

MCGIMPSEY, DAVID. *Imagining Baseball: America's Pastime and Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. Pp. 208. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cb.

It might be argued that the last thing needed at this point is another book on Baseball and American Culture. The numbers of these volumes is beginning to challenge such intellectually exhausted categories as "Causes of the Civil War." If one thought that to be the case, reading David McGimpsey's bright, fresh, and humorous analysis would lead to an admission of error. Perhaps the freshness stems from McGimpsey's Canadian perspective, or perhaps it stems from his slightly off-centered point of view that he cleverly applies to baseball and a number of other points on the cultural landscape.

David McGimpsey is a poet, songwriter, cultural critic, literature professor, and an extremely funny person. The latter three roles enrich the analysis in this study of baseball and its literature, while the first two inform both the writing and the point of view.

For the purposes of *Imagining Baseball* "literature" is widely defined to include film, television programming, fiction, non-fiction, and other scattered artifacts of popular culture. McGimpsey's interest centers on the "Tropes" of the game which are often featured in "optimistic" and "cynical" pairings.

On the one hand, baseball is held to be perfect and god-given, the best sport in the world, and representative of America at its best. On the other hand, it is a fixed monopoly controlled by evil men of power, America at its worst, akin to "The Jerry Springer Show." On the one hand, baseball is a meritocracy of quantifiable qualities, it is about children, and it returns sons to fathers. On the other hand, it is an exclusive boy's club that keeps fathers and sons enthralled by its "spirit of uselessness" (p. 2).

McGimpsey takes a hostile view toward the notion that baseball as a sport is particularly amenable to being the subject of literature. He calls this the "Doubleday Myth of baseball culture," because although not true, it has been repeated so often that it has in a certain sense become true:

Older than the hamburger, and just about as successful, baseball has more cultural weight than other less developed pastimes. Baseball's constancy on the American scene, its success as a commercial product, its standing as popular culture-and not its so-called inherent poetic properties, which can always be found in other sport- is the source of its highbrow enrichment (p. 6).

After his introductory chapter McGimpsey launches into the literature of the game in four chapters organized around themes. The first, "In The Big Inning," a title chosen no doubt for its punning Biblical allusion, examines the literary treatment of "fixes," which may also parallel the original sin in the garden. He begins with one of the more recent violations of the game, the Pete Rose affair. Here McGimpsey focuses on Bart Giamatti's *Take Time for Paradise* and the idealism and innocence that drips from its pages. He comments on Pete Rose, makes the appropriate comparisons to Ty Cobb, and believes that the Rose-Giamatti feud is an allegory of the conflict within baseball's cultural representations:

The Giamatti case, if you will, begins with a claim for baseball's essential goodness and its superiority to other games. . . .The Rose case, on the other hand, insists that the game is a compromised thing, and its human players, even if they prove to be corruptible agents of the fix, are still human. The case 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 (pp. 31-32).

Next McGimpsey turns his attention to the notion that baseball is “good” and finds this claim largely sustained by its contrast to the “bad” which is embodied in football. It is also a view that is sustained by its endless repetition. Nostalgia is a heavy theme here and within it McGimpsey analyzes the work of several writers. The central focus is on W.P. Kinsella, a writer whom McGimpsey identifies as the closest thing that baseball fiction has to Norman Rockwell. Naturally the Black Sox scandal gets attention with an analysis of Ring Lardner, Harry Stein’s *Hoopla*, Brendon Boyd’s *Blue Ruin* as well as a bow to other literary references to the scandal.

No literary or historical analysis of baseball would be complete without an examination of the “pastoral” themes in the game. The abundance of these materials makes selection difficult. Both the literary and film versions of *The Natural* and *Bang the Drum Slowly* get a full analysis. Robert Coover’s brilliant *Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* is dissected. There are comments on the retro-stadium trend, the stadium as cathedral, George Will, Harold Bloom and Cooperstown—both the place and the film.

Pastoralism, claims McGimpsey, is essential to baseball’s cultural claim and its attachments to the literary and academic world. The modern threat to this status can be seen in damage done in recent years by greed. McGimpsey wryly concludes: “The pastoral antidote to baseball’s reputation as an over-commercialized property of the entertainment industry will continue to be fairly simple: more Kevin Costner films” (p. 88).

Chapter Three “Everybody Can Play (Except You)” looks with a highly critical eye at the notion that baseball is a pure meritocracy, a democratic hothouse, and a place where the American melting pot is a reality. *The Celebrant*, *The Seventh Babe*, Dave Pallone, and *The Dreyfus Affair* are given considerable attention as McGimpsey explores the issues of race, ethnicity and sexuality. Women in baseball are analyzed in literature, film, and the historical reality. The use of Native American mascots and nicknames draws McGimpsey’s attention. In this section several films get at least passing mention, while episodes of “The Cosby Show” and “Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman” are brought into the analysis.

Chapter Four, “Is That Good Enough For You, Pop?” begins with a brief discussion of the greying fan base of baseball and the recent attempts by FOX to reverse the trend. The Father/Son relationship, so central to baseball literature and nostalgia, is given a less than hagiographic treatment in this excellent culminating chapter. Among the central works analyzed here are “Fear Strikes Out,” “The Fan,” *For the Love of the Game*, *The Brothers K*, and *Season’s End*.

In an epilogue McGimpsey concludes that baseball fiction does have things to say about America that other fictions cannot say. This he attributes largely to its patriotic connections and its claims to high ideals within the frame of “the national pastime,” no matter the truth of such claims. On the other hand, what is said in baseball fiction can and has been said in other sports fictions.

The key is largely geographical. Baseball fiction has great appeal in the U.S. and Canada but virtually no appeal in Brazil or the U.K. It is really sport that is at the heart of the matter and not a particular sport. Sport gives the universality of experience essential to great meaningful fiction regardless of the particulars. What works in the United States

with baseball, works just as well for soccer in Europe, but the search for soccer fiction in the United States would be virtually futile.

Imagining Baseball is a remarkable and indeed valuable addition to the study of baseball and culture because it brings together so many fictional and non-fictional forms in ways not previously done. The use of television and film adds to the power of the analysis giving this work a popular culture flavor as well as a literary cultural dimension.

The effort is successful primarily because McGimpsey has an eye for popular cultural analysis which matches his professional training in literature, and it works because he has the kind of mind that can run across the cultural landscape to draw parallels and comparisons others never see. Combine these strengths with McGimpsey's marvelous sense of irony, his writing skills, and his sharp wit and this becomes both a significant work on baseball and a delight to read. And perhaps best of all, *Imagining Baseball* is accessible to those untrained in the occult arts of literary analysis.

McGimpsey demonstrates once again why historians have much to learn from literature and can ignore literature only at their own peril.

—RICHARD C. CREPEAU
University of Central Florida

FINN, GERRY P.T., AND RICHARD GIULIANOTTI, EDs. *Football Culture: Local Contests, Global Visions*. Cass Series. Sport in the Global Society. Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass & Company Publishers, 2000. Pp. x + 306. Notes, index, select bibliography, and chapter abstracts. \$59.50 cb.

Nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize or serving as a catalyst for a violent riot, soccer achieves an international impact far beyond newspaper sport sections. Editors Gerry Finn and Richard Giulianotti's interdisciplinary collection of essays underscores soccer's academic value of examination. The contributing scholars illuminate the relationship between soccer and ethnic identity, mass media, nationalization, and global economics.

The first three essays employ soccer to investigate social structure in Australia, the United States, and Scotland. John Hughson's essay on Australian fandom examines the "subterranean values" of two fan groups as expressions of ethnic identity. David Andrews concludes that U.S. soccer excludes the economically disadvantaged and remains a sport for the financially empowered white middle class. Gerry Finn demonstrates how allegiance to rival clubs, Glasgow Bangers and Celtic, fosters ethnic and religious division in Scotland, underestimated by the media and academia.

The next four essays focus on aspects of national identity. Bea Vidacs posits that local Cameroon matches reflect regional differences, but Cameroon World Cup play creates a pan-African pride and consciousness. Two essays on South America explore soccer's influence on nationalism. Pablo Alabarces *et al.* suggest Argentine soccer first represented the country's elite, then its working class, until emerging onto the international scene. Yet for contemporary Argentines, soccer remains factionalized and divided like the nation. Richard Giulianotti sees a decline of national pride in Uruguayan soccer as well. He notes that