

# The New Optimism: Baseball and Contemporary Fiction

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Beginning perhaps with Ring Lardner, but certainly Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952). American baseball fiction entered a long period of essentially negative thematic resolutions. Malamud's Roy Hobbs struggles gamely, but fails utterly. Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc.. J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) gives us a protagonist who is driven mad by his playing. Because baseball has inspired more excellent fiction than any other American sport and because baseball is such a cultural touchstone, it would be interesting to look at what some contemporary fiction writers are doing with that Sport.

The novels of six writers - Philip O'Connor, John Craig, Gary Morgenstein, David Ritz, Percival L. Everett, and W.P. Kinsella - seem to indicate a more positive view of human existence. By no means do these authors return us to the days of Frank Merriwell or Chip Hilton. None would have us believe life is necessarily fair or that good will ultimately triumph over evil. All six - in varying degrees of literary skill-affirm life and credit the human spirit with the capacity to reach and sometimes even soar above the mundane.



Dick Keller, David Voigt and Paula Welch were elected to the 1985-86 nominating committee.