestly as a flawed, human model of action. Reflecting on what he and his brothers took from Papa Toe's extraordinary career, Kincaid says "Papa's bum baseball luck had some effect on all of us: for instance, it gave us all a soft spot for snakebit heroes" (273). As the portrait of the flawed father in *Fielder's Choice* helps enable its protagonist to see beyond the propaganda official baseball can be enlisted to support, Hugh's Macbeth-like determination to "bear-like . . . fight the course" is heroically rebellious at a time when notions of duty and rebellion were sharply contested and often a source of division between fathers and sons.

As the Vietnam war escalates, the definition of heroic American service becomes divisive, as the values of military involvement and patriotism come into conflict with widespread dissent. The status of a cultural item like "professional baseball hero" is likewise contested in a period whose critiques of traditional American values went beyond a discussion of policy in Indochina. And the emergence of a counterculture "program" is further problematized in the cultural arena as the material products of this counterculture were profitable enough to create a new "mainstream".[13] To a certain extent, the once worrisome Sixties counterculture has won out: Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles and memories of Woodstock certainly have more clout in the cultural marketplace than Steve Lawrence and Sgt Barry Sadler. As popular culture divides between "we support the troops" and "Hey, Hey, LBJ" the place of the traditionally patriotic spectacle of professional baseball becomes linked to a passing generation of fathers.

---

18 An irony also articulated in *The Brothers K*: "Did you know Bob Dylan left the lyric sheet off his last mumbly record so you gotta buy the four ninety-five songbook from CBS to grasp the antimaterialistic lyrics?"(539).

In a *Sports Illustrated* article on the relationship between sports and religion, Frank Deford claims that "baseball and religion are precisely the only two of our institutions which we regularly attach the defining adjective 'organized' to. We always refer to Organized Baseball and Organized Religion, but we never say Organized Business or Organized Football" (qtd in Price 300), and, while *SI*'s copy editors may not have had the time to remind Mr. Deford that the terms "Organized Labor" and "Organized Crime" are fairly *au courant*, his point is still well taken. This passing generation of baseball fathers suggests the passing of a faith in many American social organizations is fading (and the "baseball father" role is perhaps becoming recast as a "soccer mom"). In the *Brothers K*, Irwin's faith in organized religion evaporates when a vengeful elder refuses to acknowledge Irwin's faith, leaving him open to the draft (Seventh Day Adventists were usually granted CO exceptions). This discovery of an ecclesiastical "fix," which leads Irwin to uncover the fixes of the U.S. military and its authorities in Vietnam and at home, is a condemnation of all organizational power, including that of professional baseball, which is suspected of helping stack the decks against innocent kids who want to freely and unequivocally express the virtues of play.

The divisions of the Vietnam-era were not failures of the ballpark or just matters of trivial choices between recording artists; the so-called "generation gap" is part of a division that remains unresolved and continues to flare-up on the political stage. We could see Bill Clinton's "triangulated" movement to the right as one of the more obvious signs that the American middle class continues to feel anxious about the sixties, and liberalism bears a heavy burden of guilt for America's failures from Vietnam to Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, the L.A. riots, illegal immigration *etc.* The difficulty for American administrations to admit the apparent failure of a national policy (whether it be Vietnam, the Cuba embargo, or the "War on Drugs") often comes with a raising of the stakes in the rhetoric; hence, speaking out against Vietnam often came with a sharp price. (Just as today, no American politician serious about high office would speak of ending the Cuban embargo or of legalizing drugs -- even when the rationale for doing either has been reasonably discussed outside of politics.) The obligation to "support the troops" becomes a mode of control to authorize political objectives by tacitly questioning the patriotism and sensitivity of those who choose to dissent.[19] Articulating the distance between national policy and personal belief then becomes a difficult proposition, a lesson which Hugh's daughter Bet Chance learns in class when she writes:

---

19 As the solicitous phrase, "support the troops" would become an effective form of muting opposition to the Gulf War in 1991.

> I know that the way to get a D on this paper is to say the solution to the Vietnam part of this problem is to quit fighting and bring our toops home. And since good grades mean more to me than anything . . . my solution to this problem is to fight fight fight and kill kill kill until we win win win. (410)

(She gets an F anyway), but Hugh Chance's decision to concentrate on baseball (patriotic but peaceful) safely takes him out of the arena where his feelings on the divisive war would otherwise be tested.

Kincaid declares, "Baseball is not life. It is a fiction, a metaphor" (573). But as a *metaphor*, professional baseball can be harmful, since the institutional organization of the Major Leagues can be authorized to protect the "official version" of other patriotic events. It is a metaphor for a boy's undying vigor, but baseball also makes it hard to separate fiction from fact. (Would the "snakebit" heroes of *The Brothers K* have been spared of their tragedies if they had "made it" on the diamond?) While Hugh Chance reminds Kincaid, that "Baseball -- and I mean professional baseball -- has got damned near every problem that churches and religion have got. Don't you think it doesn't" (198), he still holds onto baseball like a holy grail.

The fates of the Chance brothers are not immunized by their passionate love of baseball; the extended scope of the novel does not allow such a simple resolution to the tensions of recent American history. The novel's ending does tend to sweep upward on an extended series of comings-together and positive notes, but even there confirm their atheist Grandmother's promise that "our lives will turn out very differently, and very much more darkly, than most of us ever dream as children" (235). To a certain extent, baseball dies with Papa Toe Chance's pre-Maris era, and the arrival of grandchildren makes no connecting gesture to the grand old game. Realistically and with no sense of regret, the grandchildren of the eighties are playing football (710). The dream of baseball is no refuge for fathers and sons to put aside their differences. Tropes like Donald Hall's "baseball is fathers and sons" are pleasant thoughts which a minor league team pyschiatrist in *The Brothers K* gleefully deconstructs:

> Now imagine a family with a father who occasionally declares to one of his sons, "You're cut!" or "You're traded!" and ships the little guy off forever on the next bus or plane. Imagine it good. Because *that* . . . is the only kind of dad . . . Danny Murtaugh or any other big league manager will ever be to you. So let me share a Big League Baseball Psychological Secret with you: *screw dads*! (562)

For *Papa* Toe, it is perhaps not such a big secret after all.

Season's End

The strength of the ideals in baseball fiction depends upon the strength of the less-than-ideal conditions they seek to remedy. The more immaculate the game, the more loathsome the discovery of the fix; the greener the fields, the more expensive the seat in the dome; the more divided the society, the greater need to exclaim the virtues of coming together; the sweeter the memories of playing catch with father, the more intense the *realpolitik* of *screw dads*. Popular messages from the late eighties about returning America to a *Cosby Show*-like dedication to the traditional virtues of fatherhood did not accompany an actual rededication to the responsibilities of traditional fatherhood. (Between 1970 and 1994 the percentage of children living without the presence of a father more than doubled from 11% to 22% [*World Almanac* 381]). Images of baseball as a special bond between father and son, where smooth non-verbal communication of manliness can be unthreateningly expressed, is the background to the ferocity of the lesson *screw dads*. Even as individual texts of baseball fiction may abhor the enshrinement of familiar baseball clichés (with the exception of *For Love of The Game*, I would say all the novels discussed in this chapter are fairly conscious of baseball clichés) in so doing they often acknowledge the allure of the cliché and use it to set up the exposure of "reality." Baseball fiction has no solution to the problems it exposes and can only exist within the antagonisms of its favorite tropes. Even in texts that relish a retreat to the fifties, to that simple game of catch with Dad, we can see how the contemporary dearth of these things are emphasized. Even in stories of the "son-of-a-bitch millionaire ballplayer," the spectre of a betrayed father-son tradition is usually close by.

In a provocative essay about the relationship between history, nostalgia, and pop culture critic Allison Graham writes, "Reconstructing a mythical past may begin as an act of love, but the ultimate materialization of that fantasy, we are told repeatedly these days, hardly satisfies our desire to possess the past; if anything, it aggravates our sense of estrangement" (363). The commonplace image of the game of catch is, I think, working this sense of a nostalgia-informed aggrievement, the "mythical past" of baseball adding to a sense of anger about what the game is today. Exacerbated generational tensions inform much of the narrative of Tom Grimes' baseball novel *Season's End* (1992). Joining *The Dreyfus Affair* and *The Fan* in presenting the story of a wealthy ballplayer, it is also a novel which deals with the philosophical implications of baseball's emergence as a literary staple. Just as Emersonian logic and Whitmanesque rhapsodies have been used to legitimize many questionable social developments and personal laxities, baseball's past in *Season's End* is

held by the exploitative commands of entertainment industry pitchmen, and the sport's celebration of fathers and sons is nothing compared to "the awesome sublimity of profitable things" (6). Rather than find the "kid's game" hidden in pro ball, the *ennui* of the richly rewarded and fully exploited narrator questions the ability of anybody who is held in the celebrity culture of modern America to express an honest human emotion.

The story of a "hitting machine" who has little taste for the life skills one might need outside of the ballpark, *Season's End* is also a perspective on a nation in transition. The novel starts with the fall of Saigon and the commencement of free agency, when "bourbon-stoked Senators were still talking winnable wars while kids brought up on 'Bonanza' and Pop Tarts went around spouting Mao" (10), and ends with the restructuring of the economy in the Reagan presidency. The novel has a wide scope: no names of cities or franchises are given as the aim is to present a simpler drama about the issues which alienate the narrator from his place in the world and lead him to embark on another Huck-like "literary" adventure.

Mike Williams, the hitting machine himself, gets his start in the pros due to a reversal of the Yankee Doodle situation: replacing star Ted Monday who "died on the Fourth of July with a Budweiser in his hand" (3). The owner of the team, a cynical entrepreneur, is prone to saying things like, "The American public expects ballplayers to be moral, clean-living, symbolic young men" (5), not out of faith in this ideal but as a threatening PR schtick to keep his players in line. The owner is, like the despotic Lionel Barrymore character in Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life*, bound to a wheel chair -- emphasizing his physical frailty and ironic distance from the physical game. The spectre of death for Mike, however, is his initiation to celebrity and the entertainment industry. Not only does Mike replace a dead man, in his rookie season he must cope with the loss of teammate Georgia O'Kane -- the kind of wild guy whose bonding pleasure was "honking the word 'moosecock' at bewildered and humorless standersby"(9) -- whose passing from kidney failure fills Mike with an unexpressed guilt.

"I identified with Superman," Mike reflects on discovering his physical gifts: "I wanted to be a ballplayer. All the usual reasons: fame, glory, the company of mannish boys, those puerile heroes oblivious of death" (21). This bold, narcissistic identity affords the young sports star quick validation and actually alienates him from the bosom of his family. As a young star, Mike becomes obsessed with statistics and technique, and his desire to play for reasons besides "loving the game" sets him up as a true professional ready to claim the bounty he will receive for turning off his emotions. The machine sardonically admits,

> Ballplayers are fragile and not long on perspective. We assume our privilege automatically: it has been doled out to us since birth. Open spaces, clean bright uniforms, the praise of civic-minded elders and adoring minions. Off in some dark corner, a voice may be asking, "Who are these cretins?" Maybe something nastier. But we are ballplayers. We are oblivious to the pleas and wants of the unblessed billions. (39)

Smart enough to understand the superficiality of his status, he nonetheless retreats into the shell of his "little boyness" and refuses to acknowledge adult responsibilities. Faced with the difficult tasks of negotiating reasonable contracts, and with the demands of media celebrity, he retreats into versions of the past:

> I wanted to be back in high school, playing ball on the lumpy field behind the windowless gymnasium, riding home on the bus on spring evenings after practice feeling loose and tired. (55)

> I wanted baseball to be unimportant once more. Unanalyzed by critics, unjudged by employers, the game once again pure, unsullied by the hands of television producers, programmers, tax lawyers, and arbitrators. (59)

While the "windowless gym" is not exactly the kind of memory Roy Hobbs would indulge in, and while the "unimportant game" never motivated Mike to begin with, these reveries are dodges. With the same ease with which Mike walks into being named *People* magazine's "Sexiest Man Alive" (216), he sleepwalks through his responsibility as an adult.[20] He never claims a Puritan fidelity to work, doesn't thank God -- "I do not pray, I play baseball"(140) -- and keeps his desire simple: "I wanted a lion's life, a daily cycle of regal sunning and heavy-lidded dozing" (110).

When Mike gets caught up in the middle of a contract negotiation his agent stages an event where a kid will ask for an autograph. Uncertain of the need for this he nonetheless understands that the staged event "would be my shield against the charges of egotism, greed and union driven malice. . . . The image that people would carry away with them, the one that would linger in their mind's eyes, would link me, in a positive way, with our collective sandlot past" (83). Appeals to the emotion latent in the "collective sandlot past" become an important selling-tool for the game as it accelerates its pay scales. (The staged TV event is made with hopes of cashing in on the lingering sentiments learned from TV events.)

---

20 Because of baseball's skewed demos, it's unlikely this dubious honor would ever fall to a baseball star. (These days, for a baseball player to get any cover of *People* would be unlikely.)

In *Season's End* it is staged television which offers the only entry to the collective emotions of America. The source of baseball's financial resources and the key to political success, the images and sound-bites of television form their own inescapable versions of the truth. The "grim corporate diversion"(88) of professional sports is thereby aligned by television into its cherished nostalgic forms. Mike Williams reflects,

> From the tube I learned much of what I know of the republic -- its shallow history, its boom-or-bust egomania, the unlivable glory of its myths.
>
> My father, who rode an elevated train two hours to and from his office through a borough of windowless tenements, their insides gutted by fire -- the skeletons of vanquished dreams -- wished aloud in front of the TV set that we lived in Mayberry, North Carolina. (19)

This critique says as much about Mike and his insensitivity to the class-sorrows of his father as it does about the strength of TV imagery. The baseball player's cynical understanding of material desire (even in the case of his own father) allows him to arrogantly walk away from the suckers who could possibly wish such things. If his father would like to live in Mayberry, he might very well believe in the wholesomeness of baseball stars.

Mike is aided by his agent, Hammer (as in subtle as being hit on the head with), who interprets all action in terms of how it translates from image to money. "You can't have character," Hammer tells Mike, "Character is a pre-TV mode of being. Absolutely World War II" (71).[21] Everything is up for grabs in the sweepstakes for TV dollars. Even the names of the ballplayers are considered primarily as marketing tools: "Bill Mazeroski. You get the steel-mill, wooded-mountainsides connotations in that name? . . . That name is Pittsburgh" (122). While Hammer is sleazy he has an energetic faith in his own kinds of analysis and in this way is more dedicated to *life* than his client is. Mike's sophisticated withdrawls from the details of his domestic life (his home game, if you will) always reveal his own adolescent self-hate and fear of death. As he himself admits, "There was a reassuring allure in the idea of blaming social forces. It saved me the trouble of admitting I was often incredibly distant and self-concerned" (246).

Mike's willingness to act upon advice from the devilish owner Percy, or the slovenly agent Hammer, to his mean-hearted coach Cap Carver, his wife Barbara, his teammates, make's his alienation from his father, while never openly lamented, deeply felt. Mike's rather analytical mind is explained in part as a result of his degree in American

---

21 Considering the use of the generationally textured use of the word "character" in recent elections, Hammer is obviously not making this up.

literature. Rather than going straight into the minor league system, he yielded to parental pressure and took an athletic scholarship so he could have something to "fall back on." To the young Superman, the entreaty to do this sounded like his parents had no faith in him. Cleaving the distinction between winners and losers, he says "So, unfamiliar with the language of defeat and tentative progress, I had no idea what my father was talking about" (95). In a society which rewards athletic achievement so handsomely, success might very likely convince the superstar of his specialness, his exemption from the realities of his father's world.

The father has few moments outside of Mike's recollections and while there is no evidence to suggest Mike's recollections are radically fabricated, his memories are obviously aggravated by his own fears of death. Mike complains that his father "felt personally betrayed, as if the sanctity and importance of his past had been negated, when Maris hit sixty-one" (313), a sentiment validated by the attentive chronicler of *The Brothers K* but here offered as evidence of the sentimental slob who longs for *the good old days*. According to Mike, his father went through a political transformation (which many Democrats went through) as a response to the changes in the Sixties:

> My father had been a loyal Democrat throughout my childhood, voting for Kennedy in 1960, Johnson in 1964. But by the time I was in high school, there had been a seismic shift in his political temperament. He voted for Nixon in 1968 and spoke at the dinner table of Hubert Humphrey as if he were some sort of social disease. . . . I didn't understand until later that it was Nixon's promise to restore law and order that appealed to my father. (144-145)

The "seismic" shift to Nixon, Mike comes to understand "later," is symptomatic of the unspoken rift between father and son; Mike's actual political opinions are never delineated, and his criticisms do not come with passion for the other point of view but with juvenile certainty of the previous generations failings. He will not defend the Humphrey candidacy: he interprets *all* sentiment as a commodity and measures other people against his own career and achievements. His insight into his father's politics -- "He became more rigid in his support of the war in Vietnam, as if his nostalgia for patriotism kept his sense of material inadequacy at bay"(145) -- is measured against his own faith in an eternal youth. Failing to make connections with other people, he sees himself as the emotional magnet: "my career was not the cause of his reproving coldness, but the magnet to which all his latent, free-flying bitterness was drawn" (146).

The reproving coldness of Mike's father is real but earned. Mike's complaint that his old man turned into the kind of guy who "wore a Reagan pin on the lapel of his cadet-

blue suit, telling me over Christmas drinks that my generation of players was pampered, self-indulgent and inferior"(313), does little to convince the reader his father is wrong. What Mike hears is also the voice inside himself, the reminder of his own human frailty, his kryptonite. Mike's recreation of his father's death bed scene -- "Then I heard the susurrous outlines of his voice, the nearly breathless, misshapen words he spoke, the last syllable trailing off with a faint, stertorous whisper. 'You're nothing' " (259) -- may reveal a vengefulness in his father's spirit, but to be told he is "nothing" -- the same insignificant dust as the next sucker, bound for the same "mere oblivion" as Ted Monday or Georgia O'Kane -- is the core of Mike's existential crisis. Mike's first response to this is to sarcastically distance himself from it and try again to reclaim his youth.

Mike's educated lexicon ("susurrous" and "stertorous") and his insights usually overwhelm their targets. Mocking all sentimental expressions, he can't reach beyond the advertiser's cynicism he claims to despise. Even his mother's well-intentioned desires for reconciliation are met with characteristic mocking of what he sees as working-class, TV-informed desires:

> through some perverse optimism she expected this to bring me close to my father again. I was sure she wanted some sort of television Movie of the Week version of grieving -- the kids rallying around, the comforting nurse, the gifted and sympathetic young intern subbing for the silver-haired heart specialist who was away on an extended golf vacation. (255)

It is Mike's coldness which is remarkable in the event of his father's passing -- Mr. Williams' death bed reminder is a very human gesture. The "hitting machine" himself can address his own hardness by saying, "Maybe this was what the game gave me -- dehumanization rather than transcendence. . . . My father was bitter because he had failed to reduce himself to the state of machine" (269). But he does not resolve to be more human, and, continuing to hate his father's season's end, he ends up burying his father and his age with a mechanical dismissiveness:

> I felt we were burying an era when we buried my father, laying aside an epoch of the republic's past which had been distinguished by militaristic arrogance, narrow-sightedness, and a barely veiled, unrepentant racism. (312)

Season's End often ironically comments on baseball's problematic place in "the republic," the ubiquitous phrase echoing the famous "dark fields of the republic" segment which concludes *The Great Gatsby* (182). Following the "patriotic plumb line"(189) in the rhetoric of baseball, the narrative locates the conflicts inherent in baseball's bearishness in

the cultural stock market. For Mike Williams, as was the case with many professional athletes, the effect of actual Reagan policies (tax cuts for high wage earners) is appreciated: "The year Ronald Reagan took control of the White House and declared that a renewed sense of moral and financial vigor would soon overtake the republic, full time player salaries jumped by 30 percent" (223). While the rise in salaries becomes chapter and verse in the handbook of baseball cynicism, the patriotic feelings associated with the ballpark are a boon: "Attendance boomed, the statistics leapfrogging as quickly as real estate prices and inflation figures, as if we had been charged with the duty of releasing the republic from its torpor and setting it right again, even if for no more than a few instantly replayed moments at night" (163). Characteristically diminishing the authenticity of feelings inspired (or exploited) by television, Mike cashes-in as he criticizes the financial motives at the heart of professional sports. He uses the phrase "a bedtime story by Richard III"(186) in another context, and the phrase is threateningly descriptive of the dangers of believing the rhetoric of the republic's purveyors of family entertainment.

With a degree in American Literature, Mike articulates the traditional response to the kinds of baseball idealizations found in the prose of Bart Giamatti and W.P. Kinsella:

> Eternal verities. Ptolemaic symmetry and moral order. Corn gods. Ritual love and death. Pennants.
>
> You expect a lot of us. After all, it's only nine not-so-bright, half hung over jocks trying to hit a lump of horsehide-bound cotton yarn. (219)

The dubious gesture of the erudite college grad taking refuge in the ranks of the "not-so-bright, half hung over jocks" is indicative of Mike's selective choice of myths fit to participate in. In contrast, *Bang the Drum Slowly*'s Henry Wiggen's literary pretentions do not come with embarrassing claims to be "one of the guys." Mike Williams' complaint is that he is not dumb enough; his self-hatred extends from an intimate knowledge of death in a culture (himself included) that claims the past yet despises the old. As many have done before him, he turns to the American literary masters to justify his controversial price on the free market :

> I'll bite the Emersonian apple. If the literal grass and roots and trees frontier is gone, hasn't it been replaced by the frontier of before-tax dollars, corporate profits, global markets? Even three-, four-, five-million-dollar-a-year ballplayers? Aren't we, the players, fulfilling America's destiny by holding out for as much cashola as possible? (220)

This is not an unfair interpretation, but also certainly not the musing of a dumb, drunk jock.

The novel ends with a ghost in the machine: a rotator cuff injury and a player's strike cancel the season before the playing of the World Series.[22] The gap leaves Mike free to initiate a *Huckleberry Finn*-like escape from the persistent reminders of his mortality. With bad news dim on the radio, he lights out on a road trip with teammate Otis.[23] But unlike Huck, and more like Rabbitt Angstrom, he is an *adult* who is unflatteringly troubled by his own adulthood. Finding no solace between the "dream of perfection"(125) and "the abyss of mortality"(111) Mike takes off as a self-consciously romantic expression of boyishness and callowly embarks on his impromptu *bateau ivre* to get "beyond the precincts of the sweet illusions of the game" (319).

Conclusion

Ronald Reagan was fond of telling a revealing anecdote from his days as a radio broadcaster for the Chicago Cubs in the thirties, when "live" radio broadcasts of games consisted of an announcer reading telegraphed reports of what was going on miles away from the studio. According to Reagan, during the ninth inning of a tied game the wire went dead and rather than expose the technical glitch the future President began to recreate a scene where the batter was fouling off pitch after pitch, keeping the game in tow. He would later discover the batter had, in fact, popped out on the first ball pitched, but in the meantime he had represented a new world record for foul balls. Not exactly George Washington and the cherry tree and not quite Watergate, the anecdote displays Reagan's gifts not just as a communicator but as an *optimist*, trying to keep the fan at home believing in the fiction of the live game.

In his book *Reagan's America*, Garry Wills connects Reagan's baseball announcing career and the dead-wire / baseball fiction incident to his future success as a politician:

---

22 *Season's End*'s sequence about the process of diagnosing a professional athlete's injury is the most thoroughly detailed representation of this theme in baseball fiction.

23 Keeping up *Huck Finn* allusions, the relationship with Otis is unmistakably reminiscent of the relationship between Huck and Jim, not only in terms of racial difference but in the homoerotic tones of their "Fiedler pairing" (so to speak). For example, Mike leaves his wife, Barbara, and his attraction to her is often expressed in homoerotic terms: she is described as having "the hips of a boy" (99) and hair "like an Elizabethan prince's" (281). Mike finds comfort in Otis / Jim's *physical* presence, i.e. "Otis laid a hand on my thigh" (318). Otis reassuringly calls out to him in the vernacular: "Don't worry," he said "I ain't gonna let nothing bad happen to you" (319). *Huck, honey*, indeed.

> "Re-creations" of the Reagan type continued long after they were technologically obsolete because they were an amazingly cheap way to fill air time -- if you could find an announcer who held people's interest as Reagan did. . . . The fabulator's art, based on the nostalgic reliving of the games, supplied the deficiencies of the reporter's information at the moment. This was the first time in Reagan's career, though far from the last, when nostalgia and technology were illogically yoked together, values from the past with instruments eroding past conditions. (131)

Or, as *Season's End*'s narrator sarcastically puts it: "technology with a human face. Nothing like the pastoral life of baseball" (179). This is part of the paradox of the conservative moralism of the late eighties which is expressed (in turn paradoxically) in contemporary baseball fiction. The yearned-for "return" to patriarchal pro-family virtues of post-war America is often a yearning for a nostalgically fabricated version of that post-war family, fading from memory, but whose paradigms are continually reexperienced through television and other cultural products. Baseball's imaginative entry into America's good and wholesome past makes its fictions a likely venue to articulate the repatriation of America from its current anxieties to the harmonies of a "pre-TV" consciousness. The paradox remains that baseball itself, far from being an experience limited to the innocent purviews of the kids, is also a part of the TV-generation coarseness this articulation seeks to redress. As McDonald's will use boasts of 100% Beef and family fun to associate their products with healthy wholesomeness, baseball can and does use its time-honored traditions and icons to sell itself to its (aging) fans.

Gene Fehler's sentimental poem "A Father's Dreams" speaks of baseball's generational drifts with unselfconscious *schmaltz* and a straight-face:

> The son had slammed a home run once
> Beneath the the pride of father's gaze
> From splintered bleachers which, like dads,
> Had once known younger, better days.
>
> The son, now scornful of such games,
> Has buried his past loves with a sneer
> Beneath accumulated trips
> Of sex and acid, grass and beer.
>
> The father lives through memories:
> That last home run is magnified.
> A faded photo catches tears
> Of mourning for the dreams that died. (9)

The gaps between the images of the past (the "splintered bleachers" which suggest the proper small town virtues of the baseball-loving generation) to the sixties-inspired bedevilments ("sex and acid" *etc.*) which have inspired the sneering scorn which killed the

father's dreams, are gaps that appear, in more sophisticated terms, in contemporary baseball fiction.

From the ingestion of MTV-generation sour grapes, which precedes the tragedy of *The Fan*, the gap is exacerbated by the high-priced but emotionally bankrupt world of professional sports, widening into a psychosis where millionaire athletes are treated like "kids" as the needs of real kids (not always so carefree and innocent) go unanswered. The plaster-of-Paris Adonis who pitches the no-hitter in *For Love of the Game* tries to narrow the gap as a last call for the dying generation -- the ethical defender good old Dad -- as the game is usurped by the lawyers, agents and the TV-cameras of the young. For the brave bumbler of *Fielder's Choice*, the dreams of the baseball father are never idealized, and in celebrating humor and play the gaps which divide not only generations but nations and cultures are briefly recognized on the ballfield as non-essential and perhaps resolvable. For the tribe of losers in *The Brothers K*, the dreams of the father's generation are entirely invested in baseball, but in a significant twist, the burden of this baseball dream is taken entirely by the father as the sixties "generation gap" begins to claim his sons one by one. For the juvenile rookie-of-the-year in *Season's End*, the son's cynical scorn for the traditional virtues associated with the game, despite his phenomenal success, is the source of his father's cold despair. These novels (and, to a certain extent, the father themes in the contemporary baseball novels *In Days of Awe* (1991) by Eric Goodman and *Rat Palms* (1992) by Canadian author David Homel) are not seminars in how-to parenting, and they are not replicating previous baseball-lit Dads like the good guy Pop in Mark Harris's *The Southpaw*. The trope is repeated because the tensions and conflicts it engages are honestly felt.

The image of fathers playing catch with sons is not a studio-born gimmick of advertisers. Relationships of fathers and sons mediated through sports are obviously common yet subject to a complex series of variables. Given the status of baseball as a male-testing ground and what Harold Seymour called "a badge of Americanism" (1), the words (and actions) between father and son about baseball will continue to be a rich and contested area of discourse for authors of American fiction, particularly as the societal definitions of "fatherhood" are changing. The definitions of baseball too are changing as declarations of the game's nostalgic tropes become sharper and more detailed. Within the specific tempers of the Reagan / Bush era, where the financial growth of professional baseball was accompanied with the aging of the center of its marketplace and with a noticeable expansion of the sport's place in social discourse, the upturn in baseball fiction is not surprising. And as baseball's fan-base continues to age, the tropes of baseball's long-gone immaculate states will continue to steep, and baseball's literary marketplace will

be saturated with these tropes as long as they manage to express a metaphorical relief from a complicated generational friction. (And as long as it remains profitable.)

In his popular essay "Baseball: Our Game" John Thorn writes that "We grow up with baseball; we mark -- and, for a moment, stop -- the passage of time with it; and we grow old with it. It is our game, for all our days" (55). The sentiments of the game's generational links are soothing, but increasingly it's possible to see how baseball is not so much "our" game anymore. Sayings like "it's the national anthem before every game; it's playing catch with your son"(54) are of course *fair enough*, but they hint at past times no cultural product can honestly claim. And if baseball is to be more than the mythic subject of poems, novels, stories, plays, songs, movies and TV shows, the game must continue to draw new fans. Otherwise, like Reagan's live broadcast, the game will be represented fantastically, but our hero will actually have struck out a long time ago.

SIX

Make Like Mike:
Baseball Fiction's Conclusion?

"If people don't want to come out to the park, nobody's going to stop 'em."

-- Yogi Berra

"If my devotion to baseball does more than Milton can to justify God's way to man, . . . but is also an occasional embarrassment to me, I lay some of the blame on my being a Montrealer."

--Mordecai Richler

Why Baseball?

Books are precious commodities, objects which are complexly attached to our society's definitions of intelligence, status, value and worth. Reading is so profoundly located at the center of our culture, that the production of literature and literary trends are often thought to be unselfconsciously motivated. As professional baseball's commercial concerns are well served by the idea that it's just a game, the bookselling industry is well served by the idea that it is faithfully promoting cultural betterment. Arguments that baseball's impressive forays into literature come from the sport's natural suitability to the traditions of letters similarly ignore the commercial dimensions of baseball-lit in favor of the assurances that baseball and books are innocently married -- and the fact that baseball is fit for literature, makes baseball even better. The important realization about watching baseball (being "just a fan") is that it is a viable retreat from real life pressures and it is not turned into "work" or a "project." The fan is resolutely *not* creating. This implied passivity makes the fan the likely stooge in representations of baseball's economy, but in some way the exclusively receptive aspect of the fan's perspective can be the closest thing to critical authority.

Baseball and books are good enough, but the creation of baseball fiction did not occur without editors and publishers paying attention to the appetites of baseball fans for literature about their favorite sport. And locating a consumer base that might be interested in books about professional sports is hardly the work of a marketing genius or the result of intense focus-group research. But baseball fiction comes into its own as a recognizable product chiefly because of the interest in the sport and in its tropological expressions. That baseball fiction can be good reading can be as true as "Coca-Cola tastes good," but like soda pop, adult mainstream fiction is also a commercial retail product with its own bottom lines and target audiences. The fact that many baseball novels still make it into the hard cover market, also suggests that baseball fiction's audience is one which overall does not mind paying for the privilege of reading.[1] That these contemporary books sell their baseball connection directly (the five novels I discussed in the last chapter each have a baseball or a ballplayer on the front cover) suggests that it is the baseball fan who is primarily targeted.

---

[1] Literary retail products are usually segmented in three class-conscious formats: *hard cover* (c.$27-39), *trade* (c. $12-18), and *mass-market* (c.$5-8). Increasingly, adult literary fiction skips a hard cover publication and goes directly to trade. And today, the appearance of a book in a hard cover format may itself indicate a publisher's faith in the product.

In fact, a basic marketing design, or lay-out, is something most baseball books (fiction or non-fiction, academic or general, adult or juvenile) have in common. In this, the recent tomes of literary criticism *Ground Rules* and *Making the Team* are no different than the pot-boilers *The Fan* or *The Dead Pull Hitter*. That is, the back pages of all these books assure us of how "richly textured," or "entertaining" the book is reputed to be, (cf. Morris 153) where the cover art sells the image of a big baseball. *Ground Rules'* cover has an officially signed baseball floating in the ethereal blue, emphasizing the transcendental myths that baseball's literature embraces; *Making the Team's* cover has a black and white baseball, casting its dark (cultural) shadow across the page; *The Fan's* baseball is grimy and stained, like the game that is imagined as fallen from grace; *The Dead Pull Hitter's* baseball is embossed with a bloody fingerprint so large that even the L.A.P.D. would have trouble ignoring it. In each case it is the baseball that is being sold. For whoever said you can't judge a book by its cover obviously never worked in a Barnes and Noble bookstore.

The obvious commercial and marketing designs in contemporary baseball fiction, of course, do not delegitimize the novels' discourse about America. One wonders, though, after looking at all these baseball fictions and their conflicted tropes, whether baseball fiction finally has something to say about America that other books can't say? The answer to this, keeping with the argumentation I've presented all along, is both *yes and no*. First, yes: baseball's cultural history as "the national pastime," with its cherished articles of patriotic nostalgia, and its access to deeply-held ideals (which are believed even if they aren't "true"), gives the author of adult baseball fiction a potent metaphor to measure the state of the nation. Baseball has also inspired a greater variety and volume of literary fiction than most products from popular culture have and, as such, offers a fuller imaginative frame to view America's popular culture. But then, no: the messages of baseball fiction are replicated in other fictions, particularly in other sports fictions. For other writers, soccer can be seen as aesthetically and spiritually faultless; golf's pastoral qualities can be poetically eulogized; the college volleyball squad can be transformed into an adequate metaphor for an ideal American meritocracy, and the hockey rink is as likely a locale as the ballfield for father and son reunions.

As the cultural product of baseball literature is commonly accepted, I've rarely been asked *why baseball?*, but a few interested Canadians have asked of me *why not hockey*? There are, of course, hundreds of Canadian poems, stories, novels and plays about hockey. Furthermore, like the Americaness of baseball, the Canadianess of hockey is a well-known trope, with its own like expressions, such as former Montreal goalie Ken Dryden's feel-good line "Hockey makes Canada feel more Canadian" (19). However, the Canadianess of hockey is less thoroughly expressed than the Americaness of baseball;

while there is a Canadian hockey literature which articulates game and country, the Canadian literary community has not embraced hockey the way baseball has been embraced by the literary community in the United States. (Or the way baseball has been embraced by the literary community in Canada for that matter.)

Much can be said as to why hockey literature hasn't quite become the cultural product of national affirmation in Canada that baseball literature has become in the United States. But instead of only comparing the relative virtues of the inspiring sports, I would also contrast the marketplaces and the opportunities to create an interest in something like a national sports literature. Baseball's longstanding access to the enormous American and Canadian media, and the affection of that combined population base makes the use of baseball as a literary metaphor a more likely *North American* hit, to say nothing of a greater potential for film treatment. Also, baseball literature's summer publishing schedule is a friendlier marketplace for literary companions to sport. Whereas hockey's Christmas season is good for sales, these sales are less geared towards "adult / literary" products and more towards gifts.

But it seems that, as baseball has gained a certain high-cultural credibility, Canadian publishers are becoming more interested in doing the same for hockey. As the Sisyphean travails of the Red Sox and the dispersal of the Giants and Dodgers to the West Coast have become the inspiration of so much of baseball's literary expression, the lost glory of the Toronto Maple Leafs (and of much of the NHL's "original six") is, I think, proving to be a rewarding ground for literary nostalgia. The Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup since 1967, and as a current generation of Ontarians may be more familiar with the joy of victory in professional baseball, the aging core of "original six" hockey fans may want to read more about their "lost" game. In the 1996 version of a Canadian book-order catalogue called *Books for Everybody* there were over a dozen what I would call upscale hockey books, like the collection of stories called *Original Six*, and recollections from established Canadian authors, including Roy MacGregor's *The Seven A.M. Practice: Stories of Family Life* and David Adams Richards' *Hockey Dreams: Memories Of A Man Who Couldn't Play*. When a Canadian literary superstar like Margaret Atwood or Michael Ondaatje writes a novel about hockey which is turned into a popular movie, the academic study of hockey fiction will not be far behind.

In the end it is sport, not baseball, nor hockey, nor baseball vs. hockey, nor baseball vs. football, that is the universal experience which is celebrated. The "timeless" truths of what Whitman called America's "Hurrah Game" are an easy sell in Canada, where baseball is enormously popular, but these assertions might fall on deaf ears in France or the UK, just as soccer literature is not likely to excite North American publishers.

Are These Books Any Good?

Just what makes a good sports novel is debatable. An argument which students of sports literature regularly have contrasts one view, which sees a good sports novel (or poem or story) as basically being about "something else" but using the sport setting to express it, with another view which sees a good sports novel as being essentially concerned with the issues arising from the game itself and how it is played. I find this a frustrating argument because I realize I can like (or dislike) both kinds of books. *Chacun a son goût*, said the old man as he kissed the cow.

I do not know what makes a "classic," and have no reliable system to advise the skeptical as to which of these works are ephemeral and which ones will last through the next millenium. Because I have devoted so much research interest into popular culture, I am often suspicious of the assured definitions of "quality" which inevitably precede the dismissive snaps that condemn the things I'm interested in. But even recognizing traditional biases against popular culture, I would not feel at all uncomfortable or rebellious teaching an introductory American literature class using only baseball novels as main texts. (The fact that baseball fiction features novels by name-authors like Malamud and Roth does shore up a certain canonical respectability and may help avoid the ire of those who are worried some legendary classroom in California is "getting away with" teaching English by showing episodes of *I Love Lucy*.) However, in the politicized debate about the canon, the baseball-fiction classroom might get it from both sides; from one side which may argue time devoted to *You Know Me Al* and *The Dead Pull Hitter* is time spent away from Virgil and Emerson; from another side which may argue that baseball's conservative reputation along with its largely white, largely male, audience do nothing to contribute to a more inclusive classroom.

But all books are not created equal. The differing quality and aesthetic value of these baseball books is something I am very interested in. Even keeping in mind that my general tastes may displease William Bennett, and that at this stage in my life I'm unlikely to commit myself to ticking off the titles in the appendix to Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, I do think most of the books I've discussed in this manuscript are, in fact, good books, worth reading. I'm not trying to say all or any of these books deserve their rightful spot beside the ancients or to suggest that their exclusion from such lists is the work of academic snobs. As much as we can think of baseball literature as a genre or a sub-genre of American literature, it is undeniably a minor one, existing for the most part only in the margins of academic discourse. But even minor things can have major significance and, in

the margins, the conversation about sports literature is excitingly, and often unpretentiously, evaluating quality. Of course, some baseball books are bad and some are boring. The baseball angle may have been the motivation to purchase the book, but the aesthetic response is in no way guaranteed by baseball.

I'm not passionate about trying to convince people to read books I've enjoyed, particularly if these books can be pigeonholed in a generic category which the potential reader is not interested in. I tend to believe that if a previous prejudice against or lack of interest in baseball exists, these books would be a difficult sell. But if asked what baseball novels I thought were the best, beyond their usefulness in the discussions of this manuscript, I would submit this top ten list:

The Celebrant
You Know Me Al
Blue Ruin
The Universal Baseball Association
The Great American Novel
Fielder's Choice
Hoopla
The Greatest Slump of All Time
Bang the Drum Slowly
Shoeless Joe

As explanation for this list I would say that I read like *a fan*: I want a certain sophistication about the sport's history, but I also enjoy a certain wit coming from strong voices. (I want the frosting, the flake, and the nutritional information.)[2] This is my top ten for non-fiction:

Ball Four
The Long Season
Lords of the Realm
Season Ticket
Babe
Men at Work
Playing for Keeps
Field of Screams
Invisible Men
Diamonds in the Rough

This list's prediliction for scandal and exposé perhaps unflatteringly exposes my own nostalgia for a game that never was. And to enjoy these books it probably helps to be (or

---

2 My most recommended texts, however, are two anthologies with fiction and non-fiction: *The Baseball Reader* and *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend.*

once have been) a fan. A French critic trying to explain the verbal punnery in Roth's *The Great American Novel* admits early in his essay that to understand the rules of baseball one might need "*une bonne encyclopedia, une television, et un peu de patience*" (Aubert 187). And to this advice I offer no alibi.

What Now?

I was never much of a ballplayer. Growing up in a wintery Quebec suburb, baseball wasn't exactly part of the neighbourhood scene, but when Montreal was awarded a Major League franchise in 1968, baseball became part of my life. And if there is one baseball "achievement" I am proud of, it's that I went to every single home game of the Montreal Expos 1983 season -- a year the team finished in third place and played just two games over .500. In those days, before there was a roof or heating in the Olympic Stadium, sitting through games on April and September nights was indeed an exercise in something. (I remember the games of the first homestand that year were perilously close to being called on account of snow.) I also saw those games on my own accord and out of my own pocket, mostly from a vantage in the bleachers where the seats cost just a dollar. I think about that season often; even though I wanted the Expos to win every game I saw, I developed a patience for the games themselves. And I guess I feel about that season the way I feel about having read this batch of baseball novels: I am glad to have gone through each one, I value all the time I spent doing it, but I wouldn't do it again, not unless I had better seats.

As I said early on, baseball literature has had its hot and cold streaks and it looks like things are cooling down a little. The marketplace may have been a little too soured by the strike of 1994, fans may be a little disengaged after seeing so much of the Atlanta Braves in postseason play, membership in the Society for American Baseball Reasearch is down, the critical failure of the Ken Burns documentary may have displayed the limitations in baseball's intellectualization, and there hasn't been a verifiable hit baseball movie since *A League of Their Own*. I have no special insight into the publishing schedules of the future, but it's easy to imagine how baseball's recent fan disappointments may have convinced a few fiction editors that baseball titles will be cold for now. TV-revenues will remain high of course, but the audiences likely won't expand beyond their traditional demographic base.[3]

---

3 "Televised sports attracts a heavily male audience which can not compete, in terms of sheer numbers, with the larger and more heterogenous audiences for prime time programing" (Neal-Lunsford 57).

The sport lags behind its lofty rhetoric, but this makes it easier to see how the post-strike period may ultimately bring more literature to the fans of a game as the golden ages of the past increase their lustre. When *Esquire* dubbed Michael Jordan "our new DiMaggio," it was hard to think of this as a paradigm shift, from one sports hero to another, but to the millions who cherish their special baseball memories, there is a slightly elegiac feeling about this nod to the great basketball star. To say Michael Jordan is more popular than any baseball player of recent memory is an understatement. When Jordan did a brief stint in baseball's minor leagues, MJ was the most popular *baseball* player in America. Not underpaid or untouched by scandal, Jordan has still managed to hold onto the faith of millions of fans. Fifty years from now we may hear of another athlete in another sport referrred to as our "new Michael Jordan" and basketball fans may lament the glitziness of whatever has taken the place of "be like Mike." Critic George Weigel's complaints about current baseball's "slavish imitation of the NBA" as something "which risks the transformation of baseball into but one more 'entertainment option'"(51), is the kind of commentary which insists on preserving pre-TV era virtue in baseball as it fights to maintain its extraordinary profits. Baseball, of course, made this "transformation" a long time ago; the NBA caught up and is currently beating professional baseball at its own game.

Whatever our natural susceptibilities to nostalgia, the longterm fan remains an educated critic, and as long as the fan's critical appreciation is alive there will likely be more baseball fictions, continuing to affirm and impeach the same excitable tropes. As a Dodgers fan will interpret a game differently than a Yankees fan, other differences of experiences (other seating arrangements) will inform the critical readings of baseball literature. There is no definite conclusion to baseball fiction, but since there is certainly no prohibition on partisanship in traditional literary criticism, the celebrations and hostilities of baseball fans should always feel comfortable in the pages of the literary presses. As long as people can remember how the game was played, novelists will return to America's pastime as the issues of baseball fiction remain intriguingly unresolved, contested in an extra-inning game nobody wins.

WORKS CITED

Abrahams, Peter. *The Fan.* New York: Warner Books, 1995.

Abramson, Edward A. *Bernard Malamud Revisited.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Adams, Michael C.C. "Men in America: Two Studies in Gender History." *Reviews in American History* 22 (1994): 14-19.

Adelman, Melvin L. *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Alou, Felipe (with Weiskopf, Herm). *My Life and Baseball.* Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967.

Angell, Roger. "1975: Boston Red Sox 7, Cincinnati Reds 6." In *The Baseball Reader*, ed. Charles Einstein, 15-17. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

----------. *Once More Around the Park: A Baseball Reader.* New York: Random House, 1991.

----------. *Season Ticket: A Baseball Companion.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

----------. *The Summer Game.* New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

Asinof, Eliot. *Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series.* New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1963.

Asinof, Eliot and Bouton, Jim. *Strike Zone.* New York: Signet, 1994.

Atlas, James. *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet.* New York: Avon Books, 1977.

Aubert, Didier. "*Baseballogie: Sur Trois Romans de Philip Roth.*" *Europe: Revue Litteraire Mensuelle* (June-July 1996): 186-190.

Auster, Paul. "Dizzy." *Granta 46* (Winter 1994): 215-34.

Bagge, Peter. *Hate* #17. New York: Fantagraphic Books, Winter 1994.

Bamburger, Michael. "A Sonny Day at the Ballpark." *Sports Illustrated* May 6 1996, 88.

Banks, Dennis J. "Tribal Names and Mascots in Sports." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no.1 (April 1993): 5-8.

The Baseball Reader. Ed. Charles Einstein. New York: McGraw-Hill,1980.

Baseball: Wit and Wisdom. Ed. David Plaut. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1992.

Barzun, Jacques. "God's Country and Mine." In *The Baseball Reader.* Ed. Charles Einstein, 26-29. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

"Baseball's Jewish Accent" (author uncredited). *The Economist* January 8 1994, 86.

Bell, Marty. *Breaking Balls.* New York: Signet Books, 1979.

Bellow, Saul. *The Adventures of Augie March.* New York: Avon Books, 1953.

Bernard Malamud and the Critics. Edited by Leslie Field and Joyce Field. New York: New York University Press, 1970.

Bjarkman, Peter C. "Introduction." In *Baseball and the Game of Life: Stories for the Thinking Man.* Ed. Bjarkman, ix-xix. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

----------. "Six-Pointed Diamonds and the Ultimate Shiksa: Baseball and the American-Jewish Immigrant Experience." In *Cooperstown: Symposium on Baseball and American Culture 1990,* 306-347. Oneonta: Meckler in association with SUNY-Oneonta, 1991.

Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

Blue Jays Official Media Guide. Toronto: North 49 Books, 1994.

Bookbinder, Bernie. *Out at the Old Ballgame.* Bridgehampton: Bridgeworks Publishing Co., 1995.

Boswell, Thomas. *How Life Imitates the World Series.* New York: Penguin Books,1982.

----------. "99 Reasons Why Baseball is Better Than Football." In *Heart of the Order*, 29-37. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.

Bouton, Bobbie and Marshall, Nancy. *Home Games: Two Wives Speak Out*. New York: St. Martin's / Marek, 1983.

Bouton, Jim . *Ball Four*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1970.

----------. *I'm Glad You Didn't Take it Personally*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1971.

----------. *I Managed Good, But Boy Did They Play Bad*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1973.

Bowering, George. "Baseball and the Canadian Imagination." *Canadian Literature*, 108 (Spring 1986): 115-24.

----------. "Introduction." In*Taking the Field: The Best of Baseball Fiction*. Ed. by George Bowering, 7-9. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990.

----------. *Poem and other Baseballs*. Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1976.

Bowman, John and Zoss, Joel *Diamonds in the Rough: The Untold History of Baseball* New York: MacMillan, 1989.

Boyd, Brendan. *Blue Ruin: A Novel of the 1919 World Series*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1991.

Brashler, William. *The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars and Motor Kings*. New York: Signet, 1973.

Burnett, Menon and Smart. "Sports Marketing: A New Ball Game with New Rules." *Journal of Advertising Research* Sept / Oct 1993, 21-35.

Caldwell, Roy C. Jr. "Of Hobby Horses, Baseball and Narrative: Coover's *Universal Baseball Association*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 161-71.

Candelaria, Cordelia. *Seeking the Perfect Game: Baseball in American Literature*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989.

Caraher, Brian G. "The Poetics of Baseball: An American Domestication of the Mathematically Sublime." *American Studies* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 85-100.

Carino, Peter. "Novels of the Black Sox Scandal: History / Fiction / Myth." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy Perspectives* 3 no.2 (Spring 1995): 276-92.

Carkeet, David. *The Greatest Slump of All Time.* New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1984.

Carroll, Bob. *Baseball Between the Lies: The Hype, Hokum, and Humbug of America's Favorite Pastime.* New York: Perigee Books, 1993.

Cebulash, Mel. *Ruth Marini -- World Series Star.* New York: Lerner Books, 1985.

Charyn, Jerome. *The Seventh Babe.* New York: Avon Books, 1979.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening.* New York: Avon Books, 1972 (originally published in 1899).

Citron, Jo Ann. "Running the Basepaths: Baseball and Jane Austen." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 18, no.3 (Fall 1983): 269-77.

Cochran, Bruce. "Bang the Drum Differently: the Southpaw Slants of Henry Wiggen." *Modern Fiction Studies* 33 no. 1 (Spring 1987): 151-61.

Cohen, Sandy. *Bernard Malamud and the Trial by Love.* Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1974.

The Complete Poems and Selected Prose of Hart Crane. Edited with an introduction by Brom Weber. New York: Anchor Books, 1966.

Coover, Robert . "McDuff on the Mound." In *Baseball & the Game of Life: Stories for the Thinking Fan,* ed. Peter C. Bjarkman, 3-16. New York: Vintage Books 1991.

----------. *The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* New York: New American Library, 1968.

Cope, Jackson I. *Robert Coover's Fictions.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Corso, Gregory. *Mindfield: New and Selected Poems.* New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.

Cosby, Bill. *Fatherhood.* New York: Berkley Books, 1986.

Coyle, Daniel. *Hardball: A Season in the Projects.* New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Craig, John. *All G.O.D.'s Children.* New York: Signet Books, 1975.

Craig, Jeff. *Chappie and Me.* New York: Dodd, Mead Publishing, 1979.

Creamer, Robert. *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974.

Crepeau, Richard C. "Urban and Rural Images in Baseball." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no.2 (Fall 1975): 315-23.

Cronley, Jay. *Screwballs.* New York: Pinnacle Books, 1980.

Cuddon, J.A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms.* London: Penguin Books, 1979.

Davis, Laurel R. "Protest Against the Use of Native American Mascots: A Challenge to the Traditional American Identity." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no. 1 (April 1993): 9-22.

Davey, Barbara. "Let's Go Out to the Ballpark." *The Mystery Review* 1, no.4 (Summer 1993): 8-11.

DeLillo, Dom. "Pafko at the Wall." *Harper's* (October 1992): 35-70.

Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball. Ed. by Elinor Nauen. Boston: Faber & Faber, 1993.

DiMaggio, Dom (with Gilbert, Bill). *Real Grass, Real Heroes.* New York: Zebra Books, 1990.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie* (1900). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.

Due, Linnea A. *High & Outside.* San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute, 1980.

Duncan, David James. *The Brothers K.* New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Easterbrook, Greg. "Why Don't Eggheads Love Football?" *Newsweek*, Dec. 5, 1994, 64.

Egerton, John. *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South.* Chapel Hill , NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Estleman, Loren D. *King of the Corner.* New York: Bantam Books, 1992.

Ettin, Andrew V. *Literature and the Pastoral.* Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984.

Evans, Ronald V. "Malamud's *The Natural.*" In *Explicator* 48, no.3 (Spring 1990): 224.

Evers, Crabbe. *Bleeding Dodger Blue.* New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

----------. *Fear in Fenway.* New York: Avon Books, 1993.

----------. *Murder in Wrigley Field.* New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

----------. *Murderer's Row.* New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

----------. *Tigers Burning.* New York: Avon Books, 1995.

Everson, David. *Suicide Squeeze.* New York: Ivy Books, 1991.

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury.* New York: Vintage Books, 1929.

Fehler, Gene. *Center Field Grasses: Poems from Baseball.* North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1991.

Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Fiedler, Leslie. "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" In *Mark Twain, Aventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*, ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan, 528-34. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995.

----------. *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). New York: Anchor Books, 1992.

Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style. Ed. Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward. New York: The Overlook Press, 1979.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby* (1925). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980.

Flood, Curt (with Carter, Richard). *The Way It Is.* New York: Pocket Books, 1971.

Folsom, Lowell. "America's Hurrah Game: Baseball and Walt Whitman." *The Iowa Review* 11, nos. 2-3 (Spring / Summer 1980): 68-80.

Fong, Bobby. "The Magic Cocktail: The Enduring Appeal of the Field of Dreams." *Aethlon* 11, no.1 (Fall 1993): 29-35.

Frost, Robert. *Robert Frost's Poems.* Ed. by Louis Untermeyer. New York: Washington Square Press, 1960.

Frye, Northrop. *On Shakespeare.* Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986.

----------. "The Argument of Comedy." In *English Institute Essays, 1948,* ed. D. A. Robertson, Jr., 58-73. New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.

Fullerton, Hugh S. . *Jimmy Kirkland and the Plot for the Pennant.* New York: John C. Winston Co., 1915.

Garman, Bryan K. "Myth Building and Cultural Politics in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe.*" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 41-62.

Giamatti., A. Bartlett. *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games.* New York: Summit Books, 1989.

Gilbert, Felix. *The End of the European Era, 1980 to the Present.* New York: W.W. Norton, second edition 1979.

Gilbert, Sarah. *A League of Their Own.* A novelization based on the screenplay by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel (copyright Columbia Pictures). New York: Warner Books, 1992

Gildner, Gary. *The Warsaw Sparks*. Des Moines: University of Iowa Press, 1990.

Goldstein, Warren. *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Golenbock, Peter. "Preface." In *The Best of Spitball*, ed. by Mike Shannon. New York: Pocket Books, 1988.

Goodman, Eric. *Days of Awe*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1991.

Goodman, Matthew and Bauer, Stephen. "From Elysian Fields: Baseball as the Literary Game." *The Sewanee Review* 101, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 226-239.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. "From *Father with Love*." In *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, 26-28. Boston: Faber & Faber, 1993. .

Gordon, Alison. *The Dead Pull Hitter*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

----------. *Foul Balls*. Toronto: General Publishing, 1984.

----------. *Night Game*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992.

----------. *Safe at Home*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990.

Gould, Stephen J. . "Dreams That Money Can Buy." *The New York Review of Books* November 5, 1992, 41-45.

Graham, Allison. "History, Nostalgia, and the Criminality of Popular Culture." *The Georgia Review* 38, no. 2 (1984): 348-64.

The Grand-Slam Book of Canadian Baseball Writing. Ed. John Bell. Porter's Lake: Pottersfield Press, 1993.

Granger, Bill. *Drover and the Designated Hitter*. New York: Avon Books, 1994.

----------. *The New York Yanquis*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1995.

Greenberg, Eric Rolfe. *The Celebrant*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1983.

Greenberg, Hank. In *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It*, ed. Lawrence Ritter, 306-331. New York: Vintage Books, 1985.

Gregorich, Barbara . *She's At First.* New York: Contemporary Books, 1987.

----------. *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball.* Orlando, FL: A Harvest Original, 1993.

Gregory, Robert. *Diz: The Story of Dizzy Dean and Baseball During the Great Depression.* New York: Penguin Books, 1992.

Grella, George. "Baseball and the American Dream." *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Summer, 1975): 550-67.

Gretton, Viveca. "You Could Look it Up: Notes Towards a Reading of Baseball, History, and Ideology in the Dominant Cinema." *Cine / Action* (Spring-Fall 1990): 70-75.

Griffith, Michael A. "Saddam Hussein and the Nickel Package." *Aethlon* 10, no.2 (Spring 1993): 13-16.

Grimes, Tom. *Season's End.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992.

Gropman, Donald. *Say it Ain't So, Joe: The True Story of Shoeless Joe Jackson.* New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992.

Guttman, Allen. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

----------. "Roman Sports Violence" In *Sports Violence* ed Jeffrey H. Goldstein, 7-19. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983.

----------. *A Whole New Ballgame: An Interpretation of American Sports.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Halberstam, David. *The Fifties.* New York: Fawcett Columbine Book, 1993.

----------. *Summer of '49.* New York: Avon Books, 1989.

Hall, Donald. *Fathers Playing Catch with Their Sons: Essays on Sport (Mostly Baseball.)* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985.

Harris, Mark. *Bang the Drum Slowly.* New York: Dell Publishing, 1956.

----------. *It Looked Like Forever.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press Bison Book, 1979.

----------. *The Southpaw.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press Bison Book, 1953.

----------. *A Ticket for a Seamstitch.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Bison Book, 1956.

Helyar, John. *Lords of the Realm: The Real History of Baseball.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

Hemingway, Ernest. *In Our Time.* New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1925.

----------. *The Old Man and the Sea.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.

Higgins, George V. *The Progress of the Seasons.* New York: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Higgs, Robert J. *Laurel and Thorn: The Athlete in American Literature.* Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1981.

Highsmith, Patricia. "The Barbarians." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, 244-54. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Hoberman, John M. *Sport and Political Ideology.* Austen: University of Texas Press, 1984.

Hollander, Russell. "The Religion of Baseball: Psychological Perspectives." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 1-14.

Homel, David. *Rat Palms.* Toronto: HarperPerennial, 1992

Honig, Donald. *Last Man Out.* New York: Signet, 1993.

----------. *The Plot to Kill Jackie Robinson.* New York: Signet, 1992.

Horvath, Brooke K. and Palmer, William J. "Three On: An Interview with David Carkeet, Mark Harris, and W.P. Kinsella." *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 183-194.

Howell, Colin D. *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

"How To Talk Boston." (author uncredited) *Monk* #13 (1992): 16-17.

Hunnewell, Susannah. "K is for Failure." *New York Times Book Review* June 28 1992, 14.

"Insider's Guide to Oriole Park at Camden Yards" (author uncredited). *Orioles' Official Game Program*, 1992.

"Interview with W. P. Kinsella." *Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series.* 21, ed. Deborah A. Straub, 217-223. Detroit: Gale Research Co. / Book Tower, 1987.

Irvine, Robert. *Gone to Glory.* New York: Pocket Books, 1990.

It's Happening -- A New Ball Park for Maryland (Author uncredited). Baltimore: Crown Central Petroleum Corporation, 1988.

Jacobsen, Josephine. "A Dream of Games." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, 158. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Jenkins, Dan. "Foreward." In *The Best American Sports Writing of 1995*, ed. Dan Jenkins, ix-xvi. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

----------. "Literary Ball." *Playboy* September 1990, p.40.

----------. *Semi-Tough.* New York: Signet, 1972.

Jhally, Sut and Lewis, Justin. *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

Johnson, Susan E. *When Women Played Hardball.* Seattle: Seal Press, 1994.

Johnson, William Oscar. "How Far Have We Come?" *Sports Illustrated*, August 12, 1991, 38-41.

Johnstone, Jay (with Talley, Rick). *Over the Edge.* New York: Contemporary Books Inc., 1987.

Joyce, Gare. *The Only Ticket Off the Island.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991.

Kahn, Roger . *The Boys of Summer.* New York: New American Library, 1971.

Kane, Mary Jo and Disch, Lisa J. "Sexual Violence and the Reproduction of Male Power in the Locker Room: the Lisa Olson Incident." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10 (1993): 334-352.

Kent, Bill. "Pinch Hitting for Dostoyevsky." *New York Times Book Review* June 28 1992, 14.

Kertes, Tom. "Celtic Pride" (Review). *The Village Voice* April 30, 1996, 64.

Kennedy, William. *Ironweed.* New York: Penguin Books. 1983.

Kiersh, Edward. *Where Have You Gone Vince DiMaggio?* New York: Bantam Books, 1983.

King, Martin Luther Jr. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. James M. Washington. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1986.

Kingwell, Mark. "The Toronto Blue Jays: Colonialism, Civility, and the Idea of a National Team." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy Perspective* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 209-32.

Kinsella, W.P. *Box Socials.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1992.

----------. *Dance Me Outside.* Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1977.

----------. *The Dixon Cornbelt League and Other Baseball Stories.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993.

----------. *The Further Adventures of Slugger McBatt.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1988.

----------. *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1986.

----------. *Shoeless Joe.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1982.

----------. *The Thrill of the Grass.* New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Kluger, Steve. *Changing Pitches.* Boston: Alyson Publications, 1984.

Krizek, Bob and Trujillo, Nick. "Emotionality in the Stands and in the Field: Expressing Self Through Baseball." *The Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 18, no. 4 (November 1994): 303-25.

Lardner, Ring. *The Best Short Stories of Ring Lardner.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.

----------. *You Know Me Al.* New York:Vinatge Books, 1914.

Lefcourt, Peter. *The Dreyfus Affair.* New York: Random House, 1992.

Leary, Mary. "Why I Love It." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball,* ed. Elinor Nauen, 128. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Levin, Gary. "FOX Baseball Pitch Targets Rookie Auds." *Variety* (Weekly) April 1-7 1996, 1 - (cont'd) 69.

Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt* (1922). New York: Signet Classics, 1961.

Lord, Bette Bao. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson.* New York: HarperTrophy, 1986.

Lord, Timothy. "Hegel, Marx, and *Shoeless Joe*: Religious Ideology in Kinsella's Baseball Fantasy." *Aethlon* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 43-51.

Lowry, Philip. *Green Cathedrals.* New York: Addison Wesley, 1992.

Luciano, Ron (with Fisher, David). *The Umpire Strikes Back.* New York: Bantam, 1982.

MacGregor, Roy. *The Seven A.M. Practise: Stories of Family Life* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996

Machor, James L. *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Major League Baseball: Facts and Figures. Ed. by H.G. Salsinger, Harry G. Heilmann, and Don H. Black. Racine, WI: Whitman Publishing Co. 1946.

Malamud, Bernard. *The Natural* (1952). New York: Dell Publishing, 1970.

Manley, Will. "The Manly Arts: Why I Hate Baseball." *Booklist*, June 1 & 15 1993, 1739.

Mantle, Mickey (with Gluck, Herb). *The Mick: An American Hero*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Marc, David. *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*. London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1989.

Markoe, Merril. "The Markoe Plan for Overcoming Boredom at a Baseball Game." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen. 188-191. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Martin, Nick and Porter, Marsha. *Video and Movie Guide 1994*. New York: Random House, 1993.

Martin, Quigley. *The Original Colored House of the Dead*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

Marx, Leo. *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Mays, Willie (with Harris, Jeff). *Danger in Centerfield*. New York: J. Lowell Pratt and Company, 1963.

McBain, Ed. *The Heckler*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960.

McBride, Joseph. *High and Inside*. New York: Warner Books, 1980.

McFarland, Thomas. *Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972.

McManus, James. *Chin Music*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1987.

McNeil, Alex. *Total Television*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

McWhittier, Norris and McWhittier, Ross. *The Guiness Book of Olympic Records*. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Mellard, James M. "Four Visions of Pastoral." In *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, ed. Leslie Field and Joyce Field, 67-84. New York: New York University Press. 1970.

Messenger, Christian K. "Expansion Draft: Baseball Fiction of the 1980s." In *The Achievement of American Sport Literature: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Wiley Lee Umphlett,.62-78. Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991.

---------- *Sport and the Spirit of Play in American Fiction.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

Messner, Michael and Sabo, Donald A. *Sex, Violence & Power in Sports: Rethinking Masculinity.* New York: Crossing Press. 1994.

Miller, Marvin. *A Whole Different Ballgame: The Sport and Business of Baseball.* New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991.

Milton, John. *The Complete Poetry of John Milton.* Ed. John Shawcross. New York: Anchor Books, 1971.

Mitzejewski, Linda. "Season Wish." .In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, 96-7. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Moore, Marianne. *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore.* New York: Viking Penguin. 1967.

Morris, Timothy. " 'Forget it Means Fuck it': Representations of Spanish Speakers and the English Speaking Community in Baseball Writing." Presented at the Sports Literature Association Conference in May 1994 at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

----------. *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Mount, Nicholas J. " 'Are the Green Fields Gone?': Pastoralism in the Baseball Novel." *Aethlon* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 61-77

Murray, Don. *Tall Tales in Various Voices: The Fiction of W.P. Kinsella.* Fredricton: York Press, 1987.

Nauen, Elinor. "Introduction." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, xi-xiii. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Nathan, Daniel A. "Anti-Semitism and the Black Sox Scandal." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy* 4, no.1 (Fall 1995): 94-100.

Neal-Lunsford, Jeff. "Sport in the Land of Television: The Use of Sport in Network Prime-Time Schedules 1946-50." *Journal of Sports History* 19, no.1 (Spring 1992): 56-76.

Norman, Rick. *Fielder's Choice* . Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1991.

O'Donnell, Patrick. "An Introduction to the Fiction of Jerome Charyn." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 12, no.2 (Summer 1992): 87-95.

Okrent, Daniel. *Nine Innings.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.

Oriard, Michael. "Home Teams." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 95, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 471-500.

Original Six: True Stories from Hockey's Classic Era. Ed. Paul Quarrington. Toronto: Reed Books Canada, 1996.

Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personnae: Art and Decadence from Nfertiti to Emily Dickinson.* New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Pallone, Dave (with Steinberg, Alan). *Behind the Mask: My Double Life in Baseball.* New York: Signet Books, 1991.

Plapinger, R. *Baseball Fiction 1996 Catalog #4.* Ashland, OR: R. Plapinger Baseball Books, 1996.

Plath, Sylvia. "Lady Lazarus." In *Sylvia Plath: Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes, 198-99. London: Faber & Faber, 1981.

Plimpton, George. *The Curious Case of Sidd Finch.* New York: Charter Books, 1987.

Price, Joseph L. "Fusing the Spirits: Baseball, Religion and *The Brothers K.*" A review essay in *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 300-313.

Quisenberry, Dan. "The Bomb." *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 152.

The Red Sox Reader. Ed. by Dan Riley. Thousand Oaks, CA: Ventura Arts, 1987.

"Review of *Bang the Drum Slowly*" (author uncredited). *The New York Times*, March 18 1956, 5.

"Review of *For Love of the Game*" (author uncredited). *Publisher's Weekly*, April 12 1991, 44.

"Review of *The Natural*" (author uncredited). *The New York Herald Tribune*, August 24, 1952, 51.

"Review of *Safe at Home*" (author uncredited). *Mystery Review* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 19.

Richards, David Adams. *Hockey Dreams: Memories Of A Man Who Couldn't Play.* Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1996.

Richler, Mordecai. "Triple Play." *GQ*, July 1989, 77-78

----------. *St. Urbain's Horseman.* New York: Bantam Books, 1966.

Risenhoover, C.C. *White Heat.* New York: Baskerville Press, 1992.

Robinson, Jackie (with Duckett, Alfred). *I Never Had it Made.* Greenwich,CT: Fawcett Crest, 1972.

Rogosin, Donn. *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues.* New York: Atheneum, 1985.

Roth, Philip. "The Conversion of the Jews." In *Goodbye, Colombus (And Five Short Stories)*: 137-58. New York: The Modern Library, 1966.

----------. "My Baseball Years." In *Reading Myself and Others*, Roth, 179-84. New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1975.

----------. *The Great American Novel.* New York: Bantam Books, 1973.

----------. *Portnoy's Complaint.* New York: Bantam Books, 1970.

Rothweiler, Paul. *The Sensuous Southpaw.* New York: Putnam, 1976.

Rounds, Kate. "Where is Our Field of Dreams?" *MS,* Sept/Oct, 1991,44-45.

Rushin, Steve. "How We Got Here." *Sports Illustrated,* August 16, 1994, 44.

----------. "What Might Have Been." *Sports Illustrated,* July 19, 1993, 96-104.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

Salisbury, Luke. *The Answer is Baseball.* New York: Times Books, 1989.

---------- "Baseball Purists Purify." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Social Policy* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 235-47.

---------- *The Cleveland Indian: The Legend of King Saturday.* New York: The Smith, 1992.

Sayles, John. *Pride of the Bimbos.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987.

Scheinin, Richard. *Field of Screams: The Dark Underside of America's National Pastime.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994.

The Scholar's Bookshelf. New Jersey: Combined University Press and Scholarly Imprint, 1993.

Seaver, Tom (with Resnicow, Herb). *Beanball.* New York: William Morrow, 1989.

Seymour, Harold. "Badge of Americanism." In *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture* (1990): 1-22. Oneonta, NY; Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing 1991.

----------. *Baseball: The Early Years.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

----------. *Baseball: The Golden Age.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Michael Shaara. *For the Love of the Game.* New York: Carroll & Graf, 1991.

Shannon, Mike. "Editor's Introduction." In *The Best of Spitball,* ed. Mike Shannon, 13-18. New York: Pocket Books, 1988.

----------. "The Spitball Interview: W.P. Kinsella." In *The Best of Spitball,* ed. Mike Shannon, 52-69. New York: Pocket Books, 1988.

Sher, Jack. "Christy Mathewson: The Immortal "Big Six." In *Sport Magazine's All-Time All Stars*, ed. Tom Murray, 403-33. New York: Signet, 1977.

Silverman, Al. *Joe DiMaggio: His Golden Year.* New York: MacFadden-Bartell, 1971.

Slowikowski, Cynthia Syndor. "Cultural Performance and Sports Mascots." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no. 1 (April 1993): 23-31.

Smith, Levrett T. Jr. *The American Dream and the National Game* (1970). Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975.

Smith, Myron J. *Baseball: A Comprehensive Bibliography.* Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 1986.

Smith, Red. *Press Box: Red Smith's Favorite Sports Stories.* New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977.

"Snapshot: Barney Frank" (interview). *Monk* #13, 1992, 22-24.

Solomon, Eric. "Counter Ethnicity and the Jewish-Black Baseball Novel: The Cases of Jerome Charyn and Jay Neugeboren." *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 49-63.

Soos, Troy. *Murder at Ebbets Field.* New York: Kensington Books, 1995.

Soos, Troy. *Murder at Fenway Park.* New York: Zebra Books, 1993.

Spalding, Albert G. *America's National Game* (1911). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

Stein, Harry. *Hoopla.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Strausberg, John. *Reflections on the Birth of the Elvis Faith.* New York: Blast Books, 1995.

Sugar, Bert Randolph. *Rain Delays: An Anecdotal History of Baseball Under One Umbrella.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.

Thayer, Ernest. "Casey at the Bat." In *The Baseball Reader*, ed. Charles Einstein, 301-2. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72.* New York: Warner Books 1973.

Thompson, Jim. *The Getaway.* New York: Vintage Crime / Black Lizard, 1958.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden, or Life in the Woods.*(1864). New York: Anchor Books, 1960 .

Thorn, John. *Baseball: Our Game.* New York: Penguin 60s, 1995.

Trimble, Joe. *Yogi Berra.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965.

Tucker, Ken. "Waiting to Exhale." *Entertainment Weekly*, December 1, 1995, 24-30.

Turner, Frederick W. "Myth Inside and Out: *The Natural.*" In *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, ed Leslie Field and Joyce Field, 109-19. New York: New York University Press, 1970.

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Umphlett, Wiley Lee. "Introduction: The Genesis and Growth of Sports Literature in America." In *The Achievement of American Sport Literature: A Critical Appraisal* ed. Wiley Lee Umphlett, 11-20. Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991.

Updike, John. "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu." In *The Baseball Reader*, ed. Charles Einstein, 319-30. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.

Valerio,.Anthony. *Bart: A Life of A. Bartlett Giamatti By Him and About Him.* Orlando: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1991.

Van Gelder, Lawrence. "Review of *Bang the Drum Slowly.*" *The New York Times*, Aug. 29, 1995.

Verducci, Tom. "Sign of the Times." *Sports Illustrated*, May 3, 1993, 14-21.

Voices of Baseball: Quotations on the Summer Game. Ed Bob Cheiger. New York: Signet 1983.

Voight, David C. "Getting Right with Baseball." In *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture* (1990): 23-37. Oneonta, NY; Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing 1991.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions*. New York: Dell, 1973.

Warren, Robert Penn. *You, Emperors, & Others*. New York: Random House, 1960.

Wasserman, Earl R. "*The Natural*: World Ceres." In *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, ed. Leslie Field and Joyce Field, 45-66. New York: New York University Press, 1970.

Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. New York: Random House, 1989.

Weigel, George. "Politically Correct Baseball." *Commentary* 95, no. 5 (November 1994): 47-54.

Weiller, Karen H. and Higgs, Catriona T. "Living the Dream: A Historical Analysis of Professional Women Baseball Players." *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 1 (1991): 46-54.

Weinberg, Viola. "The Playoffs and Everything." In *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers On Baseball*, ed. Elinor Nauen, 265-66. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.

West, Nathanael. *Day of the Locust and The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1939 & 1931). New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Westbrook, Deeanne. *Ground Rules: Baseball and Myth*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Whiting, Robert. *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat: Baseball Samurai Style*. New York: Avon Books, 1977.

----------. *You Gotta Have Wah*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Wideman, John Edgar. "Michael Jordan Leaps the Great Divide." *Esquire*, November 1990, 138-145 cont'd 210-16.

Will, George. *Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball.* New York: HarperCollins, 1990.

Williams, William Carlos. *Selected Poems.* Connecticut: New Directions Books, 1949.

Willard, Nancy. *Things Invisible to See.* New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

Willeford, Charles. *Cockfighter.* New York: Vintage/Black Lizard Crime Books, 1972.

Wills, Garry. *Reagan's America.* New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

Woodley, Richard. *The Bad News Bears.* A novelization based on the screenplay by Bill Lancaster (copyright Paramount Pictures Corporation). New York: Dell Books, 1976.

World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1996. Ed. by Robert Famighetti. New York: Funk & Wagnells, 1995.

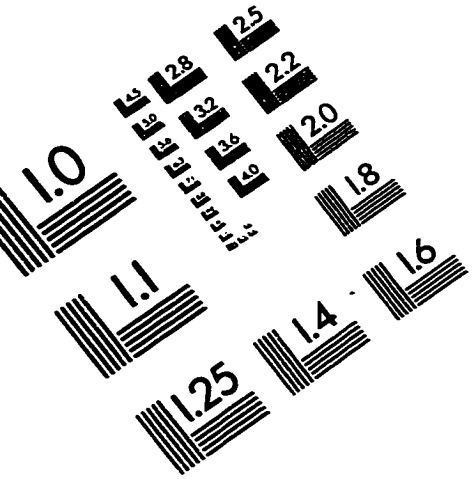
Wormser, Baron. *Good Trembling.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

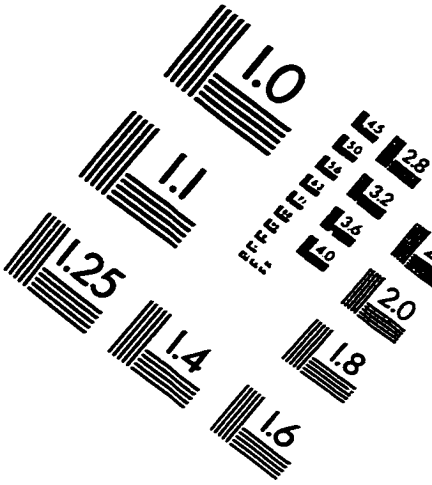
Yardley, Jonathan. *Ring: An Autobiography of Ring Lardner.* New York: Random House, 1977.

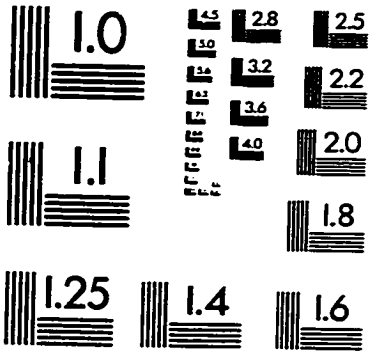
Zipter, Yvonne. *Diamonds are a Dyke's Best Friend: Reflections, Reminiscences and Reports from the Field on the Lesbian National Pastime.* Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1988.

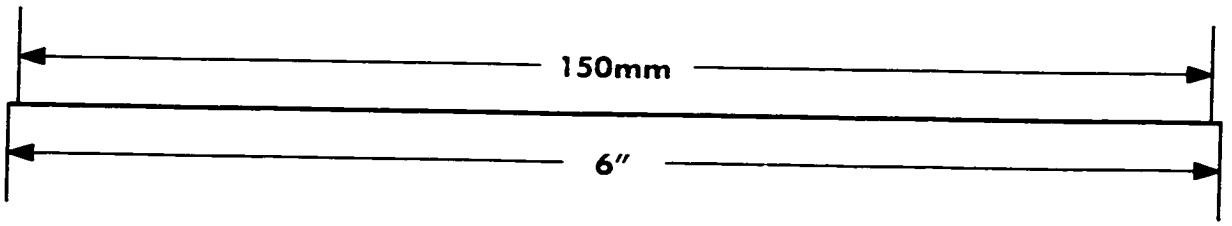
Zoss, Joel and Bowman, John . *Diamonds in the Rough: The Untold History of Baseball.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1989.

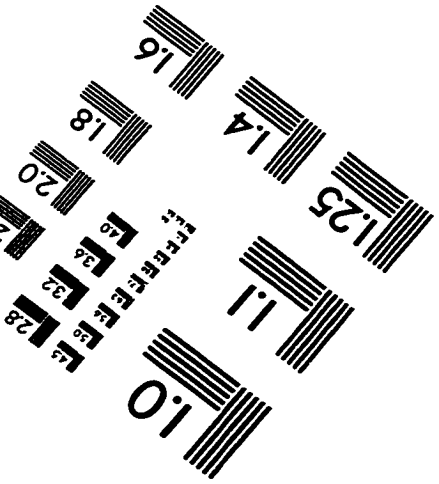
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

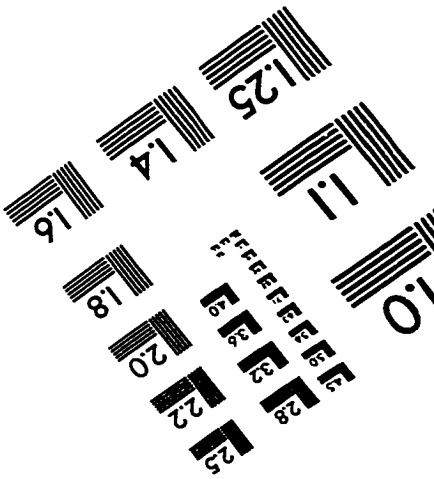












APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989