

Burns, Grant. *The Sports Pages: A Critical Bibliography of Twentieth Century American Novels and Stories Featuring Baseball, Basketball, Football, and Other Athletic Pursuits*. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1987. Pp. ix, 274.

Bibliographies are tricky little devils. Compiling a list of books, even with annotations, should be a simple enough task. Not so. Perhaps warning labels should be attached to bibliographies as well as cigarette packs. Grant Burns's *The Sports Pages: A Critical Bibliography of Twentieth Century American Novels and Stories Featuring Baseball, Basketball, Football, and Other Ath-*

*letic Pursuits* is an example of the joys and pitfalls of bibliography. The book lists and annotates some 631 works of fiction. On the positive side of the ledger, Burns calls our attention to some underrated novels, David Small's *Almost Famous*, Harry Stein's *Hoopla*, and Eric Rolfe Greenberg's *The Celebrant* among them. The author also locates some good short fiction unfortunately buried in small-circulation periodicals. And there are stories from early in the twentieth century-Hugh Fullerton's, for example-which are interesting on a variety of counts.

Unfortunately, Burns's fuzzy criteria cause him more problems than a bumpy infield. He says he will "lead the reader to both pleasureable literature and to literature that will help reveal the heart of our society" (p. vii). Robert Coover's significant novel *The Universal Baseball Association* really does not fit either of those and yet it is an extremely important book. Another criterion is the omission of work "dealing with hunting or fishing from a non-sport perspective, such as Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*" (p. viii). I cannot completely fathom his "non-sport perspective," especially with the example he uses. It may be reasonable to assert that "works whose focus on sport is not of primary, and preferably continuing, importance" (p. viii) should not be included. However, to maintain sport is not of primary focus in works such as John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* is myopic. The core of the novel is Harry Angstrom's success as a high school basketball star, a life that peaks at age eighteen and the resulting confusion and frustration. Perhaps Burns should have consulted current scholarship in trying to set his boundaries. Michael Oriard, Christian Messenger, and Robert J. Higgs are especially astute in their discussions of the literature of sport.

There are other serious problems. Where are the short stories "Roller Ball Murder" and "Nirvana, Götterdämmerung and the Shotput" (William Harrison), "Jamesie" (J. F. Powers), and the eight Busher stories Ring Lardner published in the *Saturday Evening Post* between 1915 and 1919? Where are James Whitehead's *Joiner* (1971) John Craig's *Chappie and Me* (1979), Sara Vogan's *In Shelley's Leg* (1981), Percival Everett's *Suder* (1983), John McCluskey's *Mr. America's Last Season Blues* (1983), Paul Quarrington's *Home Game* (1983), Pepper Rodgers *Fourth and Long Gone* (1984), David Shields's *Heroes* (1984) James McManus's *Chin Music* (1985) and Nancy Willard's *Things Invisible to See* (1985)? If a quick glance at my bookshelf reveals these gaps, how many more are there? The annotations, too, are problematic. They are sometimes disproportionately long for the works under consideration. Burns would have profited from stronger editorial guidance. The job of a bibliographer is to set boundaries and to be thorough and exhaustive within them. While Grant Burns's *The Sports Pages* is a useful bibliography, it should be handled with care.