

“Maybe His Mother is Right: Maybe There is More to Life Than Football”

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The rite-of-passage theme is a common one in young-adult literature; however, sport historians, for a variety of reasons, have not conducted a thorough examination of the various sports-related titles available to young adults. The purpose of this paper is to look at the changing nature of the use of the rite-of-passage theme as evidenced by two young-adult football novels: B. J. Chute, *Blocking Back* (Macmillan, 1938) and Richard Blessing, *A Passing Season* (Little, Brown, 1983). The two novels were chosen at random.

Both novels have heroes; both heroes are placed in certain contexts; both heroes are faced with a series of dilemmas that are part of those contexts; and both heroes face and respond to -for the moment; at least – their respective dilemmas. The heroes’ characteristics, their contexts, their dilemmas, and their responses to the dilemmas are similar in a number of ways and are different in a number of ways.

Chute’s hero, Mike Blair, is a prep-school running back whose key dilemma involved dealing with a spoiled-brat, new-transfer-who-doesn’t-want-to-be-there roommate who also happens to be an excellent football player, and also a running back. Blair feigns injury to allow the roommate a spot on the team. During the rite-of-passage siege, the two have a fistfight on the field, during *The Big Game*.

Blessing’s hero, Craig Warren, is a public-school, third-string quarterback in a working-class town where much of the male social life revolves around, is, or was, football. Warren’s primary dilemma is overcoming his seeming lack of desire, which is part fear of physical injury, part not knowing if he really wants to play football (or, more to the point, whether he can like poetry and be a football player simultaneously). During his rite-of-passage siege, he also becomes involved in a fistfight, also with an adversary.

Despite a distance of two generations, and despite their having totally different kinds of lives, the two young men, who share football as a common interest -and the fact that they haven’t grown up yet -come to terms with life in much the same way: through violence.