

Murdock, Eugene C. *Mighty Casey: All American*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984, xii, 164 pp. Photos, chronology, notes, index. \$27.95 (cloth).

Eugene C. Murdock calls *Mighty Casey* “an ‘extension’ of *The Annotated Casey at the Bat*” by Martin Gardner, published by Clarkson Potter in 1967. Though it prints all the Casey variants in Gardner’s book and more, it does not intend to supercede it. And I think there is more to be learned from “Casey” than either book tells us.

Murdock divides *Mighty Casey* into two parts, “The Historical Record” (four chapters) and “The Literary Record” (eight chapters). “The Historical Record” begins by reprinting “Casey at the Bat” as it first appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* and as it first appeared in book form. Since the poem was not signed with its true author’s name until it had appeared under several other names, there was a controversy about its authorship, which Murdock covers comprehensively in his second chapter. One needs to go back to Gardner, though, for a full look at Thayer’s character and background. The third and fourth chapters cover meticulously claims about the identity of the historical Casey (all apparently false) and the historical Mudville.

“The Literary Record” is a much longer section than the first. In its first six chapters, Murdock attempts a classification of the various poems descendent from “Casey at the Bat” and I think succeeds quite well. At least it is a heroic effort to give quite miscellaneous material some order. He divides the poems into those concerned with the pitcher who struck Case out, with Casey’s later redemption, with other aspects of Casey’s career, with similar efforts by other members of Casey’s family, and with parodies of the original. There is a final group too miscellaneous to classify. In this section there are some seventy-five versions of the same dramatic situation in the same verse form (Gardner’s book prints only twenty-eight), and it takes a stout heart to read through them all without panicking. But all these versions also attest to the cultural meaningfulness of the original poem.

Murdock’s last chapter, an attempt “to explain the timeless appeal of ‘Casey at the Bat.’” does not succeed very well in getting at that meaningfulness. He spends several pages describing and analyzing the appeal of baseball, but surely “Casey’s” popularity has more to do with the particular way baseball is presented in the poem, its own form, and its audience, than the fact it is about baseball. Otherwise all other baseball poems ought to be equally popular. There are intriguing facts that are reported by Murdock but not analyzed. Ernest L. Thayer appears to have been a Harvard man and a student of philosophy. Of what significance is this? What insights into “Casey” can we gain by placing it in the context of other popular poetry? The fact that it seems to have gained its popularity through recitals at theatrical presentations seems also of possible significance. In what contexts did De Wolf Hopper recite the poem and to what sorts of audiences? We need answers to questions like these before we can explain “Casey”’s popularity. I have not yet mentioned Murdock’s next-to-last chapter, which is concerned with William Schuman’s one-act opera, *The Mighty Casey*. Murdock gives an interesting synopsis of this opera, but does not analyze it. Sometimes it is possible to discover what makes popular art popular by looking at such a manifestation of it in high culture as we have here. But we need more information and different tools for examining it than Murdock uses here. Nevertheless, because his book has assembled the material it does with such care, Murdock’s *Mighty Casey* will be a principal tool in explaining “Casey at the Bat.”

North Carolina Wesleyan College

Leverett T. Smith, Jr.