

Timothy Morris, *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction*. University of Illinois Press, Champaign, 1997. pp. xii + 190. US\$34.95 hardback, US\$13.95 paperback.

Baseball is both a game and not — or more than — a game. It is popularly viewed as embodying all that is good and noble about American (that is the United States of America) way of life. Baseball is America's national pastime. As a visit to any 'major' American bookstore will reveal baseball is an activity which has generated, in comparison to virtually all other sports, a large, serious, factual literature in the sense normally associated with the liberal arts or social sciences. Books abound concerning historical, sociological, economic, legal, geographic, racial and other matters pertaining to baseball — as well as numerous excellent studies/biographies of leading players and other baseball personalities.

Baseball has also generated much fictional writing. Timothy Morris in *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction* is concerned with exploring the dimensions of such writing. He distinguishes between adult and children's baseball fiction. His major focus is the latter; though one of his sub-themes is the continuity between the two genres.

Making the Team operates at two levels. The first, as the sub-title indicates, is to examine the cultural 'function' of such writings in America. Second, and possibly more important for Morris, a teacher of English at the University of Texas at Arlington, is that baseball fiction should be taken 'seriously' — of 'Making the Team', so to speak, of that which is regarded as literature. Such a statement, however, does a disservice to Morris' overall position concerning literature. His final chapter contains a fascinating examination of the forces that shape and define tastes accorded to different types of writing (or, in this case, novels) as fiction, genre and literature (and subliterary). He finds it particularly intriguing that as children we are encouraged to read virtually anything, in an attempt to develop a taste, appreciation, even a feeling of joy for writing; however, with the passing of time 'cultural elites' define (or attempt to define) what is 'good' or 'bad' for us to read.

Morris examines four cultural sites of baseball fiction: they are assimilation, homosexuality/homophobia, language/English speaking and meritocracy. Baseball is a metaphor (tautology) for the American way of life, conveying images of fairness, equal opportunity and 'square dealing'. As students of baseball and American society (or any other

society for that matter) know both are based on privilege, hierarchy and 'strange dealings' by insiders against outsiders. In examining these various issues Morris highlights the contradictions in baseball fiction, and provides a critique of both the ideologies and practice of baseball and American society.

The scope of Morris's scholarship and knowledge is daunting. Besides issues associated with various debates in English and literacy scholarship, which, of course, is his forte, he also traverses issues as diverse as history, economics, queer theory and factor analysis. The major success of *Making the Team* is how Morris, in criticising and deconstructing baseball fiction, leads his reader into not only thinking about the nature of baseball (sport) and America (society), but also the very nature, or essence, of reading (and writing) and interpretation itself. *Making the Team* is highly recommended.

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