Westbrook, Deeanne. *Ground Rules: Baseball & Myth.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996. Pp. 348. Notes, bibliography, index. $19.95 pb.

It has long been obvious that baseball, more than any other sport, lends itself particularly well to writing, from newspaper reporting to short stories to complex works by serious American novelists. Baseball's long history and colorful players partially account for this, but Deeanne Westbrook, professor of English at Portland State University, has written a book of literary criticism that establishes the primary reasons for the close connection between writing and baseball. Stating that baseball literature has "more coherence, more common themes and figures, more 'familiar' characters and acts, a greater tendency to approach the mysterious and the sacred,

and more echoes of ancient myths than can be accounted for easily, given the secular topic and modern setting" (p.1), *Ground Rules: Baseball & Myth* posits not only that baseball literature is a genre that relies on myth for its characters, structure, and meaning, but that the game itself in its enactment of the classic quest and its use of time and space, is mythic.

Westbrook's lucid discussions of theory and her convincing and thorough application of mythic concepts to specific baseball texts make this a brilliant book She begins by discussing what myth is and why it has always existed: "myth is not something humans outgrow, like nursery rhymes, or evolve beyond, like an appendix, but something they retain as an enduring, functional strategy that mind pursues to conduct its dialogue with the world" (p.6). Drawing on critics like Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell, Lacan, and Eric Gould, she explicates well-known novels such as *The Natural, Bang the Drum Slowly, The Universal Baseball Association,* and William Kennedy's *Ironweed,* as well as lesser known works like Eric Rolfe Greenberg's *The Celebrant* and John Sayles's *Pride of the Bimbos,* among others. She shows not only that baseball literature can be considered a distinct literary genre, but also how it exists within a broader context of American storytelling. With two basic story lines—one about a person going on a long journey and the other about a stranger coming to town (the latter also known as the American monomyth)—baseball literature can easily be related to westerns and other popular genres.

Because critics have long recognized the elements of Arthurian legend that Malamud adapted for *The Natural,* as well as the religious overtones of Coover's *The UBA* Westbrook's most valuable chapters explicate works whose mythic nature is less apparent but nonetheless crucial. Examples are August Wilson's *Fences,* a drama concerning an aging Negro League player whom she links to the stories of Oedipus and Odysseus. In novels like Douglass Wallop's *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* and Kinsell's *Shoeless Joe,* the protagonist journeys through time and space and, like Odysseus, eventually returns to his family. Her analysis of Mark Harris' *Bang the Drum Slowly* is especially enlightening. This novel is unusual in that it uses the two basic stories by way of two protagonists. Henry Wiggen is the man who makes a long journey, both physically and mentally, and Bruce Pearon—in several ways Wiggen's double—is the stranger who comes to town—the silent outcast who, like Shane, sacrifices himself for the good of the group and restores the natural order of things. Harris' intriguing book, at once a comedy and a tragedy, is here shown to depend on a "complex interweaving of two hero tales" (p. 92).

A most compelling demonstration of the mythicizing inherent in baseball literature takes place in the chapter on the recurring figure of the baseball-playing dwarf, who usually meets with violence on the field. Noting that the dwarf has been a literary staple for centuries, and that Thurber's story "You Could Look It Up" *preceded* Bill Veeck's celebrated use of Eddie Gaedel (a case of life imitating art), Westbrook explains that the dwarf represents both the childlike, Oedipal past of the individual and the primordial past of the species, and often serves as alter-ego for the protagonist, with *The Naturals* Otto Zipp and the dwarf in Jerome Charyn's novel *The Seventh Babe* being two examples.

Deeanne Westbrook's *Ground Rules* is a truly illuminating and most welcome piece of literary theory, and her clear prose and comprehensive knowledge of the field are impressive. This book, which grew out of the author's love of literature and baseball, will create more interest in the mythic qualities inherent in baseball and its texts, and will go far in legitimizing baseball literature as a valid area of study.

—Michele Schiavone
Marshall University