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Book Review: *Baseball/Literature/Culture Essays: 2004-2005*

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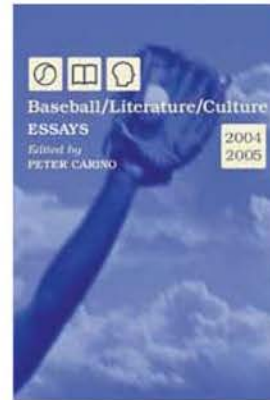
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baseball / literature/ culture essays: 2004-2005

Reviewed by Scott Peterson

DECEMBER 21, 2006

This collection is the third in a series of essays selected from the Indiana State University Conference on Baseball in Literature and Culture. Each of the three volumes is edited by Carino, who tells us in the present introduction that he prefers to think of the 18 essays-nine on baseball and literature and nine on baseball as a cultural institution-as a doubleheader rather than two competing nines. The first half of the twinbill demonstrates a wide definition of literature by letting juvenile fiction, drama, film, memoirs, and creative non-fiction into the game, along with the expected novels from the baseball canon. The second half provides insight from social, cultural, rhetorical, and traditional histories. Whether baseball researchers prefer a "Let's Play Two" rubric or an academic "run down" approach, they are likely to find several items of interest in this collection.



In the first inning of the opener, Mick Cochrane offers a writer's insight to the production of his novel, *Sport*, in which a young baseball fan learns to live in the real world. Next, Andrew Anderson discusses the "if I never get back" qualities of the young adult time-travel series of Dan Gutman (which originated in 2000 with Jackie & Me). In the two essays that treat canonical novels, Tracy Collins examines the sexist roles of female characters in *The Natural*, *The Universal Baseball Association*, *The Great American Novel*, and *The Celebrant* and John Petty takes on sex and baseball in *The Natural*. Petty argues successfully that Roy Hobbs was not created as a realistic character in a mimetic novel (which may account for some of the unsatisfactory representations of women discussed by Collins). At the same time, one has to wonder if there is something about baseball that allows a rookie novelist to succeed so wildly when by his own admission he merely wanted to be taken seriously by his professors.

Two essays in the middle innings refer to many of the same passages from August Wilson's *Fences*: James Saunders

draws parallels between Troy Maxson and Josh Gibson while Renae Shackelford looks at the metaphors in Wilson's play to illustrate the African American condition in the middle of the last century. Next, Robert Meyer places the movie version of *Fear Strikes Out* in the context of 1950s era family melodrama and compares it to Piersall's book. Gary Land traces the father-son theme through four non-fiction memoirs (*The Boys of Summer*, *Summer of '98*, *The Final Season*, and *The Last Magic Summer*). Joe Rice's creative non-fiction piece, "Sudden Hands," brings a number of themes back into play (including the troubling/troubled father theme of Cochrane and the baseball cards of Gutman), thus providing a pleasing conclusion to the opener.

The nightcap provides a rich and varied illustration of the breadth and depth of baseball's connection to American culture. Steve Gietschier uses the deaths of Ernest Barnard and Ban Johnson in 1931 as the springboard for a history of the early days of the National and American Leagues. Andrew Hazucha adds another chapter to the ever-growing body of cultural histories describing the lovable loserdom of the Chicago Cubs when he offers their futility as an antidote to the American illness of needing to win. David Ogden defines "legend" and "myth" in a baseball context and identifies the implications of the dwindling source of oral histories with the death of each former Negro League player (as illustrated by the recent loss of Buck O'Neil). Kevin Grace examines the 150-year history of the connections between tobacco and baseball, informing us that Ring Lardner favored "Home Run Cigarettes" and that Jim Bouton helped invent "Big League Chew" for kids.

Halfway home in the second game, Scott Jensen argues that baseball is a message and thus a kind of rhetoric that is delivered by baseball stadiums. He points out there have been no "stadiums" since the cookie cutters of the 60s and provides a five-part framework that researchers can use to carry out their own analyses of ball parks. John Shorey offers an engaging narrative describing the vicissitudes of minor league baseball in the Depression as he tells the story of the ill-fated Council Bluffs (Iowa) Rails. Ron Lambert compares and contrasts the Doubleday creation myth with the actual creation of Little League Baseball a hundred years later. Gerald Bazer surveys the connection between baseball and Twentieth Century American Presidents, providing anecdotes and the winning percentages of each president. Joan Thomas winds up the second game with an extended and insightful metaphor of baseball as America's first love through rival sports, labor strife, and steroid scandals.

Taken together, the essays in this collection are manageable in length (averaging about nine pages), accessible in tone

and content, and sufficiently scholarly, since most of them are supported with works cited lists. As with any trip to the ballpark, there is something here for everyone, from the ardent student of the game to the occasional fan who wants to see who's on first.

Carino, Peter, editor. *Baseball/Literature/Culture Essays: 2004-2005*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006. 200 pp. \$39.95 (www.mcfarlandpub.com/800-253-2187).

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