PLAYFUL FICTIONS AND FICTIONAL PLAYERS

Thesis submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
For the award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in English

By

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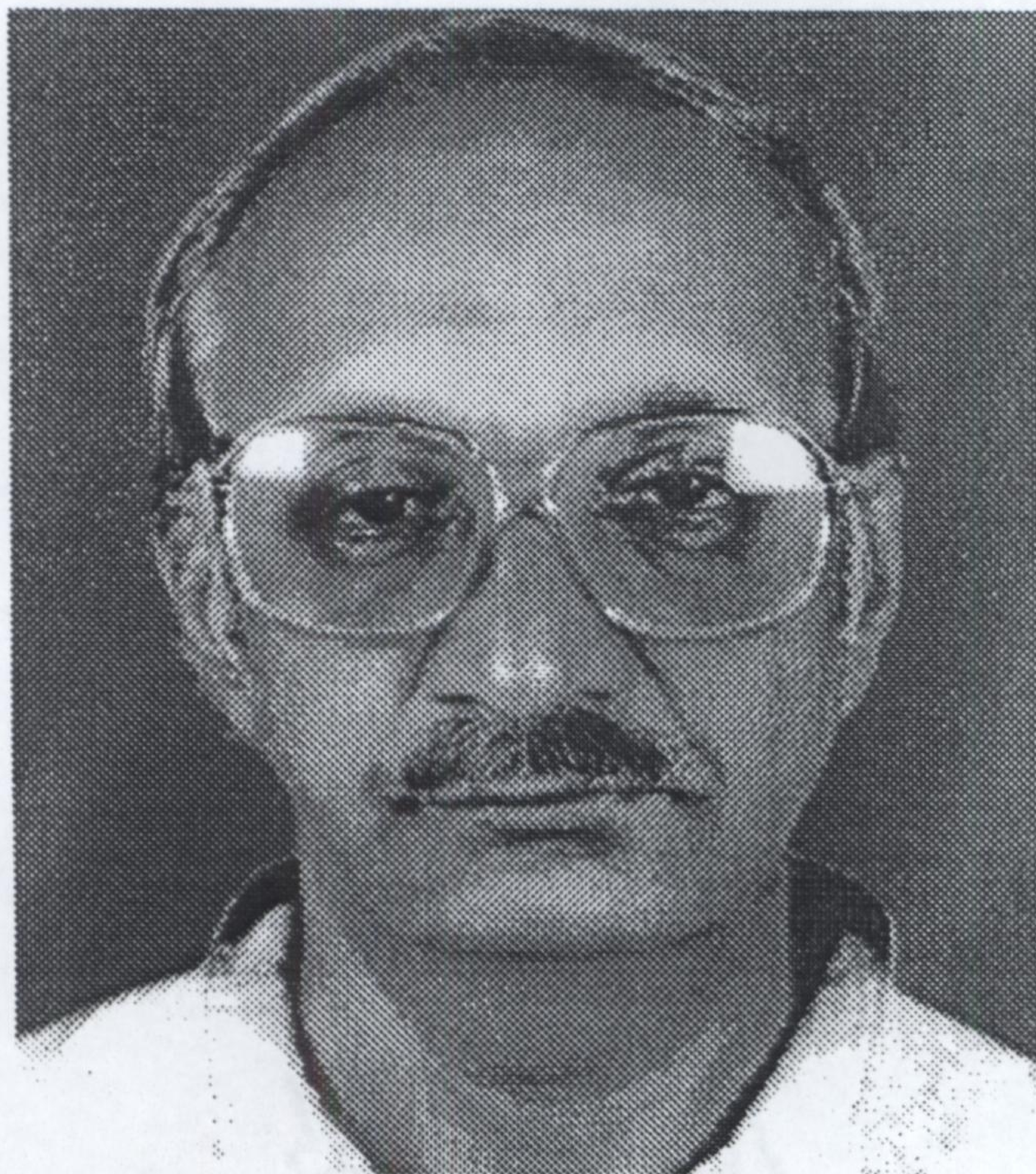
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

March 2006

Dedication:



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- my teacher and former research supervisor

CERTIFICATE

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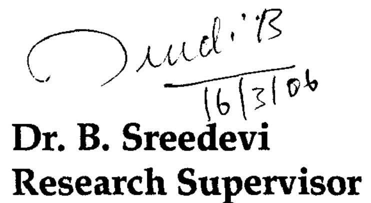
This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Playful Fictions and Fictional Players" submitted to the University of Calicut, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of bonafide research carried out by C. P. Satheesh at the Department of English, under my supervision and guidance, w.e.f. 16-06-2005, following the expiry of his former Research Supervisor Dr. R. Viswanthan.



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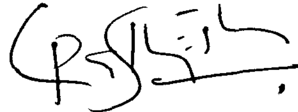
DECLARATION

I do hereby affirm that the thesis "**Playful Fictions and Fictional Players**" has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am extremely grateful to Dr. B. Sreedevi for her kindness in accepting me as her research scholar, following the sudden demise of Prof. R. Viswanathan. I also thank her for the help, encouragement and guidance given in the writing of my thesis.

Dr. R. Viswanthan, my teacher and former guide, is the driving force behind this thesis. Without his guidance, advice and directions, this work would not have been possible. I deeply regret the negligence on my part of not completing the work during his lifetime.

I wish to thank my colleagues in the college, especially the English department faculty, for their support. ASRC, Hyderabad deserves special mention for providing the major chunk of the reading material that I have used. Thanks are also due to the staff of English department library, University of Calicut; RIE library, Bangalore; CIIL library, Mysore. My friends in the U.S., Ms. Sreejaya and Mr. Asif Ismail had been kind enough to send some important books and xeroxed articles. I am further indebted to my former teachers and non-teaching staff of English department in the University.

The love and backing provided by my parents, wife and daughters (Aditi and Aparna) cannot be expressed in a few words. My father, Prof. C.P.Sivadasan has been the biggest source of inspiration all through my life. Lastly, I am obliged to each and every person who has helped me, in the completion of this work.

C.P. Satheesh

Shortened Versions Used

CN	-	Contemporary Novelists
CA	-	Contemporary Authors
CLC	-	Contemporary Literary Criticism
EZ	-	End Zone
GAN	-	The Great American Novel
UBA	-	The Universal Baseball Association, J. Henry Waugh, Prop.
GG	-	Whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus of the Chicago Bears?
FN	-	A Fan's Notes
FV	-	The Field of Vision

PREFACE

American sports fiction of the latter half of twentieth century has witnessed a wide variety of narratives, both in form and conception. A mere thematic reading of the representative novels this thesis has chosen, would be insufficient for a proper understanding of the different discursive tropes and semes they present. Although the novels selected have sport as the basis of its plot, the 'playfulness' of its structure demand the use of certain modern critical theories to analyse them. The post Second World War scenario in America necessitated a reorientation on the part of the writers to grapple with the realm of uncertainty and chance. Mimetic representation of sport would not suffice to comprehend the reality. Sporting fiction, traditionally conceived of as a self-enclosed one, with no outside referentiality is a thing of the past. Baseball, football and even a non-American sport, bullfight, has emerged as vehicles for effecting this reorientation.

The thesis entitled **Playful Fictions and Fictional Players** takes into consideration for a detailed analysis only six representative works from American sports fiction written after 1950s: Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) and Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973) *are baseball novels. Coover's Whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus of the Chicago Bears?* (1987), Don Delillo's *End Zone* (1972) and Frederick Exley's A *Fan's Notes: A Fictional Memoir* (1968) have football as its main plot. Wright Morris's *The Field of Vision* (1956) takes bullfight as its sporting theme.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one, Introduction, gives a detailed overview of American sports fiction and the emergence of a new sub-genre in American literary world. The evolution of the concept of 'play' in various stages of human knowledge is traced. It further examines the dialectical swing between play and sport; game and fiction. Finally, the chapter explains the application of some of the theories used to analyse the six novels. The second chapter makes a detailed introspection of the playfulness of language (*End Zone*) and a play at language and literature (*Universal Baseball Association).* Delillo's narrative effects a coming together of football, language and apocalyptic vision. Roth's narrator-subject indulges in a paranoid fantasy through which he subverts the exploitation of language and plays a series of literary games with his readers.

The third chapter deals with the two novels of Coover: *Universal Baseball Association* and *Gloomy Gus*. Though the narrative technique is different in these two novels, the authors play the narrative game with the text and the reader. The narrative structure in the former gives a *mise-en-abyme* effect to the protagonist's outer and inner worlds. The last chapter of the novel is highly self-conscious and marks the vanishing of the gamewright. The novel brings into play a highly complex 'godgame.' The latter narrative technically and thematically works out the football principles of difference and collision. Two stories run parallel to one another: the present of the narrator and the protagonist, and the protagonist's past. The fourth chapter consists of two novels: Exley's *A Fan's Notes* and Morris's *Field of Vision*. Witnessing or sports spectating is as important an aspect as playing. These two narratives do not have player-participants in it. The

consciousness of the witnesses posits a success-failure antithesis. The reader/spectator bringing a certain competence from outside labours to get a reading on the game and its heroic figures and moments, constructs his own text. The dynamic character of the reading/spectating process is brought to play using the tools of the reader-response theory.

The concluding chapter analyses the findings of the research work and lays bare the major strands of 'play' elements in the novels chosen. Sports narratives make use of different discursive structures to comprehend the complexities of postmodern realities. The metaphoric and metonymic planes of sport and game converge in the creation of narratives that abound in all the play modes: "playing back to," "playing beyond" and "playing between."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE ARENA

Sports literature as a distinctive genre of literature has come of age, at least in the United States of America. Sport as a subject for "serious" treatment in literature has always been a matter of debate. The world still considers sport, or more generally, play as "frivolous" and "useless," as opposed to the "seriousness" and "usefulness" of work. The tendency to dichotomise play/work is pervasive in all cultures, diachronically and synchronically. Play refers to numerous activities; it encompasses all human activities. Just as we play with the unimportant things in life, we play with serious things too. We play at life/death, literature/reality, and we play at play itself. The dialectic of gratuitousness and utility is one of the central issues concerning play.

The etymology of the term, takes us to diverse cosmologies. Perhaps the most ancient concept of play appears in Hindu cosmology. The concept of *lila* can be translated as play. "... (it) is a metaphor of flux, of movement, from which the cosmos emerges and into which it will eventually disappear" (Encyclopedia of Religion). Illusion or *maya* is another Hindu concept which stems from *lila.* In Western cosmology and humanistic thought play always remained in the domain of 'pretense' and the 'non-serious.' During the classical times 'play' was treated as a mode of education, *paideia.* Although the role played by

games and play in a child's growth is universally acknowledged, the counterarguments try to establish that these cultural concepts lose their appeal when they are used for the purpose of education and socialisation. Rawdon Wilson, citing many cultural theorists, argues that play, game and sport are often treated as the "indexes of a culture's well-being" and "it is also possible to judge social institutions, or particular cultures, by the kind and degree of play they permit" (9). Paradoxically, the decline in the range and scope of play and games is synonymous with the growth of civilisation. From the beginning of the modern industrial age, occidental cultures, set apart lesser time for spontaneous play, as does the oriental. With the advancement of cultures, the gratuitousness/utility of games and play has started determining the degree and extent of play on a universal basis.

In modern western philosophy, Friedriech Schiller's "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" (1795) introduced the concept of 'spieltrieb,' the play-impulse. Taking cue from Kant's dialectical positioning of the drive toward the material and the formal in *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (1790), Schiller employs the idea of play or free play to emphasise the importance of the concept to man's self-realisation. Schiller's role in bringing the concept of play to the consciousness of European intellectual community is significant. The centricity that he gave the concept is responsible for 'play' attaining the role as the basis of all aesthetics. In his autobiography *Ecce Homo*

(1888) Nietzsche writes, "I do not know any other way of associating with great tasks than with play" (258). The conceptualisation of the aesthetics of play by Heidegger and Gadamer is also important to the development of contemporary play theory. Gadamer gives primacy to play rather than the playful-activity of the player-subject.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* published in 1952 established the concept of 'language game,' and he surmised that people play different language games. In the *Tractus* he reduced language to elementary propositions. This reduction of all types of language to "an atomistic analysis" paved the way for the current fascination for the "tendency to subject all human activity" (Wilson 12) to small structural units which can be called games. Through his Analytic Philosophy he succeeded in bringing the attention of philosophers to the importance of language. Through the study of the meaning of ordinary words, he showed how a thorough analysis of the "ordinary language" can be made. To eliminate the obscurity thrown out by language, Wittgenstein proposed the examination of language itself, to restore its uninterrupted view.

The French mathematician Émile Borel has written a great deal on games of chance and theories of play. But the invention of mathematical game theory is attributed to John Von Neumann. Though the theory has been formulated from the analysis of certain popular amusements and board games like chess, it is applied in

"serious disciplines." Mathematical game theory is a way of mathematically analysing strategies in a variety of activities and disciplines including sociology, economics, politics, military logistics and warfare. The basic tools are all developed from the analysis of the two-person games, one-person games and zero-sum games. Its specialised terminologies: 'moves,' 'pay-off,' 'perfect and partial information,' 'strategy' etc. are widely applied in the analysis of various human activities. Wilson observes that:

> The invention of game theory ... seem to have alerted (literary) critics to the possibilities of viewing literature as, in itself, a game to be played between an author and a reader ... it is possible ... to see literature as a form of game played, for the stakes of meaning, between author and reader on either a cooperative, mixed motive, or competitive order. (14)

'Playfulness,' 'gamefulness' and the use of 'game-like structures' are inherent properties of any literary work. The author of an imaginative writing and the characters in it are essentially role-players. The author's role playing is the play of the unconscious and it becomes the vehicle for self-expression. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory reduces the surface manifestations of literary works as the end-product of the play of the artist's daydreams and private fantasies.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949) is the most important work toward the establishment of modern play theory. With the publication of this seminal work, the concept of play began to be viewed and reviewed in a serious manner. The anthropological quest of play that he launched opened up new vistas of knowledge on human existence itself. Jacques Ehrmann commenting on the significance of his work writes that:

> Huizinga is in fact the first to have undertaken in a systematic way, to establish certain relationships between various human activities (law, war, poetry, art etc.) which at first glance might appear to have nothing in common. His great merit is specifically to have discovered in the play-element of these activities a common denominator and an important factor of culture. (31)

Huizinga invites our attention to the play of animals and children. Spontaneity is the chief characteristic of all play. Play is instinctive in both human beings and animals and it is much more than a physiological act. Dwelling upon the primordial quality of play, he states: "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing" (1).

Huizinga's pathbreaking investigation into the anthropological and cultural significance of the aesthetics of play has become the springboard for all subsequent theories of play, sport and game. According to him the most important aspect of play is the element of fun. This characteristic feature of all play leads Huizinga to his eventual setting up of the antithesis of play/seriousness. He states: "To our way of thinking, play is the direct opposite of seriousness ... Play is non-seriousness" (5). Though all later play theorists have extensively drawn upon the premises of Huizinga, his antithetical positioning of play and seriousness has been critiqued by many later theorists.

The French sociologist of religion Roger Caillois is the most noteworthy successor of Huizinga in play theory. Critiquing Huizinga for his naive antithesis of "work/play" and "frivolity/seriousness," Caillois broadly classified play into four basic categories in his *Man, Play and Games* (1961): *agon* (competition); *alea* (chance); *mimicry* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo). *Agon* is further divided into *ludus* (controlled play) and *paidia* (spontaneous play). Caillois rectified some of the inaccurate positing of play-concept in Huizinga and extended it. He was also critical of the latter's blurred boundary between the sub-concepts that belong to the sphere of play and the domain of the sacred. A comparative analysis of the ideas enunciated by these two theorists would put things in the right perspective. For Huizinga:

> Play is a voluntary activity or occupation exacted within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that is 'different' from 'ordinary life.' (28)

Jacques Ehrmann quotes Caillois' definition of play verbatim:

> ... The preceding analysis allows us to define play as an activity which is essentially:
>
> 1. free: the player cannot be obliged to participate without robbing play of its nature as alluring and joyful diversion;
>
> 2. separate: it is circumscribed within limits of space and time which are precise and fixed in advance;
>
> 3. uncertain: its course cannot be determined nor its outcome reached in advance, a certain latitude for innovation being left necessary to the initiative of the player;
>
> 4. unproductive: it creates neither goods nor wealth nor new elements of property within the circle of players, it results in a situation identical to that which it began;

> 5. controlled: it is subject to conventions which suspend ordinary laws and introduce temporarily a new body of legislation endowed with exclusive authority;
> 6. fictive: it is accompanied by a specific awareness of a second reality or of straightforward unreality in relation to everyday life. (35)

The ontological phenomenon of play has certain universal elements which can be ascertained from these two theorists: Freedom, joy, tension, separateness, gratuitousness and illusion. Huizinga's and Caillois's inventory of the characteristics of play has provoked responses from numerous philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and literary theorists.

The phenomenologist Eugen Fink is also critical about the work-play antithesis. He feels that it is detrimental to arriving at "the ontological meaning of play" (19). Fink's theory relegates professional play (sport) as perverted and likens unadulterated play to "... an oasis of happiness that we happen upon in the desert of our Tantalus-like seeking and pursuit of happiness" (21). Working against the postulation of Caillois's unproductiveness of play he explicitly states that play is a "creative act" and its "product is the play world, a sphere of illusion" (26). The capacity of human beings to create alternate realities is immense. Through play we create illusions, "the mere

facade," and modern Western thought has always relegated the idea of play to the realm of the culturally "non-serious."

Myths, rituals, festivals and ceremonies are part of all culture and religion. Myth is an essential part of religion; "an imaginary world of living beings" (Huizinga 136), a product of the mental play. For many theologists myth is a fantasy world where we realise our perception of the perfect and the absolute. "Personification" is an important aspect of the creation of myth according to Huizinga, and he further states that this aspect of myth "... is both a play-function and a supremely important habit of mind" (140). The European Carnival in the medieval period did permit 'play' to establish a certain degree of social homogeneity among participants. Harvey Cox's theological inspection of festivity and fantasy laments the loss of the "Feast of Fools" from the annual religious calendar of Europe since the sixteenth century:

> The Feast of Fools had demonstrated that a culture could periodically make sport of its most sacred royal and religious practices. It could imagine, at least once in a while, a wholly different kind of world–one where the last was first, accepted values were inverted, fools became kings, and choirboys were prelates. (3)

The dilution of the spirit of play and the weakening of western civilisation's "capacity for festivity and fantasy" (4) is regrettable according to Cox.

Mikhail Bakhtin incorporates this carnivalesque spirit and the element of play in formulating a system of linguistic and literary analysis. The discourse of 'translinguistics' that Bakhtin brought to the world of modern English criticism and theory, after the translation of his works from Russian to English, has been greatly influential. His key concept, dialogic, identifies polyphony as a special property of the novel. He traces its sources back to the carnivalistic festivals of medieval cultures.

Bakhtin's 'free play' of many voices in a novel can be applied to a great deal, to the many-voiced, open-ended contemporary experimental fiction. Derrida's essays, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966) and "Differance" (1968) are the most important developments in the concept of play in the contemporary age. Language became the subject and object of his play. Meaning as permanently fixed in 'presence' is deconstructed by the free-play of 'absence' or deferral. In *Of Grammatology* he writes that: "... one could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play ... as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence" (50). The application of the Derridean concept of free play in the literary analysis of texts has subsumed all other play concepts in the postmodern context.

Huizinga's theory gives centrality to one characteristic of play, the competitive aspect, the *agon*. Ancient Greek life is marked by a long

series of contests, agonistic activities. The Greeks have linguistically separated contest and play. But Huizinga maintains:

> The agon in Greek life, or the contest anywhere else in the world, bears all the formal characteristics of play, and so to its function belongs almost wholly to the sphere of the festival, which is the play-sphere. It is quite impossible to separate the contest as a cultural function from 'play-festival-rite' ... The conception of a general, all-embracing and logically homogeneous play-concept is ... a rather late invention of language. From very early on, however, sacred and profane contest had taken such an enormous place in Greek social life and gained so momentous a value that people were no longer aware of their play-character. (31)

This linguistic and conceptual differentiation between play and contest is important for a deeper understanding of the modern concepts of game and sport. Huizinga views that it is not merely the Greeks that distinguishes between different kinds of play. The classical Hindu language of Sanskrit too "has "at least four verbal roots for the play-concept: *'Kridati,' 'divyati,' 'vilasa'* and *'lilayati.'"* The Chinese language too has separate words "cheng" and "sai" (Huizinga 31-32). The Latin term *ludus* encompasses the whole field of play without necessarily

distinguishing between contest and play. In Semitic languages too play is used in a very broad sense.

The essential difference between play and game is that the former is not constricted by rules and conventions as the latter. Although the play-sphere is circumscribed by time and space it is essentially a manifestation of human joy and freedom. It has the quality of unboundedness. The boundary between play and game is so thin that there is interplay of the elements of both concepts. Play is a constellating concept which can contain in its giant structure all the elements of game and sport.

When man plays at the serious things in life he is essentially involved in a game. Kostas Axelos elaborates this process:

> Religion wants to play the divine game and includes in its cult, poetry and art create the figures of the world in playing, the political game aims at power ... The games of language call and name beings and things, work reveals the play of forces and will tend to become a kind of game, the games of love catch us in their web and struggle brings opposing forces into play (6).

Ultimately when we play at play, it specifically belongs to the domain of games. These are particular play activities done at leisure and for amusement. Of utmost significance is the child at play. The child plays life games and adopts roles. Freud parallels children's play with

literary composition and daydreaming. The child plays with extreme seriousness his plays or games. His/Her play is a highly imaginative activity, creating his/her own world, expending a large amount of emotion on it the child links the elements of his/her fantasy world to the things in the outside world. For Freud the creative writer involved in the creation of a fantasy world is akin to a child playing a game, arranging and rearranging his imagined objects and situations. Both have the capability to distinguish the imagined world from the real world.

Games can be broadly divided into social and sporting games. Social games are innumerable and vary from one culture to another. Eric Berne's *Games People Play* (1964) is a pioneering work on social games and behavioural play. His transactional game analysis is based on clinical psychology, behavioural science and social relations. The importance of the work lies in the fact that many of human beings' most unconscious acts and moves have been diligently categorised into game structures. Caillois's definition of play/game is also paradigmatic of the various games that the child, the adult and even the animals involve in.

"In Greek mythology and theology, in notable contrast to Christianity the gods themselves played games, chartered the games of human beings and intervened in them as 'co-players'" (Encyclopedia of Religion). In Hindu mythology gods watch over the 'game of war,'

between human beings and demons from heavens. Huizinga states that: "Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game" (89). The war/game analogy is universal and mythic. In ancient civilisations the idea of war and the idea of game seem to have been treated as interrelated. The metaphoric/metonymic substitution of one for the other is pervasive in archaic mind and the analogy still prevails in many cultures. Many of the modern sport allow a limited degree of violence and some even end up in the death of one of the contestants. The gladiatorial combats in ancient Rome as mass spectacles of violent games are bound by rules. Its cultural function at that time is significant. In the Hindu epic *Mahabharatha* the war between the *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* have all the trappings of a game. Thoroughly demarcated by space and time, each day's game of war ended just before the sunset by the blowing of the conch. War, says Huizinga, retains its play-quality "so long as it is waged within a sphere whose members regard each other as equals or antagonists with equal rights" (89). For the same reasons, he dismisses the wars waged by barbarians and heathens which do not come under the purview of law. Modern table-top simulation war games and most importantly video and computer games of simulation, into which rules and regulations are programmed, are played on an equal footing.

Game analogy and play-concept can be extended to literature too. The popular statements such as "The game of literature;" "All

literature is play" and "The game-like structure" (Wilson 85) draw a parallel between literature and games. Games and literature have certain common denominators, just as they differ in many ways. Games and literary texts are self-enclosed and separable from other activities. Both depend on rules and conventions; in games, the rules and regulations are inflexible while the conventions of a literary genre are largely flexible. They have structural complexities and they presuppose a reader/spectator.

The impact of sport on modern American life is virtually inestimable. Baseball, American football, boxing, basketball, tennis, athletics and a number of other sport are avidly watched and followed by a large share of the country's population. A country with a few hundred years of history has developed a sporting history of more than one hundred and fifty years. Organised sport came to existence after the American Civil War. The wave of immigrants from Europe and the establishment of New England colonies brought in new games and fuelled the play-spirit. Fresh ideas of sport along with industrialisation, urbanisation and technological advancement paved the way for the growth of the existing games and for the birth of new ones.

Until games began to be played at an organised level in the mid-nineteenth century, hunting, cockfighting, wrestling, horseracing, running and some ball games engaged those with the play-spirit. Several versions of boxing and wrestling existed in many parts of

America, from a very early time. The winners of physical combats and gambling were richly rewarded with money. Michael Oriard explains the development of mass sport in America:

> Baseball led the way in creating sport for the masses ... First organized by the aristocratic Knickerbocker Base Ball Club in New York in 1845, the game was quickly taken over by the immigrant working class ... as early as 1866, baseball was being termed 'the National Game.' (*Heroes* 3-4)

Until recently baseball was the most popular game in America and by the mid-1970s American football eclipsed the national game in terms of attendance in the stadium and televised viewing.

American football resembles the British rugby and the sport was marred with violence from the very beginning. Oriard opines that boxing is the oldest of all sport in America and the one with a bad reputation. Until the early decades of the twentieth century, the sport "survived illegally" and "the sport had been practiced by men of lower ranks for the amusement of the aristocracy". The fourth major American sport that is represented in American sports fiction is basketball. Oriard records the genesis of the sport in America: "Conceived in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith ... to provide the physical activity 'muscular Christians' required but could not find outdoors during the winter months" (*Heroes* 5). Recently it has emerged as a

major spectacle sport in the country. American sports fiction owes a great deal to these four games. The structural configurations of these games ideally suit a fictional representation. The semiotics of these games and their massive following has been major reasons for the large number of narratives written on them.

Sport has mimetic as well as semiotic dimensions. Many originated out of the structures inherent in certain cultural manifestations. Chess and American football arose out of war. Hunting became the paradigm for many folk games. The presence of a distinct beginning, middle and end facilitate the technicalities of writing fiction. Each sport has climax, drama and tension built into its matrix. The writer of sports fiction has abundance of material in this cultural artefact. The fiction-maker need not venture beyond the realms of the sporting arena for heroic actions, moments and heroic figures. Oriard commenting on the similarities between the structure of sports and fiction observes that:

> Even the division of a novel into chapters can be dictated by the nine innings of a baseball game, the four quarters of a football contest, the ten rounds of a boxing match, or any of a number of other such natural components. Moreover, few activities so combine reality and fantasy in such paradoxical ways as does sport: the realities of hard work, business practice, discipline, and

> failure; and the fantasy dreams of freedom, perpetual youth, and heroism. All sport epitomize American dreams, fears, and obsessions; qualities like rugged individualism, teamwork, striving for the pinnacle of one's profession, self-reliance, fair play, and fear of retirement or failure are as intrinsic to American attitudes towards life as they are to sport. Sport is both a metaphor for American life and an escape from the banality or complexity of life ... Sport thus offers the writer an ideal microcosm for analyzing and criticizing these American characteristics. (*Heroes* 8)

The marginalisation of sport as a subject matter for serious fiction can be attributed to the play/work, frivolity/seriousness antithesis.

Baseball is the sport most suited to the intricacies of writing sports fiction. The cultural weight that the sport carries in American minds is enormous. 'The national game' has a very rich history and "the greatest backlog of memory and a homegrown mythology" (Messenger, *Sport* 315). The mythic connotations of the sport, to the Americans, foster textualisation. The sport connects the country with its rural past. For the urbanised American the lush green ball park vicariously substitutes the pastoral elements missing in his/her life. The baseball seasons parallel the cyclic motion of seasons; the game comes alive in the spring and dies out in fall. The deeper life patterns

of voyage and return of youth and age "is a deeply felt mimetic response" (Messenger, *Sport* 11) in the narrative of the sport.

Baseball's sense of timing is always in the domain of game time. Unlike many other sports it is not played with the clock, but against it. The nine innings of a game can be prolonged to any stretch of time. The temporal dimensions of the game are as interesting as the spatial dimensions. Baseball like cricket "celebrates and even sensationalises the crossing of boundaries" (Viswanathan 25). The inner geometric grid and the baseball diamond are boundaries to be transcended. The beautifully proportioned, geometrically measured grid and diamond with four equidistant bases "contain a journey, perilously begun at 'home' plate, and with a bit of luck, courage, skill and aid, a return 'home' with the object of the quest, the run" (Messenger, *Sport* 316). The journey motif, its affinity to myth and the sociological theme of bonding of generations have provided a rich mosaic for many baseball fiction writers.

With merely the bat and the ball baseball can be played anywhere. Hence, its sociological implications are high. It furthers family relationships, especially between the father and the son. American fathers imparting baseball lessons to their sons are a recurrent theme in fiction and movies. The game's numerology, statistics and records are important factors for the creation of a great deal of "backlog of memory." The heroic acts of the past are readily present in the mind of

an avid fan, in the form of runs scored, homeruns, averages of the batter and many such memorable details. Every baseball game enables the spectator to play numerical mental games before and after game-time. The historical references to the game and the tremendous scope the game allows for a detailed referentiality particularly conform to the creation of the narratives. Baseball creates books and books in turn create alternate baseball games. Messenger notes that: "'Creating the field' is expressly linked to 'creating the book' in many baseball novels" (*Sport* 320). Makeshift baseball games on table top (Coover) and magic ball field (W.P. Kinsella) are the narratives cited by Messenger.

American football has no "homegrown mythology," numerous referentialities to records and statistics or any deep-set mythic connotations. "Football in America was a folk game" (Oriard, *Football* 277). It was initially a campus game much below baseball in popularity. Professional football's popularity since the 1960s has surpassed baseball. The impetus was provided by television. Print media had always backed sport but the sport grew into enormous proportions in the sixties. Apart from television, the socio-political conditions of the decade necessitated a sport associated with violence and the metaphor of war. Melvin Palmer's comment about the sudden spurt in the popularity of the game and the narratives it has produced during this period is interesting:

> From 1968 to 1972 ... (the) five-year period saw the publication of six novels which took football players as central characters or the football game as central metaphor ... In 1968 in America the old verities were fast disappearing and new rituals were being created. Because baseball could no longer carry the burden of time, America needed a new sports myth ... Football became the new myth, at least for a while and this fact is reflected in sports fiction. (48-49)

The nostalgic vision of baseball became highly inappropriate for a country battered by wars, racial unrest and assassinations. The organised violence that football symbolised amply substituted the no-contact game of baseball.

Football's spatial and temporal metaphors are entirely different from that of baseball. The game is played with the clock and allows only brief interludes in the division of the game-time into four quarters. Players traverse the football field in a linear progression often coming back in the same manner. "The dominant mode is repetition" (Messenger, *Sport* 259). Imperialistic connotations and war metaphor: "acquisition and defense of territory" (*Sport* 258) abound in the structural configuration of the sport. The players endlessly traverse from the scrimmage line to the end zone.

The metaphor of war in literature applies only to football and chess. Football unarguably is a violent game with head-on collisions, injuries and even death. Chess imitates war strategies more precisely: capturing of the king, defence and offence. The game obliterates a complete kingdom in a silent manner. The most violent popular American sport is boxing. Boxing is an individual sport and its metaphoric associations are with fight—on a one-to-one basis. Fight denotes individual clash as well as group combat. A boxing match in sports parlance is usually referred to as a fight. Joyce Carol Oates says that: "Each boxing match is a story—a unique and highly condensed drama without words" (8). The sport is just a matter of life and death for the writers as well as the spectators. American fiction has a number of boxing novels to its credit but the narratives do not conform to a structural framework.

Among the major American sports, basketball produced the least number of narratives. The sport cannot boast of any persistent myth. It does not possess any historical referentiality or cult heroes—the legendary anecdotes of heroic exploits on the field which pass on from one generation to another. Recently the sport has given Americans a few national heroes and in popularity rates they have surpassed baseball and football heroes. Contemporary American basketball stars have international reputation unlike the stars of the other two

American team sports. The game lacks any sustained metaphoric associations and hence it little appeals to fiction writers.

Messenger's opinion on the difficulties of textualistion of the sport would throw more light on the matter:

> Basketball is a difficult sport to write about for the sports reporter or the fiction writer. Basketball possesses too many adagio plays and too few real climaxes. Rather than building in a pattern of plays and strategy, it provides continual flow, frustrating to the writer who would pace the development of character and plot with competition, victories and defeats. Basketball does not possess language in any form. (*Sport* 388)

John Updike's *Rabbit* trilogy, Lawrence Shainberg's *One on One (1972)* and Barry Beckam's *Double Dunk* (1980) are a few well known fictions of the sport.

In modern America, organised sport has become a big business. Keeping this aspect apart, the baseball championships and the football championships sans spectators would lose much of its aesthetic splendour. One of the most well known popular cultural theoreticians Russel B. Nye writes that: "When half the American population watches bowl games over the New Year's holidays, something is happening that ought to be reckoned with" (101). His reference is to the super bowl championship of American football. If the statement

were to be extended to a universal level, it is common knowledge that much more than half the population of the world watches world cup football (soccer in America) and the Olympic Games.

The importance of sport in contemporary culture is undeniable. The concept of 'play' has undergone various evolutionary stages on the epistemological levels of anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology. Every nation has its own sporting ethos, heroes and divergent ways of representing it in myth, literature and films. Sports' spectating as a sociological phenomenon still continues to baffle the theoreticians and serious thinkers on popular culture. Sport, easily the largest single activity in modern life, is the greatest cultural phenomenon of our times.

The bulk of American sports literature comprises of sports fiction; in terms of quantity and quality. Although a large number of poems, short stories, plays and journalistic pieces have been written over a period of hundred years, sports fiction merits special attention. The literary scenario in America has of late, recognised American sports fiction as a sub-genre of its literature. Of the hundreds of writers who have written sports novels, the most prominent ones are: Ring Lardner, Jack London, Bernard Malamud, Robert Coover, Wright Morris, Philip Roth, Mark Harris, Joyce Carol Oates and Don Delillo. But the number of major American writers who have appropriated sport, sporting

metaphors or sporting characters in their novels in a minor/major way is considerable and impressive.

Gilbert Patten, who wrote, under the pseudonym "Burt L. Standish," is often regarded as the father of American sports Fiction. For sixteen years he published a Frank or Dick Merriwell story every week in Street and Smith's *Tip Top Weekly* (1896-1912). Frank Norris and Richard Harding Davis are writers of the last decade of the nineteenth century who have sports as a theme and metaphor in their novels. Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire* (1932) and Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Granty* (1927) have player-heroes in their novels. F. Scott Fitzgerald has a number of sporting heroes in his works. Thomas Wolfe has a baseball playing protagonist, Nebraska Crane, in *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940) and *The Web and the Rock* (1939). James T. Farrel has a number of baseball scenes in his fiction.

One of the most prominent twentieth century writers, Ernest Hemingway, was fascinated with the rules and technical aspects of bullfight, boxing and American football. Christian K. Messenger comments that: "He wrote about all sport that actively engaged him and criticized roundly that sport which he felt to be less than true" (*Sport* 237). Hemingway's conception of sport and sporting heroes is entirely different from that of other American authors. He shuns "the collective sports heroism" most visible in corporatised American sports spectacle. Hemingway elevated the sportsman to a code hero through

his short stories and novels. Man as a competitor pitted against an alien nature or beast in exotic lands is his major motif in literature concerning sport. An astute spectator and great scholar of the aesthetics of sports, Hemingway took great interest in such elemental and primordial sport as fishing and hunting.

The *Sun Also Rises* (1927) has as its central character, the ex-athlete, Robert Cohan. Hemingway excelled in portraying individuals in ritualistic sport:

> The Ritual Sports Hero in American Fiction had been a well-tested figure from Cooper's Natty Bumppo down through Hemingway's classic bullfighters and fishermen to Faulkner's Ike McCalin. The Ritual Sports Hero had always been a solitary figure coming to learn what he was capable of in a primal arena. (Messenger, *Play* 239)

At the heart of the novel are bullfight and its spectating in the backdrop of the festival of San Fermin. *Death in the Afternoon* (1931) is a long scholarly treatise on the symbolism of bullfight. Through his narrative on the sport he brings out the structural differences of formal, amateur and ritualistic versions of bullfight. Santiago's veneration of Joe DiMaggio in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and the boxing hero, Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) are the other Hemingway characters playing at sport.

William Faulkner has *The Hamlet* (1940) and *A Fable* (1954) to his credit, as representatives of the sub-genre. He created football players in two of his novels and has a baseball game as one of its *Sanctuary* (1931) central events. Robert Penn Warren in *All the King's Men* (1946) and William Styron in *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) make use of football scenes in these novels. *From Here to Eternity* (1951) written by James Jones has Prewitt, the boxer as its hero. Jack London used boxing hero and theme in such works as *The Game* (1905) and *The Abysmal Brute* (1913). John Updike's *Rabbit* trilogy has a basketball player as its hero; his other novels *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday (1954)* also make the play and game aspect very obvious.

Robert Detweiler's study on sporting metaphors and themes in American fiction is extremely useful in categorising the various types of 'sports fiction' and 'playful fiction.' He discursively examines almost sixty novels and short story collections published since 1965 and place them in three paradigms:

> The first of these is what I would call playful or whimsical fiction, writing that is based on exuberance and exaggeration, that appears spontaneous and casually composed (even though it is not), that is usually funny, and that does not portray a particular game, or play a game with the reader ... A second category is the fiction in which particular games are

> portrayed and indeed usually form the foundation of plot, characterization, or imagery. Very often these games are sports; sports, in fact, are so central in recent American fiction that I shall consider them as a separate aspect of the second category ... A third category is the fiction in which or through which the author plays a game with the reader, either by presenting the story in some cryptic form as a puzzle to be solved or as an inside joke in which the reader understands that he is asked to share in the fun of a *roman a clef* or a similar combination of history and fantasy or a revision of an older narrative. (48-49)

In the first type the examples cited are Richard Brautigans novels and some novels of Donald Bartheleme. To the second category falls the majority of the sports fiction and the examples quoted are Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association* (1968) and Joyce Carol Oates' *With Shuddering Fall* (1964). To the third paradigm belongs such works as Susan Sontag's *Death Kit* (1967) and Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962).

The thesis takes into consideration only the second category of 'playful fictions' in which sports play a dominant role or the major character, or characters' lives dominated by sports, or fiction in which the sport milieu is the dominant setting. 'Playful fiction' is an

ambiguous phrase, and it constitutes of the central concept of sports literature namely 'play.' All fiction is essentially playful, creating illusory worlds out of one's imagination and language. The game/text analogy have sprung from the basic assumption that like sports and games "literary texts are self-enclosed, separable from other activities, possess their identifiable text-specific assumptions ... and are, or seem to be, autotelic ..." (Wilson 85). In the analysis of literary texts, even in the most straightforward of fiction, the different levels of play are obvious; in the first place the author seems to be playing, at the second level the text as engaged in a play and at a higher level the interplay between the authors and the reader.

Games are rulebound and, rules and conventions have structured fiction, until the arrival of postmodern fiction and the poststructuralist notion of 'free play.' Detweiler's definition of playful fictions can be appropriated for a detailed discussion of the concept of play and games vis-à-vis literature. He explains:

> Playful fiction ... (is) an artistic self-consciousness whereby the writer, already intensely aware of the illusory nature and potential of the novel and story, manipulates the components of narrative to show the reader their artificiality. He constantly reminds himself and his readers of the pretense nature of the story, and

> thereby creates a secondary game in the already given context of play-fulness characteristic of all fiction. (51)

'Playful fiction' encompasses in its rubric both the fictional representation of sport or game and "fiction as game." All fiction partakes of the *agon*, the contest. The Hindu epic-narrative of *Mahabharatha* has the game of *chaturanga* as the central event which determines the destiny of the protagonists. *Chaturanga* as played in the narrative combines elements of the games of 'chance,' games of 'strategy' and games of 'skill' This ancient Indian game was "a four-handed dicing game" which later transformed into a modern European version of a "two-handed game of pure choice and skill" (Wimsatt 69). The depiction of the rules of the game as determining the course of the narrative in *Mahabharatha* and the use of 'game situation' in it is the oldest instance of using 'play' and 'game' in literature.

The present study has six American sports narratives written after the 1950s. Don Delillo's *End Zone* (1972); Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973); Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) and *Whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus of the Chicago Bears?* (1987); Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes: A Fictional Memoir (1968);* and Wright Morris's *The Field of Vision* (1956).

Delillo's fictional output has an amazing range of subject matter: "football, rock music, film, terrorism, espionage, pure mathematics,

technology" (*CN* 237). *End Zone* is his only sports fiction, but games are an important feature in all his works. In an interview to Tom LeClair he says: "Games provide a frame in which we can try to be perfect. Within sixty minute limits, or one hundred yard limits or the limits of a game board, we can look for perfect moments or perfect structures" (81). All of his novels are powerful evocations of contemporary realities and they are characterised by a satiric tone. In his novels black humour and apocalyptic vision are rendered in a jargonistic language. Though possessed with vivid descriptive powers, Delillo shuns "conventionally structured plots" and embraces "episodic narration and disjointed dialogue" (*CLC* 78).

End Zone emerged out of the turmoil of the American sixties. Its apocalyptic vision is fostered by the contemporary fear of an imminent nuclear war, viewed from the backdrop of Cold War. Football metaphor of violence and war is delineated in pure jargonese. Language is at the core of the narrative. "What writing means to me is trying to make interesting, clear, beautiful language" (LeClair 82). In football language the relationship between the signifier-signified is intact. Football is a sport initiated by language—the play names called by the coach and the quarter back's signals signify only one single play move for the entire time. Polyphony of voices results in the discordance of the team. There is neither 'difference' nor 'deferral' of meaning. In this sense the narrative validates logocentrism and affirms faith in the fixity of

meanings. The protagonist is a student-player of 'Logos' College. In *End Zone* corruption of language is represented by the protagonist's fascination for nuclear war. Extending the linguistic theme, using the metaphor of the subject matter, part of the narrative is composed of the discourse of nuclear war. "It is as if the book were an attempt to compile a last repository of a lost language and simplicity of life" (*CA* 121). The hero of the narrative resigns to ascetic simplicity. In keeping with the avant-garde style of contemporary fiction, the novel ends where it began without any linear progression of the plot or character development.

Philip Roth's novels are generally seen as experimental fiction and lay a lot of emphasis on humour and its cathartic function. Mixing the serious and the comic is the dominant mode of the majority of his writings. Commenting on his style he said, "Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness are my closest friends" (Roth, Interview 410). He excels in creating a blurred boundary between the imaginary and the real. Roth, like Delillo, is acutely aware of the disparate range of American realities. His early novels are set against the backdrop of Jewish family life. He has often offended the sensibilities of the refined reader by thematically rendering pornography and erotic fixations. His baseball novel is also not free from the flouting of taboo subjects. What marks Roth's fictional world is his flair for the language and the linguistic and literary experiments that he displays.

The Great American Novel is a baseball novel about the possibilities of language and the variety of 'literary games' authors can play in a single narrative. Through an extended parody of American institutions and the rhetoric of delusions, Roth weaves the baseball story of a now defunct League and its players. Language structures the fabula of the novel. The writer-narrator's language prowess is at display. Though the fabula is set in the Second World War, the background of narration is the "demythologizing decade of the sixties" (Interview 84). The novel parodies the American infatuation for mythologisation. A wide array of contemporary realities is exposed to burlesque using every literary device available for a writer. Peter Hutchinson calls this 'playfulness' with language and literature, "Games Authors Play." From self-consciousness to slapstick humour, Roth employs every conceivable 'literary game.' Through alliteration the protagonist exploits the linguistic potentials. The narrative swings between the "self-indulgence" of the play of language and "the more disciplined format of 'game'" (Hutchinson 19) through literature.

Robert Coover is a contemporary postmodern writer who believes that traditional narrative modes are highly insufficient even when dealing with baseball and football. He is one of those writers who have turned away from what Erich Auerbach termed mimetic fiction and has come to rely on new forms of fictional representations of reality. In his works the line that separate fantasy and reality is very narrow. "By

parodying popular and traditional forms of narrative and by subverting myths, Coover attempts to alert his audience to significant new literary patterns" (*CLC* 22). His constant reference points are myths, archetypes, theology and cosmology. Game metaphors recur in his narratives. Coover reflecting on the widespread use of game motifs in his fiction says:

> We live in a skeptical age in which games are increasingly important. When life has no ontological meaning, it becomes a kind of game itself. Thus it's a metaphor for a perception of the way the world works, and also something that almost everybody's doing—if not on the playing fields, then in politics or business or education ... And formal games reflect on the hidden games, more so in an age without a Final Arbiter. So it's an important metaphor to be explained. (LeClair, Interview 72)

The formal games he adopts as subject matter are baseball in *The Universal Baseball Association* and football in *whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus*.

The former novel is as much about baseball as it is about narrative experiment. The narrative is often thought of as a discourse on the creation of a text. The creator of the fantasy world of table-top baseball writes a whole history of an imaginary league. Only the

omnipotent author knows which of his protagonist's world is real: the baseball world of the Association or the reality of his life. The two worlds merge completely in the narrative. The game world often becomes his primary reality. The protagonist mourns when the most favourite player of his association dies by a quirk of fate or chance, in the dice game of baseball. But he is unaffected when he loses his job, the only means of sustenance in the primary world. To add to the complexity of the novel, the creator of the Association vanishes in the last chapter. Coover's baseball text operates at several narrative levels. At the level of the author primarily, at the level of the inner and outer world of the chief character, at the level of the players in the Association and finally a highly self-conscious level of narration is worked out through the eighth chapter. The chronology of narration is not disrupted until the final chapter, which as a frame tale; stand out from the rest of the narrative. The open-ended novel ends in a frozen frame, as the player-characters go out to enact the "Parable of the Duel." The eight chapters of the novel parallel the nine innings of a baseball game. The ninth chapter/inning is expected to be completed/played out by the reader/spectator. Coover creates a "writerly text" out of his baseball narrative. John Fowles' notion of a 'godgame' is also a significant feature of the text. The multiple levels of 'play' evoked in the text, "contrived bamboozlement" by the author and the subject's struggle within a "complex cognitive trap" all point to the

complex ways in which playfulness and gamefulness coexist in the text.

Football aesthetics and aesthetics of art (sculpting) form the main referents of Coover's second novel taken up in this study. Coover's 1975 novella was expanded and published as a novel in 1987. The sculptor-narrator of the narrative, Meyer, is considered as "an artistic counterpart to J. Henry Waugh" (Messenger, *Sport* 295). In an endless narrative play between the past and the present life of the football-playing protagonist Gloomy Gus, Coover adopts the football principles of 'repetition' and 'collision' and draws out its aesthetics. Gus, though a celebrated professional football player knows nothing of the play-spirit. His play is bereft of any fun, joy or creativity. Coover delineates his central character as an automaton, who is completely "metaphor free" and lacking in imagination.

Coover's innovative fiction-making process in the two narratives adopts some of the techniques of the contemporary experimental writers: The breakdown of linearity of narrative for multiple renderings of time, place and character; episodic narration of the events of the plot and the characters' lives. He adopts different narrative strategies in the two novels selected. The baseball novel has the author as narrator; the football novel is narrated by one of the chief characters in it.

Coover like other postmodern authors use these techniques as a means by which he can create alternate worlds and new patterns of

human experience. Lois Gordon's comment on Coover's fiction and characterisation is noteworthy, especially with regard to the two novels the present study has chosen:

> Coover's eye is always upon human neediness, upon man's yearning for significance in both concrete and metaphysical terms. Throughout, his protagonists face eternal predicaments: how to deal with the need for power, control, significance, and immortality within the realities of personal and human limitation (time and fate) and how to deal with personal failure, sexual longings, and the wish for control over chance and mortality. (8)

Coover ends his football narrative with the question "Why are We Playing?"

Even the most sceptical student of culture would not be able to dismiss sports as an 'obsession' or sheer waste of time. In a country where more people actively take part (spectating) in the Super Bowl Championship game than the presidential election, one cannot overlook the cultural artefact that is 'sports.' Sport spectatorship has undergone vast changes over the years. The power that "sport spectacular" (Greenway 55) exerts over millions of fans and followers have baffled cultural theorists. In America the tradition of sports spectating came into existence with the establishment of baseball in

the late nineteenth century as the national pastime. Studies on the demographic profile of sports spectators have revealed that crowds are predominantly male and urban. The general classifications of gender, age, race and social standing differ from sport to sport. Participation in sports is often talked of in terms of active and passive participation. To actively participate is to be a player which only a few can become in professional sport, while passive participation is done through spectating: in person and on electronic media. The thesis takes into consideration two American novels that treat the theme of the aesthetics of spectating: Exley's Protagonist is a football fan and Morris's characters watch bullfight in a Mexican arena.

Football is a quintessential American sport and is the most watched sport in the country. Football's appeal depends to a large degree on "spectacle." Frederick Jameson identifies 'spectacle' as a key to understanding contemporary mass culture. Michael Oriard's comment on the spectacle offered by football as opposed to other cultural forms of mass spectacle is important:

> But behind the spectacle of football, real persons are performing real acts. One could overstate this authenticity as easily as ignore it, but football is grounded in a reality, absent from the popular romance or adventure plot. Those who describe professional football players as "entertainers"—a familiar

> claim—ignore the fact that their injuries are real, their careers short, their livelihoods at stake when they play. (*Football* 9)

The tragedy of the 'players' in a bullfight arena is even more so. Although not an American sport, bullfight's representation in an American novel with American characters have helped Morris's narrative to be considered as an American Sports fiction. The violence of the sport is part of the ritual that is performed in front of the spectators, and is not a metaphor for any outside reality.

A Fan's Notes is the first book of Exley's "fictional autobiographical trilogy" (*CLC* 186). The novel combines autobiographical materials and fictional elements. Peter Bailey calls the work "the novel-as-autobiography" (79) and he further states that "the novel bears the author's name for the protagonist and depicts himself in a "deliberately simplified, artfully crafted" (80) manner. The study examines the narrative from the vantage point of the spectator-fan. The protagonist is Exley himself. The narrative revolves around the central character's desire for fame. The success-failure antithesis worked out in the novel is marked by the loneliness of Exley, who indulges in fantasising and drinking. Heavy drinking and fantasy are his two chief means of escapist modes and further act as a consolation for his famelessness. In his wild fantasies he becomes the owner of the New York Giants (has pretty women swooning at his feet); a British

colonist in Rhodesia and on another occasion he turns a TV soap opera into a pornographic romp filled with all the latest perversions. Exley, according to himself, knows pretty well the difference between fact and fantasy. His occasional bout of mental instability is the reason attributed for such outlandish fantasies. In the narrative he remarks: "I was never incapacitated by fantasy ... I had incapacitated myself; the fantasy had followed to consume the endlessly idle hours" (*FN* 80). Toward the end of the narrative his only hope of becoming famous lies in writing. Unable to produce the "Big Book" he remains a 'fameless fan.'

Wright Morris is one of the most underrated post World War II American fiction writers. The amazing range and variety of his sheer bulk of writing (novels, short stories, photo-text books, several volumes of essays and criticism) has failed to command a general attention. His novels are often a return to his nostalgic Nebraskan childhood. Willa Cather, before him, had captured the mystery of Nebraskan plains in her works. Morris, initially a photographer, has experimented and skilfully combined the techniques of photography and fiction writing in many of his works. Photographic images, vision and sight are important elements in his works. In his critical work, *The Territory Ahead*, he states that American fiction has been dominated with the notion that "raw material" of experience is more important than the technique of rendering it. He is a writer who experiments with the

technique of novel writing and lays a lot of emphasis on the past of his characters for attaining self-knowledge and a consequent transformation.

The Field of Vision is considered to be his greatest literary achievement. The narrative makes an examination and re-examination of the past of its characters, from the vantage point of the sights and visions offered by a bullfight arena, with a view to "... imaginatively recreate the past, transforming it into the living present" (Waterman 35). Transformation is man's ability to discover his own nature. Only Gordon Boyd, the hero of the narrative is able to break free from the prison of the past and come through to heroic action and transformation. The fragmentary structure of the novel contains the thoughts and actions of one of the narrators as he/she watches the action in the arena. The character-spectators engaged in watching the bullfight create several 'texts' of bullfight in their mind.

All narratives raise the issue of reception and reading is an activity that presupposes a text, a set of visually presented linguistic symbols from which meaning can be ascertained. Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* and Wright Morris's *The Field of Vision* are novels in which the characters create 'writerly texts' out of the sport they watch. The codes of meaning thrown up by the narrative discourse of football and bullfight lead the characters to read it along with their past experiences, present condition and their aspirations.

The achievement of the six texts analysed in the study from the point of view of the techniques employed and the themes they deal with emphasise the importance of 'Sport' as a serious American popular culture. From the status of a mere 'Academic step-child' it has grown into a sub-genre to be taken note of.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAY AT LANGUAGE

Don Delillo's *End Zone* effects a metaphoric convergence of football, nuclear war and language. The first-person narrator, Gary Harkness-as-football-player, perceives danger in traditional language, which he considers dead. Logos College, where he plays football, is located in West Texas, "in the middle of nowhere" (*EZ* 30). Their Coach Emmet Creed's word is the controlling principle of the little world inhabited by the players of his team.

"Not content merely to use language as a means of communication ... (the narrative) turns to examine language as a subject in itself ..." (Keesey 34). The narrator-player Harkness doubles up as a philosopher of language. He explains why football is a perfect example of the power of language to control action as it feeds the reader/spectator's "benign illusion" that order is possible. Football "... is the one sport guided by language, by the word signal, the snap number, the color code, the play name" (*EZ* 112). Even the silence which envelops the college, which is surrounded by desert, becomes a disturbing noise to Harkness. The founder of Logos, Tom Wade, "... built it out of nothing. He had an idea and followed it through to the end. He believed in reason. He was a man of reason. He cherished the very word" (*EZ* 7). Now dead, the college is controlled by Mrs. Tom

Wade through Coach Creed, a man "famous for creating order out of chaos" (*EZ* 10).

"To instill a sense of unity" (*EZ* 9) he fences off the practice field and builds a watchtower from which he controls action. He controls action largely by "naming the plays," a very important aspect of every football match, and an activity, Harkness believes, gives Creed his ultimate power. He was also "the name-giver," the one who changed the team's name "from the Cactus Wrens to the Screaming Eagles" (*EZ* 10).

Creed is a despotic coach who craves for absolute command over the players. He lost his previous job for breaking the jaw of a player who disagreed with him. He is unmindful of the physical pain and mental torture that he inflicts on the players, as when he argues that "the players accept pain. There's a sense of order even at the end of a running play with bodies strewn everywhere" (*EZ* 199).

Creed is not just a football guru for the players; his 'credo' is followed and recited with almost religious devotion. The skilful manipulation of the language is no more better displayed than in Creed's saying about football that "It's only a game but it's the only game" (*EZ* 129).

> Behind Creed's profession of fatherly concern for his players and behind his seeming acknowledgement of a world outside football—it's only a game; don't take it

> seriously; there are more important things to life—lies his real belief: winning is everything. In the player's minds Creed's words take on a life of their own, defining the world as one of do-or-die bravery, of suicidal self-sacrifice out of loyalty to the team and its coach. (Keesey 35)

Bobby Luke is one of the players who faithfully heeds to Creed's call for the display of violent extremes of loyalty and self-sacrifice. "He was famous for saying he would go through a brick wall for Coach Creed" (*EZ* 53). Bobby was a man of few words and shy too. Repeating these words enabled him to feel at one with his team and it lulled him into an illusion of comfort. "Maybe he had heard others use it and thought it was a remark demanded by history, a way of affirming the meaning of one's struggle" (*EZ* 53-54).

American football is the technological sport par excellence. It has all the trappings of a simulated war. Strict authoritarianism, which is built into the matrix of all war narratives, is an essential ingredient of football too. Territorial aggrandizement is the key to victory in a football match. A slight 'let up' would result in the loss of annexed territory and the dispossession of the ball.

Trite expressions of fighting spirit and devotion to leaders are languages familiar not just to warfare but to football also. Words create the difference between friend and foe. The mindless repetition of the

language of negative epithets which the other team as an enemy to be beaten sets the scene for violence. The players, bent over along the line of scrimmage, are organised for violence; when the name of the play is called, that perfect lineup becomes bodies strewn across the field in painfully undignified postures. As Keesey observes "Following each play as its name is called, the team members rely on the language of football, to give them an order and direction their lives would otherwise lack. But this impression of dignified ceremony and perfect control is a terrible deception" (36).

The language of football, supposed to provide defining moments and meaningful action on the field, turns out to be a series of orders that the men are conditioned to obey. "Words move the body into position. In time the position itself dictates events" (*EZ* 45). Players line up facing the opposing team, with the vision of perfect structures and aesthetic movements that exhibit their potential for spectacle. But this position is one of aggression and completion which will eventuate in violence and meaningless destruction. This mindless destruction accentuated by the clichéd expressions of do-or-die bravery had been repeated by men before and will continue to be repeated even after the present destruction. "The words were old and true, full of reassurance, comfort, and consolation. Men followed such words to their death because other men before them had done the same, and perhaps

it was easier to die than admit that words could lose their meaning" (*EZ* 54).

Coach Creed, master plotter is an obsessive ascetic, "a land locked Ahab, who paced and raged, who was unfolding his life toward a single moment" who demands that his players lead "a simple life" (*EZ* 54). Harkness responds to these exhortations of self-discipline because they resonate with his desire for self-annihilation, and because they remind him of his own father, who had put a sign in his room:

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

THE TOUGH GETS GOING. (*EZ* 17)

From ages fourteen to seventeen he repeatedly looked at this sign and began to perceive a certain beauty in it. "The sentiment of course had small appeal but it seemed that beauty flew from the words themselves, the letters, consonants swallowing vowels, aggression and tenderness, a semi-self-recreation from line to line, word to word, letter to letter" (*EZ* 17). Personifying vowels and letters, Harkness imagines them as consuming emotional creatures. But this courtship with words and languages did not last long: "All meaning faded. The words became pictures. It was a sinister thing to discover at such an age that words can escape their meanings" (*EZ* 17).

Coach Creed "narrows experience into a linear narrative with the goal line at the end" (Osteen 145). The words of both Creed and Gary's father "hark back", as another character puts it, to ancient ways, they

represent those primal origins to which the ascetic wishes to return. Creed's verbal instructions are an authoritative discourse, which demands "unconditional allegiance" so that "when coach says hit, we hit" (*EZ* 35). This discourse is univocal, direct: it is the Logos, the Word of God. No player is allowed to be undisciplined or deviate from the team strategy. Creativity and individual brilliance must be confined to the dictates of the creator. "The football team thus operates according to the principle of indistinguishability ... and the coach's goal is to turn the team into goal-bound ascetics like himself" (Osteen 146).

Later, after the season ends with a loss to the Centrex team and when the team unity starts disintegrating Creed makes Gary the co-captain of the team. He tells him that, "football is a complex of systems. It's like no other sport. When the game is played properly, it's an interlocking of a number of systems ... When the systems interlock, there's a satisfaction to the game that can't be duplicated. There's a harmony" (*EZ* 199). He further stresses on the need for self-sacrifice and extreme asceticism which borders on self-annihilation:

> Our inner life is falling apart. We're losing control of things. We need more self-sacrifice, more discipline. Our inner life is crumbling. We need to renounce everything that turns us from the knowledge of ourselves. We're getting too far away from our own beginnings. We are roaming all over the landscape. We need to build

> ourselves mentally and spiritually ... I lived in an inner world of determination and silence. Mental resolve. It made me strong; it prepared me. Things return to their beginnings. It's been a long circle from there to here. But all the lessons hold true. The inner life must be disciplined just as the hand or eye. Loneliness is strength ... Fasting and solitude. If you can survive loneliness, you've got an inner strength that can take you anywhere ... I don't think there's anything makes more sense than self-denial. It's the only way to attain moral perfection ... A brave nation needs discipline. Purify the will. Learn humility. Restrict the sense life. Pain is part of the harmony of nervous system. (*EZ* 200-201)

Taft Robinson, the black running back introduced in the very beginning of the narrative, also falls for Creed's advertisement on self-denial, loneliness, moral perfection etc. Such asceticism says Osteen "... is only a step away from fascism, from 'final solutions' that resolve problems through mass atrocity" (146). Thus Creed's prize player-turned-ascetic gains a mixture of pleasure and horror in reading about "atrocities" and about "... the ovens, the showers, the experiments, the teeth, the lampshades, the soap" (*EZ* 240). In a similar way Gary becomes obsessed with the other final solution: nuclear war. He says "I

like to read about mass destruction and suffering ... thermonuclear war ... horrible diseases, fires raging in the inner cities, crop failures, genetic chaos, temperatures soaring and dropping, panic, looting, suicides, scorched bodies, arms torn off, millions dead" (*EZ* 240).

In the beginning when he played football, Gary was like Bobby Luke, ready to go to any extent to display his loyalty to the team and Creed. He believed in Creed's words that pain would make him stronger. "There was even pleasure in the daily punishment on the field. I felt that I was better for it, reduced in complexity, a warrior" (*EZ* 31). His failures in the football field were a thing of the past, which he would like to overcome with success at Logos by winning the big game. But the team's terrible defeat disappoints him and the rebel in Gary comes out in full defiance. Conformity to rules and restrictions became a thing of the past and he withdraws from the world of male competition that he represented. The asceticism that he observes, confines him to his room where he starves himself, nearly removes himself from the world altogether. "Despite his gesture of defiance Harkness has simply taken his coach's creed of strength through self-punishment to a further extreme" (Keesey 44).

The streak of 'fanatical monk' in Gary made him believe that his was an act of flagrant violation of Creed's orders. Harkness takes up issue with the Coach on the concept of 'oneness.' Creed stressed on the team unity and emphasised individual self-sacrifice. Gary's contention

was that "It was a good concept, oneness, but I suggested that, to me at least, it could not be truly attractive unless it meant oneness with God or the universe or some equally redoubtable super-phenomenon. What he meant by oneness was in fact elevenness or twenty-twoness" (*EZ* 19). But Gary's method of seeking oneness was suicidal. The transcendental unity that he sought was the other extreme and self-destructive.

Gary's terminal desires are manifested more directly in his fixation with nuclear holocaust. Air Force ROTC Commander Major Staley was a teacher at Logos College who offered a course in 'Aspects of Modern Warfare.' In his class, Gary was the best student who had "read everything the school library had to offer on aspects of modern war" (*EZ* 156) and he asked the most penetrating questions. The Major tries to persuade Gary to join the cadet wing as a stepping stone to a career in the Air Force which "... is the most self-actualizing branch of the military" (*EZ* 157). Despite his refusal to join the Air Force ROTC, Gary's mind seems to be filled with images of death and destruction "I liked dwelling on the destruction of great cities ... pleasure in the contemplation of millions dying and dead. I became fascinated by words and phrases like thermal hurricane, overkill, circular error probability ... stark deterrence, dose-rate contours, kill-ratio, spasm war. Pleasure in these words" (*EZ* 20-21). He often reflects on the subject in his circular walks into the desert and back.

He discusses his morbid fascination, at length with the Major, in the desert motel where the Major lives. Staley starts off his long monologue on nuclear warfare by dwelling upon the rhetoric of nuclear ideology. "There's a kind of theology at work here. The bombs are a kind of God. As his power grows, our fear naturally increases" (*EZ* 80). The modern society's attraction and fear of the nuclear bomb verges on the realm of religious feeling. Osteen observes that "Ira Chernus has recently analyzed this nuclear theology, making a convincing case that our cultural fascination with nuclear weapons derives from a distortion of religious impulses" (Osteen 147).

The signs of imminent chaos everywhere accounts for the apocalyptic vision of Gary's narrative. One of Gary's teammates is taking a course on "the untellable," nuclear war is often referred to as "the unthinkable." The narrative implies a relationship between the two, in both linguistic and theological senses. The nuclear jargon employed by nuclear strategists and scientists acquire meaning and significance only within the parameters of their game theories. The language used by people like Staley, appear far removed from reality. In telling the unthinkable, they close the gap between reality and vision. The strategists who take part in such a language game are insulated from the disaster and they indulge in the game because they are walled off from its realities. He complains to Major Staley that "... there's no way to express thirty million dead. No words. So certain

men are recruited to reinvent the language. (The words) don't explain, they don't clarify, they don't express. They're painkillers. Everything becomes abstract" (*EZ* 85). Here the nuclear holocaust engenders a metaphysics not of presence, but of absence. Like nuclear strategy itself, the language is founded upon paradox. Those who use the language are unmindful and impervious to the enormity of the reality that they are trying to represent. Just as the weapon is capable of creating a wasteland out of the world, the jargon itself simplifies and reduces the language by emptying it of its referentiality, proceeding towards the ultimate simplicity of meaninglessness. "The result is a kind of linguistic end zone, a verbal ground zero" (Osteen 149).

The illusion of presence or the metaphysics of presence makes the vision of 'the Bomb as God' a terrifying one. Tom LeClair has paired the theology of The Bomb with Creed's discourse, viewing them as similar versions of logocentrism, a re-inspection of theological values based upon what Derrida calls a "metaphysics of presence," which claims to "supply final meanings and answers and bring an end to play" (17). Creed is undoubtedly, imbued with godlike authority and like another nuclear bomb threat looming large over the world, he looms large on the Logos football by the absence of his presence. He watches the game from a 'tower' at a distance and does not interfere or rain down instructions 'play by play' during the practice sessions. The players well aware of his absence/presence wait at the line of scrimmage, for

his assistants to name the play, for a final explosive surge towards the end zone: "... players moving from assigned positions to a collision of bodies and a pile-up, to a breakdown of play that language began" (Messenger, *Sport* 306).

Osteen quotes Ira Chernus: "Nuclear weapons ... inspire both awe and dread, and remain mysteriously fascinating, both because of their complex technology and because of their seemingly limitless power" (147). For Staley the bombs are gods and he speaks of the "overwhelming presence" of this omnipresent God. "We have too many bombs. They have too many bombs. There's a kind of theology of fear that comes out of this ... It's so powerful ... It dwarfs us so much. Now god is the force of nature itself, the fusion of tritium and deuterium. Now he's the weapon. So maybe this time we went too far in creating a being of omnipresent power" (*EZ* 80). The power for total destruction is incredible with a nuclear weapon.

> They are 'present' in our minds only when not used--and when truly 'present'—that is, when used—they will bring about an ultimate absence, the *end* of civilization and perhaps even the extinction of humanity. It is one weapon whose value depends upon its never being used ... (Osteen 147).

The symbolic force of these weapons will loom large in the minds of the people.

Staley invites Gary's attention to his concept of 'humane wars' which according to him "... will happen in the not-too-distant future" (*EZ* 81). This humane warfare would have all the trappings of a game bound by rules and regulations and that we will "practically have a referee and a time-keeper" (*EZ* 82) as in a football game. Staley's prophecy of humane wars necessitates the adherence to rules. Perhaps Johan Huizinga, the pioneer among play theorists had foreseen such a scenario much earlier, when he says "... all fighting that is bound by rules bears the formal characteristics of play by that very limitation" (10). Throughout his discussion of play and war, Huizinga emphasises the necessity for the play-attitude of antagonists who regard each other as equals, if we are to consider their fighting a ludic function. Staley elaborates his concept:

> Each side agrees to use clean bombs. And each side agrees to limit the amount of megatons he uses ... there'll be an agreement ... we actually specify the number of megatons; let's just say hypothetically, one thousand megs for each side. So then what we've got is a two-thousand megaton war ... We make it strictly counterforce. So right off the bat you avoid the fallout Hazard and millions of bonus kills, or deaths from fallout ... there'll be all sorts of controls. Then it would

> be over and you'd make your damage assessment. (*EZ* 81-82)

Humane wars as nuclear war games would end in a 'pile up' as in the game of football. Whether the game is spatially and temporally restricted, or the tonnage drastically cut short, the end result could be a no-win situation. A nuclear war could have no winner, because it would destroy all possibilities of deciding the winner.

Nuclear strategists and war veterans like Staley "actually prevent our confronting the realities of nuclear holocaust by camouflaging it with pseudo-objective terminology" (Osteen 149). Staley bombards Gary with his jargons:

> I'm not some kind of monstrous creature who enjoys talking about the spectacle of megadeath
>
> ....
>
> The greatest thrill of my life was getting a ride in the XB-Seventy.
>
> First to sixth hour after detonation the ground-zero circle is drenched with fallout ———
>
> dose rate begins to slow down.
>
> It all depends on the MEGATONS, THE FISSION YIELD, AIR OR SURFACE BURST, WIND VELOCITY, MEAN PRESSURE ALTITUDE, DESCENT TIME, MEDIAN PARTICLE SIZE.

> TEN MEGATONS OF FISSION PRODUCE ONE MILLION
> CURIES OF STRONTIUM NINETY
> What does that do to MILK CALCIUM LEVELS?
> There's a FACTOR FOUR DISCRIMINATION against strontium in the human body.
> Then there's CERIUM ONE FORTY-FOUR, PLUTONIUM TOW
> THIRTY NINE, BARIUM ONE-FORTY ... ZINC SIXTY-FIVE IN FISH. Also RADIOIODINE
> That's milk, children, thyroid cancer. (*EZ* 85-86)

After quietly listening to the onslaught of verbal bombardment Gary is devastated and fascinated beyond the point of response. He simply "headed back to the campus through the desert" (*EZ* 87) contemplating the destruction of human kind. In such an eventuality one will be forced to "reinvent the language" constructively. "In some form of void, freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself. What we must know must be learned from blanked-out pages. To begin to reword the overflowing world. To subtract and disjoin. To re-recite the alphabet" (*EZ* 89). Gary displays his desire for regenerative destruction, his hunger for closure and the apocalypse penchant for cleansing. As Osteen points out, it is merely "another of Gary's ascetic simplifications" the desire to blank out and then rewrite those empty

pages is another expression of that "eschatological impulse that makes nuclear holocaust attractive" (149).

One night, in Major's motel room, Gary and Staley play a simulated war game. It is a crude form of game devoid of any modern gadgetry, "... with only a few numerical estimates of troop units, missile inventories, production capacities" (*EZ* 219). Major has worked out the game situation in a meticulous manner, devising even the most particular maps and charts. But the game is played between unequal opponents, one of the most important violations of the play-spirit. A second manifest problem with the game is one common to all war games— "the obvious awareness on the part of all participants that this wasn't the real thing" (*EZ* 219).

In the first part of the war game, Major Staley elaborately builds the scenario of conflict. Gary cannot feel the tension inherent in the game situation as he was neither involved in the creation of the game nor was he "... familiar with the professional manipulations, both diplomatic and military, which might normally precede any kind of large-scale destruction" (*EZ* 223). Nevertheless, Gary rises to the occasion in the second part of the game where he actively participates in the game. The moves made by Gary are challenging and helped further the conflict. Both players are totally immersed in the gravity of the situation they were encountering "Silences between moves were extremely grave." The game required only twelve major steps for

completion, but they "were at it for more than three hours" (*EZ* 223). All through the game, although talk was brief and pointed, the language was replete with military jargon of nuclear warfare. Osteen's critical statement is pertinent in this regard:

> Most of the terms and even the crisis scenario which initiates the game comes directly from Herman Kahn's *On Escalation*, which uses an escalation 'ladder' to predict and analyze how a crisis might move up the rungs into nuclear war. Kahn is one of those men recruited to reinvent the language, having defined many of those words which please Gary (for example, 'stark deterrence' and 'super-ready status'). Moreover, the game itself adheres quite closely to Kahn's escalation ladder, moving inexorably from 'ostensible crisis' to 'spasm response.' (150)

In the text, the end of the game is punctuated by a phone ringing. His concentration being entirely on the game it strikes his ears as a bomb exploding. The mundane world of reality intruding upon the insular, greater game world.

The horrifying concept of the humane war-as-game, and the simulated nuclear war game do not possess the pure play-attitude or the unadulterated ludic element in it when put into the perspective of the theories propounded by early play theorists, Johan Huizinga and

Eugen Fink. Play for Huizinga is "a free activity entirely lacking in material interest and in utility ..." (Ehrmann 34). If anything can redeem the world from the apocalyptic vision fostered by the war-mongers and nuclear strategists, is a return to the unadulterated, pure play-attitude. This play-attitude is one quality that sustains the beauty of the languages facilitating the poetic and expressive functions of it. The absence of which may even hamper 'simple communication.' The meaninglessness of empty 'rituals' and the technological precision in games endorsed by coaches like Creed are transcended by the football players/participants in two simple play-forms in the narrative.

The first of these play-forms is the "Bang, You're Dead" game. A simple communal game as played by the children. "Extremely simple-minded game" which evokes nostalgic feelings of one's childhood. "Your hand assumes the shape of a gun and you fire at anyone who passes, you try to reproduce, in your own way, the sound of a gun being fired. Or you simply shout these words. Bang, you're dead. The other person clutches a vital area of his body and then falls, simulating death" (*EZ* 32). Like all games, "Bang, You're Dead" too depends upon the adherence to rules. The result of the simulated shooting would always be death; no one can escape with mere injury. They played the game for almost a week. Gary was not an avid player in the beginning, but gradually his interest grew and he "began to kill selectively." When he was killed, he experimented with the aesthetics of the calisthenics of

death, by a gunshot. The narrator-participant was after "a classic death." The only "massacre" took place at the beginning "when things were still shapeless" (*EZ* 32). It dawned on them that the game could be played in a much better way and has more potential than such unmitigated violence allows for. As David Berman explains: "The 'unwritten limits' which the game soon takes on make the game like a primitive ritual. All ritual is essentially played and depends upon strict adherence to forms and rules" (67). Gary perceives a mythic connection between the game and its more primitive forms when he says: "To kill with impunity. To die in the celebration of ancient ways" (*EZ* 33).

This game is structured in the form of a social intercourse. In psychoanalytical terms it is a transaction. The participant-player, who spots the person to be shot at, essentially gives indications of acknowledging others. Eric Berne calls it "transactional stimulus" and the action related to this stimulus is "transactional response." He further comments: "both these transactions are complementary ... and follows the natural order of healthy human relationships" (29). The camaraderie exhibited by the football players and the level of communication between them is amazing. Such simple complementary transactions occur in social relationships and these relationships occur in activities, rituals and pastimes.

The game has all the formal characteristics enlisted by Huizinga:

> It is a free activity; experienced as make-believe and situated outside of everyday life, nevertheless capable of totally absorbing the player; an activity entirely lacking material interest and in utility. It transpires in an explicitly circumscribed time and space, is carried out in an orderly fashion according to given rules, and gives rise to group relationships which often surround themselves with mystery or emphasize through disguises their difference from the ordinary world. (Huizinga 34-35)

The game is played in free time, before the fall semester begins, without the compulsion of anyone. The player-participants gain no material benefit from it; the rules are absolutely adhered to and the cooperation among the footballers is all absolutely one of pure 'play-attitude.' The game is a way of breaking the isolation of the desert wasteland. The game ends when the classes begin. The significance of this game in the context of the wasteland, both within and without the character-player is that it rejuvenates the spirit and harkens them back to a less complicated time, the simplicity of the children. Although the footballers play at death, the death is regenerative.

The other game that constitutes pure 'play-attitude' is central to the narrative. The 'snow football game,' the narrator-player and his

teammates engage is the most elemental form of sport. It combines the simplicity of the earlier game, and primitivism, associated with pure play, which bring sport closest to order in an essentially chaotic world. The game is not a planned one, but a spontaneous one in the fresh snow. "It began as a game of touch, five on a side, no contact except for brush blocks and tagging the ball carrier." Ankle-high snow did not deter them, neither the classes that were going on. Nobody bothered to keep count of the plays, moves or tactics. "The idea was to keep playing, keep moving, get it going again." The players on both sides kept increasing as the snow fall became heavier and heavier. The game and the rules too kept changing from time to time. The game is fast reduced to its most basic form. Changes are reflected in the players' attire too. All protection from the blizzarding snowfall is eliminated. "Gloves were outlawed," even the placing of hands under armpits between plays is outlawed. "We were part of the weather, eight inside it, isolated from objects on the land, from land, from perspective itself" (*EZ* 194). The few spectators watching also left, the players enjoyed skidding and falling. Huddles are outlawed and each offensive play would be announced aloud, taking away the surprise element, the art of deception in football: "... the defense would know exactly what was coming." The players have no complaint and they follow every rule to each letter of the alphabet. The language used is the most rudimentary football words, devoid of any jargon. "We were getting extremely basic,

moving into elemental realms, seeking harmony with the weather and earth" (*EZ* 195).

Soon passes and reverses are also outlawed. Tackling replaces tagging. Finally end runs are banned. The game is thus reduced to its bare essential movements—straight-ahead running, blocking and tackling. By now the number of players has increased to fourteen. The weather is too harsh; hands became numb, snow on the lashes blurred vision, shoes weighed them down. In spite of all this "We kept playing, we kept hitting and we were comforted by the noise and brunt of our bodies in contact, by the simple physical warmth generated through violent action, by the sight of each other, the torn clothing, the bruises and scratches, the wildness of all fourteen, numb, purple, coughing, white heads solemn in the healing snow" (*EZ* 196).

In the most elemental form of the football game played by Logos college players, the violation of some of the games' structure and symbolism can be overlooked. It does not mar the play-attitude to any extent. The basic structure of linear spatial movement and the traversal of the field up and down are kept intact. Football is a game played against the clock; its chronology meets a dead-end when the game time ends. In the snow football game the temporal structure of the game is not adhered to. The game is not in any way limited to time as it has nothing to do with winning and losing, and at no point of time in the game, scoring is mentioned. But the earthbound nature of the

game is strictly followed as the passes, the long bombs and the short-passing are outlawed. Repetition as a dominant mode of the game is well taken care of as the players endlessly keep running straight ahead in search of the end zones at both ends.

The violence and pain undergone by Gary and others in the snow game is one they gleefully accept. The game is played for the sake of playing; play becomes an end in itself, an expression of all that is associated with unbridled play-attitude: human joy, freedom, unproductive and order amongst the meaningless chaos of the "end zone." David Berman's comment is appropriate at this juncture "... in the snow football game the emphasis is definitely upon the visceral reality of direct experience enjoyed for its own sake, not as a means to another end" (69).

The real game, the big game against the Centrex is placed in the second section of the narrative. A thirty-one page description of the "big game," is placed not at the climactic end of the text but in the middle and described in fragments, fractured point of view, and "elegant gibberish" (*EZ* 113). As the narrative has nothing much to offer in the final part, vis-à-vis football, except the desperations and aberrations of the players and the minor characters, Osteen makes a very interesting observation about the narrative:

> ... (the narrative) places that staple of sports fiction, the Big Game, not at the end of the novel but in the middle,

> and then follows the team's disintegration and Gary's further explorations in Part III (In this regard, it resembles a nuclear disaster novel: Part I builds to a confrontation, the middle section details the "war", and Part III describes the aftermath). (152)

Osteen's use of the term 'war' for the big game is deliberate and loaded with meaning.

The narrator-player and his football buddies have been waiting for this crucial show down with their major opponents. It is no less an event than a war; all the hype and preparation for the game promise an engrossed, pitched battle on the ground. The first sentence of the discourse of the game with Centrex describes historical fact: "The special teams collided" and moves to the narrator's judgement: "quite pretty to watch." The second paragraph effects a shift in narration, enclosed within parentheses it is spoken to the spectator/reader by the author. "The spectator, at this point, is certain to wonder whether he must now endure a football game in print ... And of course it remains the author's permanent duty to unbox the lexicon for all eyes to see—a cryptic ticking mechanism in search of a revolution" (*EZ* 111-113). To decipher whether Harkness as player/narrator delivers this or an implied author is impossible. However, he does not take into account the spectator/reader's resistance to another "football game in print," and defines the desires and expectations of "the exemplary spectator."

Finally the 'author' comes to the conclusion that this "game on paper" will fulfill those needs. But in a surprising reversal, which is so characteristic of Gary, in the rest of the narrative, declares that "But maybe not. It's possible there are deeper reasons to attempt a play-by-play" (*EZ* 112).

The text of "the big game" as narrated by the second narrator as if he is the author "unboxing the lexicon" is simply 'unwrapping.' It is not interpretation or recovery of meaning. "Poetic gibberish" follows:

> Quick Picket left, hook right
>
> Twin option off modified crossbow
>
> Re-T, chuck and go
>
> Monsoon Sweep, String-in left, ready right
>
> Cradle-out, drill-9 Shiver, ends chuff
>
> Broadside option, flow-and-go.
>
> Middle-Sift-W, alpha-Set, Lemmy-2
>
> Twin deck left, ride series, white divide.
>
> Gap-angle down, 17, dummy stitch.
>
> Bone country special, double-D to right. (*EZ* 39-141)

But this gibberish is not without consequences, "simultaneously distancing players from, and triggering players into bone-rattling action" (Benton 9). The language used here parallels the war-game language of Major Staley in the usage of specific football rhetoric. Play-by-play description is realistic and involving. The game is suitably

dubbed "theology versus technology" by Osteen (149). Since 'play names' are unfamiliar to the reader/spectator, the play signals; both verbal and non-verbal, become an impenetrable language comparable to the jargon of nuclear strategy. The names for plays that the coaches invent are univocal but strategically significant. As in nuclear strategy, words become the primary weapons. "Each play must have a name. The naming of plays is important. All teams run the same plays. But each team uses an entirely different system of naming. Coaches stay up well into the night in order to name plays ... No play begins until its name is called" (*EZ* 118).

The play name has a univocal meaning. The names are signals rather than symbols, the moment they reach the hearer he springs into action, the response is spontaneous. There is no communication loop in the signal language; whatever gap remains between the signifier and the signified is covered up by quick action. Errors are bound to occur as the opposing team has counter strategies and 'counter play-names.' Added to it is the noise created by the players and the spectators. The play-name indisputably has an authoritarian effect, the qualities of logos. One player in the Logos team, called a 'fetus eater' for his ignorance of the play names doesn't understand all the signals. Thomas LeClair comments on the characteristic feature of this language "... because the signal language is specialized, limited in

context, spoken and authoritarian, it seems to drive back forward the purity of logos before what Derrida calls 'fallen language'" (115).

The motif of naming is not confined to the plays, but the characters too discuss the origins and significance of their names. Norgene Azamanian tells the story of his name. "It comes from Norge refrigerators and from my uncle, Captain Gene Kinney" (*EZ* 13). Larry Nix and Anatole Bloomberg have their own stories to tell.

Anatole Bloomberg is a Jew—a "kike"—who like Myna Corbett, Gary's lover—a "cunt," and Taft Robinson—a "nigger" wish to transcend their condition. Bloomberg is Gary's roommate and he wants to "unjew himself." He attempts to reinvent himself by changing his language usage; way of speaking, urbanisms, set of words and phrases etc. His intention is to release himself from feeling Jewish which he associates with "the guilt of being innocent victims" (*EZ* 47). Bloomberg represents those who trade their history, their rich and emotive patterns of speech, for bland, ineffective dead expression. He severs his relationship with his family and masters the parlance of nuclear physicists. He refuses to return home for his mother's funeral for fear he would once again feel Jewish. He leaves a stone painting it black, in the desert, *in memoriam.* "Bloomberg is that tragedy of an anti-Semitic society, the self-hating Jew" (Keesey 38).

Taft Robinson is another player, black and he embodies for white "the legend, the beauty, the mystery of black speed" (*EZ* 190). In spite

of being a prized athlete, and "one of the best running backs in the history of the Southwest" (*EZ* 3), he does not aspire to be a football immortal. Football was just a necessary rite of passage for Taft during which he learned to understand his blackness fully. The first black ever to attend Logos College, he tries to confront racism by trying to get more deeply in touch with his African heritage and he starts speaking the language of black pride. His effort to leave behind the language of white racism is compared to Wittgenstein's attempt, in his philosophy of language, to indicate what has already been written is not nearly as important as the truths about morality, religion and aesthetics that remain to be discovered. "Two parts to that man's work. What is written. What is not written. The man himself seemed to favor the second part. Perhaps Taft (Robinson) was a student of that part" (*EZ* 233). Gary makes this observation when he sees the poster of Wittgenstein on the wall of Taft's room. Robinson ends up sitting silent at the end of the narrative. As Keesey comments: "After all Wittgenstein ended his work by saying that 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'" (40).

They burden him with words of praise and worshipful admiration that are ultimately just as demeaning. The racist mind of the whites "coloreds can run and leap but they can't concentrate" (*EZ* 40-41) denies the blacks the superiority in 'brainpower.' Thus Robinson, although envied for his physique, is considered as a white man's

commodity which can be traded like a slave at an auction. "... good shoulders, narrow waist, acceptable neck," he is "prize beef at the country fair"—a "commercial myth" (*EZ* 3).

In his attempt to fully understand his black identity, Taft slips into the life of the ascetic, giving up even football, and confining himself to seclusion and a reductive environment. His life towards the end of the narrative is ordered and fixed in his room with only the bare essential objects. It is a world of objects arranged with geometric precision, a world stripped of the element of play and creativity.

Anatole and Taft increasingly reflect Creed's logocentric aims. Robinson, who is almost invisible until the last few pages of the text (the figure who haunts the narrative) become a mysterious dropout as opposed to the new football-loving, co-captain Gary. A role reversal—where Taft is now the earlier Gary, ironic and evasive. Yet with parallel interests—father, silence, space, language and fascination with mass death, persuades Robinson for a double life involving football and his investigations.

Gary's appearance in these last pages in Taft's room gives the narrative structure a circular shape. Taft is the subject of the text's first sentences after which he mysteriously disappears, except for the occasional mention in all kinds of games. Gary's apparent acceptance of the triumph of this sterile world is evident, as it is after his last visit to Taft's room that he loses his will to live.

Myna Corbett is the only woman to have major status in the narrative. She is an obese and "blotchy-faced" figure in whom Harkness finds a lover. She remains obese "to escape the responsibilities of beauty" (*EZ* 201). She dreams of flight and a life in Moscow but has an authoritarian father. Harkness sees her as a "perfect circle" and for him "the simplest thing to say is that she made me feel comfortable" (*EZ* 6).

While reading the dictionary to each other in the library, searching for some "protomorphic spoor," they become sexually excited and "the words ... made us want to speak with hands" (*EZ* 217). Gary cannot escape from the clutches of logocentrism even in passion. As they act out the various stages of love-making in the far corner of the library between high stacks, Myna posits "herself as the knowable word, the fleshmade sigh and syllable" (*EZ* 218).

Her zany response to conventional beauty and her refusal to be contained within the limits prescribed by a sexist society, does not last long. She soon parrots conventions. After her return from Christmas vacation she is twenty pounds lighter. She tells "I had to do it Gary ... I was moving like an unreal person. I used to look forward to nothing type things ..." (*EZ* 187). The "nothing-type things" are the precise reasons why Gary was originally fascinated by her. Myna in resisting the consumer culture of the cosmetics had been an earlier victim to the consumer culture of junk food, as she purchased and ate food to make

herself defiantly fat. Now that she has become beauty conscious and her common habits have been reversed. It was not the social revolutionary in her that resisted the sexist ideals of the society, but a deeply ingrained childish fear of sexual insecurity. Myna and her female friends would talk about their fathers, expressing horror at the prospect of being handled by daddy's "gross thumbs" or being bitten by his "horse teeth" (*EZ* 94).

Myna, unlike Bloomberg and Taft, decides to acquiesce to the conventions imposed by the society when she goes on a diet. Gary confronts the slimmer Myna in a state of shock, but the Chalk sisters insist that he respond to Myna's new look. "It's all very existential" (*EZ* 188) is his comment. Esther Chalk's rejoinder is apt "Don't use words ... Either you like her this way or you don't. You can't get out of it with words" (*EZ* 188). Berman notes that: "The breakdown of the social order implied by the possibility of nuclear war and made specific in the identity problems of the novel's individuals is mirrored in the debasement of the language" (57).

The only character, besides the narrator, who is interested in using the language playfully, is Wally Pippich, the public relationship man. He is appointed immediately after the defeat in the "big game." Gary "fashioned a theory based on the relationship between defeat and the need for publicity, or anti-publicity, the elevation of evasive news to the level of literature" (*EZ* 150). His job is to promote the Logos College

as the ultimate destination for 'college football.' He has a feel for sound and he feigns mastery of the semiotics of advertising and the language of copywriting. The narrative critiques the language of advertisement used by copywriters without deciphering the literal and figurative meanings of words and phrases. Pippich's promotion will have the catchy sentence "Taft Robinson and Gary Harkness. The T and G Backfield. Taft and Gary, Touch and Go—Thunder and Gore" (*EZ* 151). Although he does not know "squat" about football he knows to play with language. The above phrasing comes purely from his feel for language and sound. In using the phrase "Thunder and Gore" he is in danger of not only being literally incorrect but figuratively too. Thunder is as inappropriate to Taft as Gore is to Gary. But the language of advertisement thrives on such incorrect expressions and false claims. "An irresponsibly expressive language may therefore be as meaningless as an overly mathematical and abstract one" (Berman 51).

Pippich's language play does not end here. He has the habit of creating new words with "ation" suffixes, especially when he is in a buoyant mood. Scoop becomes "scoopation," big becomes "bigation," hand becomes "handation" and piss becomes "pissation." "ation" is a suffix associated with many of our modern, technological words such as 'computerisation,' 'mutation,' 'instrumentation,' 'radiation' etc.

It has the quality of making things abstract and negates the possibility of a poetic play of language. Such an abstraction of

language is dangerous as it would take us to the "end zones" of human communication. In critiquing, the discourse of the language of public relations and advertising, the narrative hints at the need to go backward to the more primitive and sacred functions of language. Huizinga tells us that "Poetry in its original culture-making capacity, is born in and as play—sacred play, no doubt, but always, even in its sanctity, verging on gay abandon, mirth and jollity" (62).

Alan Zaplac, the professor of Exobiology, one of the disciplines offered at Logos College, complains that the terminologies of his language are virtually untranslatable. Only five feet four inches tall, the man exhibited unusual mobility in his teaching methods, speaking quickly he flowed over his own words:

> Formic acid trickles through the great halls of the universe ... to evolve, whatever synthesis you can guess at, methane, ammonia, hydrogen, water vapor, all acted on by present or unknown forms of energy to form amino acids ... (*EZ* 91-92)

He exhorts the class to give him a sign that his words ring any kind of bell in the mind of his students.

The course in the 'Untellable' at Logos College has a sacred ring to it. In primitive cultures the sacred is often that which is untellable. In a world where the language becomes increasingly meaningless, it is profaned. The Untellable in a way signifies the metalanguage of non-

denotative sounds and gestures and silences which exist beyond the expression of words. Billy Mast is the only football player who is taking the course. Words without their denotative meaning become mere sounds, one can express a whole range of emotions with such sounds. Without definitions the words would have a ring of truth about it. One of the major activities of the class as a whole is to "shout in German a lot" (*EZ* 15). David Berman discerns: "The danger of knowing the language is that one may confuse the meaning of a word with the sound it makes" (63). The endless play of the language is sustained and meaning becomes 'deferred' as Derrida says.

After Billy Mast's desk-banging and recital of a few German words to himself he explains to Gary that "the German words gave him comfort, though not as much as they used to when he didn't know what they meant" (*EZ* 116). This is a primitive form of play which the class engages in. In so far as they are ignorant of the meanings the words are mere non-denotative sounds for them. Meaning is imposed by the way they express it; gestures, pitch, stress and volume. Creativity and play-attitude are the essential features of this game.

Defining words and concepts become a fixation with certain characters. Abstract and analytical definition neither provide a fixed meaning nor do they help in understanding the reality. "Identity" says Buddy Shock "An equality satisfied by all possible values of the variable for which the standardized expressions involved in the

equality are quantitatively determined" (*EZ* 44-45) — in response to Tim Flanders' mentioning of the word identity with reference to his grandfather. In a similar way Billy Mast and Jimmy Fife give the most abstract and mathematical of definition for the words 'function' and 'balance' respectively. Although no one pays much attention to such meaningless utterances, the individuals are programmed with such ready-made definitions. Gary defines history as "the angle at which realities meet" (*EZ* 35).

The text leaves no discourse of language unscathed: sport, academy, military, media, technology and consumerism. The American society that the narrative depicts is rampant with paranoia and on the brink of chaos. The discourse reaffirms the ritualistic qualities of language, perhaps the only saving grace in a rudderless world. In critiquing the subversion of language through the character of Major Staley, Alan Zaplac and Wally Pippich, the narrative "makes us see football as an efficient illusion of order, a perfecting of reality through organized language ..." (*CLC* 54).

The Great American Novel has as its narrator, a "four score and seven" year old retired sportswriter, Word Smith. The narrative mixes historical and imaginative figures and events from the world of baseball, American history and mythology. The narrator-subject is "a fellow with the immortal gift of gab" and is addicted to "alliteration" (*GAN* 12, 15). At the centre of his text is the effort to revive the memory

of the "Patriot League:" the third major league in the American baseball fraternity after the National and American Leagues. The history of the country's baseball establishment had witnessed, in reality, numerous third leagues, notably the Federal League.

Smitty's Patriot League ceased to exist in the year 1943, a year after the Second World War. It has been completely obliterated from the history of baseball establishment, the record books, the sportswriters' memory and from the nation's collective memory itself. The narrator subject's "crusade to restore the omissions by establishment chroniclers" (Schwartz 140) is the dominant discourse of the narrative. In the 'Prologue' to the narrative, he gives vent to his wrath against the omissions:

> I am speaking of a chapter of our past that has been torn from the record books without so much as a peep of protest, *except by me.* I am speaking of a rewriting of our history as heinous as any ordered by a tyrant dictator abroad. Not thousand-year-old history either, but something that only came to an end twenty-odd years ago. Yes, I am speaking of the annihilation of the Patriot League. (*GAN* 26)

The use of the first person 'I' in the Prologue, which is rendered in a long dramatic monologue, is characterised by an on-the-face address to the readers/fans.

Smitty's narrative of the hapless Ruppert Mundys is worked out at two levels of play: The play of the sporting game of baseball and the play at literature and language. The text chronicles the misery of Ruppert Mundys—the 'homeless' equivalent in the narrative to the baseball metaphors of 'exile,' 'banishment,' and 'journey.' The 'baseball exploits' of Ruppert Mundys and the banishment of Patriot League is woven into the narrative with the use of a number of literary devices—traditional, modern as well as postmodern—which can well be enumerated and classified under the rubric of 'literary play' or 'literary game:' parody, satire, allegory, irony, paradox, quotation, ambiguity, pun, allusion, myth, farce, slapstick, figures of speech, alliteration, fantasy, burlesque, travesty, grotesquerie, rhetoric, obscenity, baseball jargon, onomastics, physical humour, native American humour, pastiche, patois, scatology, naming-game, spoof, black humour, self-consciousness, signification, absence, presence, difference, carnival, transgression etc. Peter Hutchinson describes a literary game:

> ... as any *playful*, self-conscious and extended means by which an author stimulates his reader to deduce or to speculate, by which he encourages him to see a relationship between different parts of the text, or between the text and something extraneous to it ... literary games are not autonomous—they exist in

> conjunction with a plot, or with character, or they are to be seen in relation to other works of literature. (14)

Play as a constellating concept encompasses both games and playfulness. The representation of the game of baseball and the play at literature and language in Smitty's narrative, are the major discursive strands to be analysed. Only an "implied reader" would be able to lay bare all the literary games made use of in the text. The self-consciousness of the parodic 'Prologue' forewarns the reader of the barrage of literary and language plays that he/she would encounter. In Smitty's own words: "... it is only the prologue. I was only opening the tap, to get the waters running" (*GAN* 22).

The Prologue opens with "Call me SMITTY" (*GAN* 11). The ex-sports journalist has had a close association with "four American Presidents!" because he "polished their prose" (*GAN* 15). The self-conscious text of the Prologue explicitly states his fascination for the idea of writing 'The Great American Novel.' Ben Siegel's incisive remark on Smitty's parody of this practice is worth noting: "... (Smitty's narrative) takes sharper aim at the American habit of ranking and labeling artists as we do athletes" (180). The writer-subject alludes to the works of Melville, Hawthorne, Twain and Hemingway. Each of these writers lay claim to be labelled as the 'Greatest American Novelist.'

The writer-subject is housed at the "Valhalla Home for the Aged" and the doctor tending to his old-age diseases asks him to stop this "orgy of alliteration," and reminds him that at his age "it is tantamount to suicide" (*GAN* 21). But Smitty's success at writing the 'Great American Novel' largely depends upon his linguistic abilities, at the heart of which is alliteration. He says "Alliteration is at the foundation of English literature" (*GAN* 19). The octogenarian had a regular syndicated column: "One Man's Opinion" in the sports page of a daily. In one of his alliterative bouts he describes the "race of fans including himself as:

> ... radiant, raffish, raggedy, rakish, rambunctious, rampaging, ranting, rapacious, rare, rash, raucous, raunchy, ravaged, ravenous, realistic, reasonable, rebellious, receptive, reckless, redeemable, refined, reflective, refreshing, regal, regimented, regrettable, relentless, reliable, relentless, reliable, religious, remarkable, remiss, remorseful, repellent, repentant, repetitious (!!!!) ... (*GAN* 12)

Accounting for only half the alliterative sequence he creates out of the alphabet 'R.' He claims to have the ability to write a book out of the alphabet 'X.'

"Call me Smitty" echoes Moby Dick's opening: "Call me Ishmael." Smitty is the one who survived "the wreck to tell the tale" of Patriot

League. The narrator reminds the readers, that his initials are similar to that of William Shakespeare. The prologue parodies the 'Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer in rendering "the annual trip to Cooperstown" by baseball fans, the place where "Major Abner Doubleday, invent(ed) the game of baseball" (*GAN* 24, 26). The narrator himself had just come back from such a trip to the place where he cast his vote "at the annual balloting for baseball's Hall of Fame." Every year he votes for Luke Gofannon, the legendary player of the Patriot League. As usual the authorities, led by "Mr. Bowie Kuhn, so-called Commissioner of Baseball" do not count his vote. The running feud between the powers-that-be and the crusader of truth is central to an understanding of the "alternate world" created by him. According to Smitty, "MR. BOWIE KUHN IS A LIAR AND THE HALL OF FAME SHOULD BE NAMED THE HALL OF SHAME" (*GAN* 27).

Satirising the nexus between sports and politics becomes a discursive device to reveal the self-seeking grossness of the world of corporatised American sports. Using the "rhetoric of delusion" and "dishonest manipulation of language," Bowie Kuhn and his associates deny the elderly writer the right to truth (Jones and Nance 148). The official discourse of the authorities is mocked, derided and upended by the carnivalesque narrative of the subject. The vote cast for Luke Gofannon does not find mention in the "Baseball Writers' Association of America's" (BBWAS's) final list due to the insidious conspiracy

against him—no Patriot League player can ever be elected to the "Hall of Fame" (*GAN* 33).

Smitty parodies his literary hero, Hemingway, by engaging him in a long conversation, on a boat along with a "vassar" co-ed who had "come South to learn about Real Life" and discuss "Literatoor" (*GAN* 36). Hemingway addresses Smitty, by a fictitious name, Frederico and discusses with him the making of Hemingway's habit of entertaining his friends on his boat and of his novel *The Old Man and the Sea* ... (Baumgarten and Gottfried 123-124). Hem (what Smitty calls him) mockingly says that in Smitty he sees a potential writer of the G.A.N. Consequently he belittles Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, the other two contenders for the prize. In the ensuing discussion, Hem asks:

> ' ... You know why you can't name the Great American Novel, vassar?'
>
> 'No,' she moaned
>
> 'Because it hasn't been written yet! Because when it is it'll be Papa who writes it and not some rummy sportswriter ...' (*GAN* 41)

Hemingway's "macho-competitiveness" (Jones and Nance 144) edges out all other claimants to the throne of the best novelist and establishes himself as the greatest. The allusion to the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and its structure foreshadows the picaresque mode of

narration of Smitty. The text of the Ruppert Mundys is peppered with episodes and anecdotes, joined together by a framework. In comparing *The Scarlet Letter* and his epic, Smitty identifies that "each has a windy autobiographical intro" and "a *scarlet letter.*" In Smitty's text the "letter was R. At the outset for Ruppert, the team's home; in the end, as many would have it, for 'Rootless,' for 'Ridiculous,' for 'Refugee'" (*GAN* 49). The 'Prologue's 'literary game' and 'language play' ends with a sinister warning:

> Let me prophesy. What began in '46 with the obliteration of the Patriot League will not end until the planet itself has gone ... For make no mistake, you sharp-eyed, fast-talking, money-making O'Malleys of America, you proprietors, promoters, expropriators and entrepreneurs: *the coming cataclysm is coming.* (*GAN* 56-57)

The first narrative unit, 'Home Sweet Home,' skilfully interweaves the sporting game of baseball and literary games. The saga of the Ruppert Mundys begins in the historical backdrop of the Second World War. The journey motif of the game of baseball is worked out through the sorry plight of the 'hapless Mundys.' They have become the baseball equivalent of 'homelessness' and the endless traversing of the bases. Parodying the Jewish history as related in the Bible, the journey motif alludes to the "Jews wandering in the desert after the exodus from Egypt" (Schwartz 137). The once glorious team in the Patriot League,

have now become the downtrodden, the 'other,' marginal, in the world of American baseball. While all the other twenty-three teams could play half their games on home turf, "the Mundys alone played all one hundred and fifty four games on the road" (*GAN* 64). The owners, out to make quick money have decided to lease the "beautiful Mundy Park" into a wartime "embarkation camp" for "fifty thousand dollars a month, twelve months a year" (*GAN* 95). The Mundy brothers, the present owners of the team, inherited the franchisee of the club from their legendary father, the 'Glorious Mundy.' The narrative satirises the hypocrisy manifest in their display of patriotism. In actuality, the corporate greed of the capitalistic forces rendered the Ruppert Mundys into wanderers. Smitty ironically comments that the explanation given to Port Ruppert fans is "... to help save the world for democracy" (*GAN* 61). General Douglas Oakhart, the President of the Patriot League, perceives a conspiracy, hatched by the American and National Leagues, to drive the Mundys to bankruptcy or to relegate the eight teams to the minor leagues.

Politics and corporate greed join hands to expunge the bizarre teams of the Patriot League from the sports history of the country. Ruppert Mundys, Tri-City Tycoons, Aceldama Butchers, Independence Blues, Terra Incognita Rustlers, Tri-City Greenbacks, Asylum Keepers and Kakoola Reapers are the eight teams that constitute the third major league. The once glorious Mundys are now a ragged lot; a team

built out of midgets, misfits, cripples and psychopaths. During the days of Luke Gofannon, the Mundys topped the table and Luke's heroics in the field are now part of baseball lore. Smitty's hero's baseball career is as illustrious as the careers of the legendary Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb, the immortals of the real baseball world. Flamboyant on the field and colourless off the field, "Luke the Loner" did not run after fame, but fame came to him all the same. In an instance of irony, Smitty describes the death of the hero at the age of thirty-six:

> To acknowledge the cheers from an oncoming school bus--boys and girls hanging from every window, screaming, 'It's him! It's Luke!'—the sweetest shyest ballplayer who ever hit a homer, momentarily took his famous hands from the wheel and his famous eyes from the road, and shot off the slick highway into the Raritan River. (*GAN* 99)

Such events bordering on black humour is another feature of Smitty's fabula. In his play with the history of the game and its heroic figures, the narrator-subject constructs a counter-history of the game, at the centre of which is the tragicomic tale of the Mundys.

The Mundys manager Ulysses S. Fairsmith, is a Christian gentleman who is affectionately called Mister Fairsmith by the players, sportswriters, the Mundy brothers and even by General Oakhart. A

thorough gentleman and scholar of the game, Fairsmith is the "Mundy's long suffering manager" who has seen and has been with the team in their glorious 1920s as well as the inglorious present. "Fairsmith adds a dash of Christian martyrdom" to the theological concerns of the narrative (Pinsker 96). The rhetoric of missionary preaching and the rhetoric of tradition and conservatism are burlesqued through the character of Fairsmith. Although he had to submit to the corporate interest of the league owners, he took a defiant stand "against the introduction of nighttime baseball into the Patriot League schedule." His eloquent speech loaded with theological implications captured the attention of the country:

> Daytime baseball is nothing less than a reminder of Eden in the time of innocence and joy, and too, an imitation of that which is yet to come. For what is a ballpark, but that place wherein Americans may gather to worship the beauty of God's earth, the skill and strength of His children, and the holiness of His commandment to order and obedience. For such are the twin rocks upon which all sport is founded. (*GAN* 101)

The parody of the language of the church using the myth of baseball as America's religion is with definite purpose. Smitty echoes the popular sentiment that baseball, or more generally, sport is the modern American religion. The American public has made the ballparks their

churches on Sundays. Baseball and the sporting world emerge as an 'alternate world' to the post Second World War generation of Americans wallowing in an uncertain, unknowable world.

Smitty's text is a product of the tail-end of the "demythologizing decade" of the sixties. The Vietnam War, Cold War with Russia, McCarthyism and the assassination of Kennedy has had a telling effect upon the consciousness of the Americans. Perception of reality had become a postmodern problem not only for its artists, but to the common man too. "Traditional American traits such as 'fairplay,' 'sportsmanship' and 'individual sacrifice'" (Cartwright and McElroy 435) had become a thing of the past in politics and international relations. The last vestiges of these essentially sporting qualities remain only in the ballparks. Grappling with the reality of the breakdown of an ordered universe, they find solace in the aesthetics of baseball. The game transports its spectators and followers to a distant, mythic past, appealing to all sections of the American society.

Fairsmith, the preserver of traditional baseball, in an earlier instance, staunchly opposed the broadcast of Reaper home games on the local radio station. The whiskey magnate, Frank Mazuma, the owner of Kakoola Reapers, with his capitalistic motives was the man behind the floodlights and live commentary. General Oakhart, the other parodic conservatist, who is highly regarded as an upholder of

"Rules and Regulations," condemned the absurdist idea of a ball-by-ball description:

> ... you could not begin to communicate through *words*, either printed or spoken, what this game was all about ... the beauty and meaning of baseball resided in the fixed geometry of the diamond and the rest it provided of agility, strength and timing. Baseball was a game that looked different from every single seat in the ball park ... (*GAN* 102-103)

The General relies upon the aesthetics of on-site baseball spectating to give credence to his stance. The spectating/reading position is significant in the perception of the beauty of the game/text of baseball. Notwithstanding the respect and command that the two gentlemen enjoyed in the league, the money power of Mazuma helped him realise his profit motives.

In Gil Gamesh, Smitty's Patriot League has the last of the great heroes. It is mere coincidence that the very year General Oakhart became the President of the P. League, the nineteen-year old Gamesh burst into the Tri-City Greenbacks team, as a sensational rookie pitcher. He is the only Babylonian-American in the league and his name echoes the mythic Babylonian of the same name. In Babylonian epic Gilgamesh was "... a hero of Herculean proportions; in America he is reduced to an ethnic 'Bab' joke" (Pinsker 94). Smitty

compares the baseball prodigy to the Babe Ruth of the 1920 and describes him as "an Olympian of the Ruth-Cobb variety." The General called him "the Talk of the World," and the depression-hit nation found themselves rejuvenated at the opening of the 1933 season (*GAN* 68).

Gil Gamesh did live up to the high expectations of the sportswriters, fans and the P. League authorities, until his altercation with the most respected umpire, Mike Masterson happened. With his "I can beat anybody 'motto'" he took the country by storm:

> ... he was a living, breathing example of that hero of American heroes, the he-man, a combination of Lindbergh, Tarzan, and (with his long girlish lashes and brilliantined black hair) Rudolph Valentino: brave, brutish, and a lady-killer, and in possession of a sidearm fastball that according to Ripley's 'Believe It or Not' could pass clear through a batter's chest, come out his back, and still be traveling at 'major league speed.' (*GAN* 70)

Filthy language, ambiguity, pun and patois characterise the 'epic' quarrel between 'Mike the Mouth' and Gil. General Oakhart's obsession with 'Rules and Regulations' has an excellent match in the uncompromising attitude of Mike on the ground. Intimidated by players, fans and managers to revoke close calls throughout his career, he never budged. Smitty recalls "... the kidnapping and murder of Mike

the Mouth's only child back in 1898, his first year up with the P. League" (*GAN* 71). Here the allusion is not just to the baseball history of the League but to the literature of 'dime novels' and 'crime fiction' as well. Ben Siegel comments about the narrative's use of such works as a means of parody, black humour and obscenity where "... the baseball diamond (often becomes) a setting for outlandish criminal or heroic exploits and vulgar, ethnic humour" (183). Mike "credited Gil with a second loss" for trying to bean the batter. Gil tried to downplay the matter by justifying it as an 'intentional pass.' Now Gil's perfect record of "14 and 1!" has been converted to a less impressive "14 and 2." But, in spite of the strict discipline enforced by the umpire with the connivance of the General, Gil Gamesh slowly progressed to reach the last game at the end of his very first season as nineteen-year old immortal. He had "... tied the record for the most wins in a single season (4) ... had broken the record of the most strike-outs (349) ... the record for the most shutouts (16) ..." (*GAN* 85).

The battle of words between Gil Gamesh and Mike resume when the umpire refused to count the final out, in the final game of the season, "... because at the moment of the pitch, *his back had been turned to the plate*" (*GAN* 86). The swarm of fans, numbering sixty-two thousand turned savage and demanded the ouster of Mike the Mouth from both the game and the world:

'KILL THE MOUTH! MURDER THE BUM!'

'BANISH THE BLIND BASTARD! CUT OFF HIS WHATSITS!'

'BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!' *(GAN* 87)

Oral excesses had reached a climactic pitch, among the player-participants as well as the spectators when the umpire and the authorities decide for a 'replay' of the pitch. The umpire blurted "Play!" and Gamesh pitched. His rising fastball travelled between "one hundred and twenty and one hundred and thirty miles per hour, "took a curve past the batter and it struck Mike Masterson in the throat" *(GAN* 90). The following days' newspaper announced the death of Mike, but Mike survived only to be muted for the rest of his life.

Smitty's black humour narration of the event culminates in the maiming of the umpire and the banishment of Gil Gamesh from organised baseball. The narrative subverts the media penchant for sensationalism and premature reporting. Mike recovered from his coma in the early hours of the next morning, but could express his demand for the dismissal of Gil from baseball only in writing. The juxtaposition of Mike's and Oakhart's refined language with the obscene baseball slang is a significant aspect of the monumental feud. The dailies sensationalise and serialise the bizarre story of the most

incredible pitcher in Patriot League history, and consequently the mystery of his death/disappearance after a car crash. Several people report sighting Gil at several locations and "like the mythopoeic hero whose name he bears ... rumours about his stubborn immortality persist" (Pinsker 96). Burlesquing the American obsession for hero-worshipping and personality cult, the number '19'—Gil's baseball jersey number—attain mythic value.

In Smitty's third narrative segment, 'The Visitor's Line-Up,' he sketches the character and physical deformity of each player in the Mundy's starting lineup. Physical grotesqueries, physical humour and scatology are marked features of this unit. Vividly sketching the details of every player, it becomes the site of the naming-game, travesty and mythic allusions. Parodic qualities of the narrative are extended to the characters' names. The fabula of the Mundys team of 1943 appropriates names from a great many cultures and mythologies: "Hindu, Greek, Norse, Semitic, Cannanite, Sumerian, Celtic, Iranian, Aztec, Icelandic, Slavic, Japanese and even Easter Island" (Oriard, *Heroes* 251). Onomastics as another language game is widely applied throughout the narrative. A deeper understanding of the allusive associations of the names call for a vigorous effort on the part of the reader. The text presupposes the presence of an implied reader to successfully connect the names emanating from mythology, literature

and real life. The thinness of the border separating illusion and reality is another textual layer of playfulness of Smitty's story.

The first baseman of the team is John Baal. "Baal is the name of the major Cananite god in the Hebrew Bible" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 128). Baal's career takes the reader to the very origins of organised baseball, as he is the third-generation player in his family. His father and grandfather were major league players. The description of the game in its infant stage echoes the aetiological narratives of the Bible concerning the origin of traditions and customs. A regular drunkard and a player with a criminal background 'Big John's and his ancestor's' story illustrate the scatological side of baseball.

> Base's son, and Big John's father, was the infamous pitcher, Spit who in the years before wetting down the ball was declared illegal, would serve up a pitch so juicy that by the end of an inning the catcher had to shake himself off like a dog in came in from romping in the air. (*GAN* 90)

His pitches were virtually untraceable, leave alone hitting it. Opposition mounted against this filthy tactic and the farcical mode in the narrative takes enormous proportions. Somebody suggested that saliva could be allowed but "mucus and phlegm" should be outlawed. The ballplayers "euphemistically" called the saliva pitch "the stringy stuff" (*GAN* 121). In the 1902 World Series, a law was passed against

the anointing of ball with all kinds of foreign substances, by the Patriot League owners. Spit's career came to an abrupt end in the 1903 season, when he did the most outrageous act ever displayed on the baseball diamond. The graphic depiction of the most repulsive slapstick physical humour in Smitty's words is as follows:

> And so before twenty thousand shocked customers—including innocent children—the once great pitcher ... did the unthinkable, the unthinkable, the unpardonable, the inexplicable: he dropped the flannel trousers of his uniform to his knees, and proceeded to urinate on the ball, turning it slowly in his hands so as to dampen the entire surface ... he called 'Here comes the pissball, shithead—get ready!' *(GAN* 122-123)

Although, the trajectory the ball took became a matter of animated discussion for years, Spit was immediately banished from the League and ended up in Nicaragua. Bernard Rodgers comments that, John Baal and Mister Fairsmith can be identified as, "the rogue and gentleman of the American comic situation" (15).

Spit earned the dubious distinction of being the first player to be banished from baseball and the despicable event became "... the first deplorable exception to the Patriot League's honorable record" *(GAN* 122). The narrative technique of mixing actual baseball history with fantasy pervades Smitty's text. The 'earwax controversy' is indeed

part of baseball history. The motif of banishment is worked out at both levels: the team and the individual players. Gil Gamesh's expulsion from major league is the "second deplorable exception" and both players are metaphorically rendered homeless, as they seek out existence in alien countries.

The French-Canadian, Frenchy Astarte, bats first and plays shortstop for the team. He is "the only player ever traded out of his own hemisphere" (*GAN* 111). Until 1941 he was with the Tokyo team of Japan. In the historical context of the world war fought between the two countries, Smitty's text echoes the baseball politics between, them through the character of Astarte. "His speciality was dropping high infield flies. The higher the ball was hit, the longer it gave him to wait beneath it, thinking about Japan and the day he would return to Tokyo and stardom" (*GAN* 113). Nickname Damur, second batter in the team, is just fourteen years old. He is frantically in search for a suitable nickname and suggests many to his teammates. In a narrative where names acquire mythic, allusive and comic significance, he had to settle with 'NICKNAME' as his nickname. His slight built, age and his nickname made him a "mascot to the crowds," but his name became a cause of worry for him. His protest is ignored: "'Nickname' isn't a nickname, it's the *name* for a nickname!" (*GAN* 116). Smitty's exuberant wordplay facilitates the thumbnail sketching of character-players. The left fielder, Mike 'the Ghost' Rama, according to Frank

Adrolino "... is named after the seventh incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu and hero of the epic *Ramayana.*" The Ghost's trouble was the outfield wall and every time he refuses to see the existence of walls he is carried on a stretcher to the hospital. Adrolino further comments on this black humour event: "The ironic allusion here is ... the conflict between materiality or *maya* and the ultimate reality *Brahma.*" Mike Rama is a prototype of "The self-destructive ballplayer" in the factual baseball, named "Peter Reiser" (220). Wayne Heket plays third base and is the oldest Mundy. An old-timer, aged fifty-two, he was a rookie in the year 1909. The night fielder Bud Parusha is another grotesque player-participant. Physical deformity in the form of an absent left arm is well compensated by the use of his mouth. His "singular fielding technique" with the mouth and right arm amused the crowd a great deal. Even with a large mouth, sometimes the ball get stuck paving the way for "an inside-the-mouth grand-slam home run" (*GAN* 135). Mouth again becomes a site for grotesque and farcical physical humour.

Roland Agni, the child prodigy, a kid of eighteen is the right man in the wrong team. His parents are more worried about his character than a successful career in baseball. The overweening pride of the child, who grew up as a hero, in an atmosphere of adulation, made him "contemptuous of everything and everyone around him" (*GAN* 138). His parents thought the best school to teach "values of humility and self-sacrifice" was the Mundys team. Amidst cripples and midgets,

the wonder-boy batted lower down the order, at eight, and was not paid for it. His perfectly V-shaped body was a marvel and the kid's only demand was to be traded. His cry: "Trade me! Trade me away from these freaks and these oddballs" falls on deaf ears. The remaining players are mostly insignificant creatures even in a Mundy team. Smitty classifies them as the "council of elders ... every last one of them flabby in the middle, arthritic in the shoulder, bald on the top." They are in the narrator-subject's words: "... (the) has-beens, might-have-beens, should-have-beens, would-have-beens, never-weres and never-will-bes ..." (*GAN* 143).

The intermingling of anecdotal baseball facts with fiction, lulls the reader into the belief that the paranoid fantasy of Smitty is not an altogether incredulous thing. The extensive use of the narrative elements of tall tale and Southwestern humour as noted by Bernard Rodgers heightens the effect of the allegorical framework of the narrative. Alan Schwartz makes a significant observation about the fabula of Mundys and its 'over-the-hill cast-off' player-participants:

> ... the baseball context ... makes us experience directly the uncertainty of our basic, commonplace assumptions about the nature of truth ... (It) shatters our ability to sort out incredible reality from probable fiction ... (taking) us to a plane of epistemological uncertainty

> (and) paradoxically insists on the importance of remembering history. (41)

Smitty's comic mediation on baseball and history, baseball and myth, fashions a parabolic parodic critique of the disparities in American life.

The "wandering Jews," Mundys, parading from one town to another to play baseball is the text of the narrative unit 'In the Wilderness.' In a bizarre event, the grotesque team is accorded a "pregame ceremonial welcome" and "a parade down the main commercial thoroughfare ... in a city garbage truck" (*GAN* 150). The contingencies of war had necessitated the borrowing of a vehicle from the municipal sanitation department. The Mundys manager, Mister Fairsmith proselytizes on the "subject of suffering."

"The innovative owner of the Reapers declared that afternoon 'Ladies Day,' hoping thus to beef up the skimpy crowd that would otherwise turn out ..." (*GAN* 158). Ladies were admitted free of charge, but the game was suspended for a few minutes when one of the ladies was discovered to be a man. The narrative parodies the "Negro baseball League," a historical reality, through the character of Mazuma and Aunt Jemima. Aunt Jemima established the "Negro Patriot League" and established themselves as the third major Negro League after "the Negro National" and the "Negro American" (*GAN* 161). Mazuma represents the ugly face of organised sport. His lust for money, leads

him to bizarre thoughts: replacing all the white players with blacks is such a one.

The narrative digresses from the 'homeless' condition of the Mundys to ground the fabula in the historical context of baseball. In this endless traversal from one base/town to another, Smitty spoofs the middle class family values of "Momism" and "Dadism." The Mundy players are adopted by spinsters to baby feed, pamper and to put them to sleep. Frank Mazuma's daughter becomes the archetypal American middle-class overprotective child. "Infantilism" and "childish dependencies" as "maladies inherent in American families are caricatured and spoofed" (Jones and Nance 150).

In spite of having all the odds against them, the Mundys managed to sneak a win against the 'lowly' team comprised out of the inmates of a mental asylum in Ohio. The grotesquerie of the visiting team is evenly matched by the grotesquerie of the home team. The game "... was believed to be of considerable therapeutic value to the inmates, particularly the sports-minded among them" (*GAN* 186). The vivid description of the match, abound in banality and slapstick humour. The Mundys are the clear winners on and off the field. Off the field, the team gains in confidence and with renewed vigour they accept defeat in the majority of the remaining matches.

The narrative unit, "Every Inch A Man," focalises the successful introduction of midgets into bigtime baseball. The capability of the

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Kakoola owner, Mazuma, to "outbizarre" the Mundys is exceptional. Bob Yamm the "forty inch high ... sixty five pounds" midget signed a contract with the Reapers in the month of September that season. At the plate, in his batting crouch, "... he presented the pitcher with a strike zone not much larger than a matchbox" (*GAN* 210). The twenty-two year old midget is an exceptional speaker; with his power of rhetoric he became an immediate darling of the media. Frank Mazuma, the wily businessman exploits the pinch-hitter's command over the language and his sophisticated manners. He was given the jersey number "1/4." The General cautioned Mazuma against bringing dishonour to the game and the league, to which he responded by pitching in Yamm at a press conference:

> 'I have it on very good authority,' that the powers-that-be have threatened to pass a law at the next annual winter meeting of the owners of the Patriot Baseball League of America that will bar forever from any team in the league anyone under forty-eight inches in height. This, may I add, even as our country is engaged in a brutal and costly war in behalf of freedom and justice for all. (*GAN* 211)

The narrative conflates several texts into the rhetoric of human rights: baseball, the Second World War and American constitution. The intertextual plane at which the speech is delivered, parodies the

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rhetoric of delusion so prevalent among American politicians and capitalistic forces. The delusion of grandeur blinds him to the realities of the world and the world of baseball. Yamm lives and plays in a baseball world filled with 'otherness' and 'difference.' His transgressive play at language stems from a distorted view of language. He adopts the transgressive role to combat authority and in the process becomes a self-styled spokesman of all midgets, and by extension to all oppressive groups.

Yamm becomes a mere puppet in the hands of the business magnate Mazuma, to further his profit-making endeavours. Baseball aesthetics and the dignity of the game are non-relevant issues to the Kakoola owner. He is a man who lives in complete accordance with the American spirit of success madness. The writer-narrator lampoons the media weakness for hype and yellow journalism. The popular press reflects the taste of the reading public. The fickleness of the nation in running behind such travesties is satirised. The two brilliant orators in the text viz. Mister Fairsmith and Bob Yamm resort to a "dishonest manipulation of language." Jones and Nance make a very important examination in this regard:

> Ironically, Fairsmith's rhetoric of conservatism and Yamm's rhetoric of civil rights sound very much alike. Working from opposite perspectives the conservative and the liberal, each invokes self-righteous, self-evident

> platitudes on behalf of his opinions and each avoids any systematic adherence to logic. (148)

In their play at language, the conservatist and the human rights activist in the league, play out the synecdochical 'transgression' and 'carnival.'

The midgets' discourse takes on every authoritative voice in the country. He challenges the powerful General Oakhart, the policy-makers and the media barons. Along with his "utterly delightful and charming and beautiful Judy Yamm" (*GAN* 216) — the midget-wife of the midget-star, the couple is even considered as the prospective first couple of the country by the over-enthusiastic interviewers and media. They appear on radio talk, magazine covers and crowds flocked the ballparks, wherever Bob Yamm played. Mazuma sensing danger in the enthusiasm generated by the midget gets hold of another midget; the "No.1/2, O.K.Ockatur" (*GAN* 217) as a right-handed pitcher. He was shorter than Yamm and the rivalry began over the number. In the following days the major headlines of the sports pages of the country are filled with the epic quarrel between the midgets. As a consequence, Bob Yamm is ousted from the team, but later reinstated and Ockatur is traded to the Mundys. The Bob Yamm text ends with a ball striking between his eyes and blinding him for life.

The picaresque mode of narrative digresses from the main plot and portrays Mister Fairsmith's adventures in Africa, where he takes

the game of baseball, the national pastime, to the savages. The main strand of narrative that underscores the rest of the fabula is the rhetoric of Communist conspiracy and American patriotism. Mrs. Angela Whittling Trust, the owner of Tri-City Tycoons, perceives an international Communist conspiracy to sabotage Patriot League and the sport itself. Baseball attains symbolic significance as an upholder of American democracy and, as "the very fabric that holds us together as a nation" (*GAN* 287).

Roland Agni, the most dissatisfied man in the team, knocks every door to get himself traded. One night he breaks into the "underground bunker of Angela Whittling Trust" (*GAN* 265). Mrs. Trust is an ex-nymphomaniac who has had affairs with all the yesteryear superstars of baseball: Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Jolly Cholly Tuminikar, Luke Gofannon, and Gil Gamesh. She refuses to trade Roland Agni, but her rhetoric on the insidious Communist conspiracy to destroy the league and thereby baseball baffles the young rookie:

> No, even while this war rages on against the Germans and the Japs, the other war against us has already begun, the invisible war, the silent assault upon the very fabric that holds us together as a nation ... *Baseball*! And that is how they propose to destroy America, young man, that is their evil and ingenious plan—to destroy *our national game*! ... In order to destroy America, the

> Communists in Russia and their agents around the world are going to attempt to destroy the major leagues. They have selected as their targets, the weakest link in the majors—our league. And the weakest link within our league—the Mundys. (*GAN* 287)

Mrs. Trust attributes the 'homelessness' of the Mundys, to this conspiracy. The discourse of communist conspiracy is delivered in the historical context of the cold war between America and Russia. Parodying this version of the rhetoric of delusion and the discourse of McCarthyism, Angela Trust vividly describes the depth of communist infiltration into various American institutions: military, sport, government and capitalistic economy. Mrs. Trust accuses Frank Mazuma as a communist agent, who has already done considerable damage to the very existence of the league. Hyperbolic treatment of the multivalent dimensions of the sporting game of baseball has been so characteristic of Smitty's text:

> When baseball goes, Roland, you can kiss America goodbye. Try to imagine it, Roland, an American summer Sunday without doubleheaders, an American October without the World Series, March in America without spring training. No, they can call it America, but it'll be something very different by then, Roland, once

> the communists have made a joke of the majors, the rest will fall like so many dominoes. (*GAN* 289)

Baseball becomes the synecdochic America. Conflating baseball and America, Smitty's narrative purpose is not to demythologise baseball. The subversion is intended at the polemic of cold war and the distortion of language by the authorities. Baseball provides a different temporality and a different potential for individual achievement. It is the ultimate metaphor for American principles of democracy, free enterprise and individualism. Several of its heroes have fostered the rags-to-riches myth, and the game has promoted the qualities of hard work and success-drive. Baseball preserves the "otherness" that no other American sport can boast of. Amid the chaos of urban life, the baseball parks enliven visions and nostalgia of a pastoral past.

Turned down by Angela Trust, the child-prodigy approaches the Jewish owners of the Greenback team. Smitty caricatures the Jewish life and the Jewish perception of America as a land of opportunity. Abraham, Sarah and their math genius son, Isaac Ellis live above the rightfield scoreboard overlooking the ballpark. Smitty's narrative draws upon the Bible, history of Jews in America, Jewish vernacular humour and actual baseball anecdotes. The child-genius Isaac has devised a baseball strategy which he wants to test on his father's team, the Tri-City Greenbacks. The father, on the other hand, wishes to run the team on traditional baseball wisdom. The ingenious formula,

"the fundamental equation for winning a baseball game" that he develops is:

$$1\ Y = (R\ W)\ (Pb/Pd)$$

He evolves this theory out of his strategy of doing away with the "sacrificial bunt" and the "intentional pass" (*GAN* 294).

Roland Agni desperately looks out to the Greenbacks homeground, from the heights of the scoreboard, contemplating suicide. Isaac approaches Agni and entices him to test the 'extra-energy' doctored wheaties, the "Breakfast of Champions" on the Mundy teammates.

Mister Fairsmith's role as a baseball missionary in America, twenty years earlier is a long digression in the narrative unit of the 'The temptation of Roland Agni.' He undertakes a proselytizing mission of the 'national mania,' to several countries including Japan and Africa, accompanied by Billy, his nephew, a young theology scholar. In an extended parody of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the black African experience of taking the game to the savages is clothed in a language of dark comedy. Fairsmith's adamance to his own principles and the 'rules and conventions' of the game render him into a 'Christian martyr' for a noble cause. Smitty's burlesque of the mission and "Fairsmith's rhetoric of conservatism lumps together everything traditional; customary attitudes and practices in religion, baseball, patriotism, government and family life become interchangeable and are

used to validate one another" (Jones and Nance 148). Strange baseball rituals are enacted with the ritualistic chant "'Omooo! Omooo! Omooo!'" Tied to a stake, the missionaries witness the savages devouring boiled balls. Defiling of virgins with baseball bats and the "hitting contest" with the head of a killed "enemy, or traitor" are the other rituals staged before them (*GAN* 329). As if awakened from a dream, Mister Fairsmith cries out "The horror! The horror!" (*GAN* 332). They manage to escape from the clutches of sacrificial death, because of the benevolence shown by some natives.

The episode is another instance of the scatological basketball as presented in Smitty's paranoid fantasy. Macabre physical humour and obscenity of language facilitate the construct of a parallel world. America has always taken great pride in taking the game to alien cultures. "Baseball as aesthetic ideology" is concerned "with the ways in which American mass culture and leisure activities mediate America's relation to the world" (Duvall 287). The contextualisation of Smitty's baseball narrative, in the aftermath of Vietnam War, Korean War and the bipolar division of the world into two blocks, under America and Russia, attain special significance. Baseball's cultural role within America and its political role outside the country has been a matter of intense debate in the American media, in the decades following the II World War. The narrative "... exhibit(s) historiographic metafiction's self-conscious blurring of the boundary between history

and fiction ..." (Duvall 287). In an endless interplay of history/reality, and fiction/illusion, the figuration of baseball in the Cold War scenario becomes entirely different from the pastoral concerns of the sport. Duvall's observation on the projection of baseball as a tool of imperialism brings out three interrelated points:

> 1)...baseball is why we defeated Germany and Japan 2) baseball is a justified form of cultural imperialism since the game embodies our democratic principles; thus, 3) baseball should be mobilized in the Cold War effort to help define America's difference from Communism and the Soviet Union. (288)

Fairsmith's attempt to impart baseball lessons to the uncivilised savages, although ends in a farcical climax, his baseball rhetoric parodies the American notion of the 'other' as undemocratic and fit for thrusting upon them an essentially "cultural aesthetic form that is American and democratic" (Duvall 290).

The final unit brings back Gil Gamesh, the last real hero of the Mundys team, to America. Gamesh becomes a double agent and the narrative continues with the rhetoric of the goodness of American democracy and the dangers of Communism. After the death of the venerable Mister Fairsmith, Gamesh becomes the manager of the Mundys team. The team, as suspected by Mrs. Trust, is the primary target of the destroyers of America. The banishment of Gil from

baseball, took him to Soviet Russia, where he was enrolled in the "International Lenin School for Subversion, Hatred, Infiltration, and Terror," is known by the popular acronym "SHIT" (*GAN* 355). Six years he spent in Moscow, from where he took a doctoral degree in indoctrination and espionage. In his long discussion with General Oakhart about his adventures in Soviet Russia, Gamesh reveals his mission in America and the basis for his new-found ideology: "All my life I found my strength in rancorous resentment, but only after my banishment from baseball did I plunge headlong into a barbarous world of violence and vengeance, and dedicate myself wholly to destroying what had destroyed me" (*GAN* 354).

Through the character of Mrs. Whittling Trust, the narrative burlesques the McCarthy era. She accused everybody in the Patriot League of being a Communist agent. Gamesh's description of his involvement with the Communist conspiracy supported Mrs. Trust's stand. He further says that: "The fact of the matter is that nobody in all of Russia had the slightest understanding of the political and cultural significance of baseball and its relationship to the capitalist mystique, until I arrived on the scene" (*GAN* 358). Gamesh echoing Mrs. Trust's fanatical rhetoric of Communist conspiracy, names Frank Mazuma, O.K.Ockatur and almost all members of the Ruppert Mundys as being actively or indirectly involved in spying for the Communists.

The narrator Smitty makes a brief appearance through a recorded conversation with General Oakhart. It was "... subsequently introduced into the hearings of a sub committee of the House Un-American Activities Committee ..." (*GAN* 362). Gamesh in his new role as the manager of the Mundys team inspires them to a few victories. He delivers a series of speeches to the Mundys grounded on the ideology of human hatred and the rhetoric of indoctrination. Gamesh's double dealing was identified by Roland Agni and a bizarre sequence of events, characterised by black humour, follows. Smitty's narrative at this point juxtaposes humour with horror. In the game with the Kakoola Reapers, Roland Agni falls dead in the ballpark, after several gunshots are heard. Gamesh is severely wounded and the vengeful umpire Mouth Masterson is identified as the murderer. In one of the most illustrative black humour scenes of the narrative the assassin is found dead inside the scoreboard from where he fired the shots:

> The coroner's inquest revealed that of the two hundred and fifty-six slugs fired by the Kakoola police, one had grazed Mike's ear; however, the long night he had spent with his high-powered rifle in a remote corner of the score board ... dreaming his dreams of vengeance, followed by the excitement of the assassination itself, apparently had enough to cause him to keel over, at eighty-one, a victim of heart failure. (*GAN* 393)

This incident and the subsequent enquiries seal the fate of the League as it now faced certain obliteration from the country's baseball history.

Gamesh, after his return to Moscow in 1953, is executed for being a double agent the following year. The general himself mysteriously disappears during a flight on board a private aircraft in 1956. Since the expulsion of the regular players from the League, the crowd kept away from its games. The Judge Landis Commission was entrusted with the task of cleansing the League and restoring it to its past glory. But he only succeeded in worsening the condition and sabotaging the whole establishment. The findings of the "House Un-American Activities Committee" were described by Smitty as false and baseless, for which he was "... held in contempt of the Committee and was sentenced to a year in the federal penitentiary ... and was paroled after six months ..." (*GAN* 403)

The "Epilogue," similar to the "Prologue" is rendered in the first person singular by directly addressing the readers of Smitty's text. It shows that the text will remain unpublished. He approaches twenty seven publishers to get the 'truth' published and presents several of the rejection-slip statements he has received. Smitty survived the wreck only to face the "derision and scorn" of the publishers:

> I am returning your manuscript. Several people here found portions of it entertaining, but by and large the book seemed to most of us to strain for its effects and to

> simplify for the sake of facile satiric comment the complex realities of American political and cultural life. (*GAN* 408)

He compares his plight with that of the Russian, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who, like himself, "refuses to accept lies for truth and myth for reality" (*GAN* 410). Finally he writes to China's Chairman Mao Tse-tung for help in getting a translated text of the *The Great American Novel* published in his country.

CHAPTER III

THE NARRATIVE PLAY

The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh, Prop., is a parabolic narrative framed in a mimetic structure. The mimetic recreation of the world of baseball, by the creator- participant, Henry Waugh, is private and fantastic. Waugh's game world is "... so completely internalized that it creates its own course and meaning, creates its own myths and rituals" (Berman 210). Virtually every activity in the life of Waugh is impinged upon and controlled by the discursive structure of the game. The external reality of the game world gets subsumed in the narrative of his fantasy.

Henry is an accountant with "Dunkelmann, Zauber and Zifferblatt, Licensed Tax and General Accountants ..." (*UBA* 35). The monotony and boredom of his workaday world, provides absolutely no scope for creativity, for the 'playful' protagonist. His problems are confounded by his boss, Zifferblatt, whose name in German means 'clock-face.' He is a "militant clock watcher," capable of extracting the maximum out of his employees. Henry had so far lived up to the image of a man known for his "life long reverence for hard work and dependability," but of late, since the creation of his 'world of baseball,' that "letting-the-team-down guilt" (*UBA* 35) has been weighing upon him. Play-images of the mimetic game of his creation and play-attitude

to work/reality distract him to the point of making errors in his accounting job and being irregular at the job.

Henry invents a fictive, board game of baseball, a self-enclosed world, which constitutes of eight teams, under Universal Baseball Association. Although the creator/god of his game, his power is limited by the rules and structure of the game. The eight teams play out the 'Association seasons' in the kitchen of his flat through the offices of three dice. "... three ivory cubes, heedless of history yet makers of it ..." (*UBA* 16). Every movement and action is predetermined by the roll of the three dices. The permutations and combinations worked out in every detail, decides not only the destiny of each player, but the ratings of the teams and the survival of the Association itself. "This three-dice system encompasses within its 216 possible combinations all the activity of a baseball game; no action can escape Henry's contrivance" (Miguel-Alfonso 93). Henry compiles ledgers on the play-by-play of each game. In real life too his job is with ledgers, files, accounts and statistics. The systematic manner in which he approaches the stacking and compiling of the record of events in the play world is the other extreme of the recklessness in his accounting job.

The Universal Baseball Association is a microcosmic, self-referential world. Henry respects and adheres strictly to the self-imposed rules of his fantasy world, which require no outside

referentiality. It would be worthwhile to consider Rosemary Jackson's conception of fantasy:

> Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, recombining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new'; absolutely 'other' and different. (8)

For the subject-player, the basis of his real interest is not in the actual baseball, but in the internal mechanism of his organisation and the unpredictability of the development of the game. Henry had tried his hand at many games: "... baseball, basketball, different card games, war and finance games, horseracing, football, and so on, all on paper of course" (*UBA* 44). He had even invented a board game called "Intermonop," a variation on Monopoly. Finally he got fixated to baseball:

> Not the actual game so much—to tell the truth, real baseball bored him—but rather the records, the statistics, the peculiar balance between individual and team, offense and defense, strategy and luck, accident and pattern, power and intelligence. And no other activity in the world had so precise and comprehensive a history, so specific an ethic, and at the

> same time, strange as it seemed, so much ultimate mystery. (*UBA* 45)

Baseball is the national game of America, with the greatest "backlog of memory" and a "homegrown mythology" (Messenger, *Sport* 315). The temporal dimension of the game is determined by the game time, not the clock time. Henry the gamewright enjoys this freedom from the clock, particularly when viewed from the point of view of his ten to four job at the office.

The narrative of Henry Waugh presents a structure with a *mise-en-abyme* effect. The fiction-within-the-fiction schema has as its outer diegesis, the world of the protagonist as an accountant and the fictional world of his creation. The inner diegesis is the world within the Association inhabited by the players, their biographical details; its history; statistics and records. Over and above these two narrative frames is the presence of the author-narrator who acts as the omnipotent super god. There is no authorial intervention in the mimetic world created by Henry, but the protagonist is subject to the entrapment worked out by the author in his labyrinthine 'godgame.' Henry in turn is god in his own respect. Miguel-Alfonso comments that:

> Having realized that he has become the Lord of an entire world, Henry's first gesture is to limit meaning and reference to the self-referential play of 'his won

> reactions.' Henry's responsibilities toward the UBA have given way to a narcissistic consideration of himself as absolute owner ... (98)

His imaginative game world is not merely confined to the playing out of the games and seasons. Henry meticulously works out the lives of the players, on and off the field. Within the field, in the actual game of his play world, he is only a witness/dice roller, subject to the aleatory operations of the dice, the vagaries of chance and fate.

In a rather elaborate way, the subject has worked out the progression of his fictive game. "He had spent the better part of two months just working with the problem of odds and equilibrium points in an effort to approximate that complexity" (*UBA* 20). Initially, Henry tried with a two dice system, but finally settled with three white dices. The "more spectacular events" are triggered by the throw of "triple ones and sixes—1-1-1 and 6-6-6" and are referred to the "Stress chart." The "Chart of Extraordinary occurrences" is referred to when the dice successfully shows triple ones and sixes. Such an occurrence manifests the glorious uncertainties of the game of baseball, both real and fictive:

> These two charts were what gave the game its special quality, making it much more than just a series of hits and walks and outs. Besides these, he also had special strategy charts for hit-and-run plays, attempted stolen

> bases, sacrifice bunts, and squeeze plays, still others for deciding the ages of rookies when they came up, for providing details of inquiries and errors, and for determining who, each year must die. (*UBA* 20)

Henry's design is in no lesser manner detailed and precise, than the actual game's. The "complex dialogic construction" (Miguel-Alfonso 93) details a big cast of character-players, administrators, fans and the sports journalists. In keeping with the baseball paradigm of father-son relationship, his narrative incorporates player dynasties and stars voted to the baseball 'Hall of Fame.'

The narrative opens with the description of the astounding feats of Damon Rutherford, the Pioneer pitcher: "*Rookie pitcher Damon Rutherford, son of the incomparable Brock Rutherford, was two innings—six outs—from a perfect game!*" (*UBA* 4) That afternoon, in the game time, Henry looked at his watch in the real time, it was eleven in the night; in the real world, and the night would be long for him as the game at hand had to be completed. The 'play' of the protagonist in Schillerian terms, is both central and fundamental to human experience, because it is in play that human beings realise themselves or make real—their highest ideals. For Henry the accountant, his game world is the be-all and end-all of his life. Eugen Fink's ontological definition of play characterises the play-mode of Henry: "... the player experiences himself as the lord of the products of his imagination—

because it is virtually unlimited, play is an eminent manifestation of human freedom" (24-25). Henry's respect and commitment to his fantasy world of the Association is genuine; he is neglectful of the next day's work at his office in the real world.

His absorption in the game of his 'inner world,' from a psychological perspective, stems from the basic human liking for role-playing. "Children make-believe in their play, but the fiction they create and impose themselves is to them true" (Wilson 10). The alternate, make-believe world of Henry counteracts the drab reality of the 'outer world' and it supplies him with a vicarious pleasure of authority. Here the role-playing also becomes a means of self-expression. In the narrative, the protagonist/gamewright is in the mode of role-play; the player-characters play roles; the readers of the text of the Association themselves play roles as spectators to the games.

J. Henry Waugh the proprietor of the Association, whose initials with the last letter of his name—H—form the Hebrew symbol or substitute for the name of God, JHWH—Jehovah. The religious overtone in the name of the 'creator' is significant. It is a sure sign of Henry being attributed, godly powers over his creation, by the master-creator/author. The act of naming the players in the Association becomes a major fixation for the creator. The naming-act becomes a highly creative act. In a subversion of the Derridian concept of

Logocentrism, the name, the Word, the Logos becomes the Word of God, "... name a man and you make him what he is" (*UBA* 48). The numbers: statistics and records do not provide life. "He ... needs to suffuse the individuals he has invented with a soul and life ..." (Miguel-Alfonso 95). Names supply identity to the individual players and in carefully naming them, they attain a psychological edge to their personality.

> ... names ... were what gave the league its sense of fulfillment and failure, its emotion. The dice and charts and other paraphernalia were only the mechanics of the drama, not the drama itself. Names had to be chosen, therefore that could bear the whole weight of perpetuity. (*UBA* 46-47)

The difference between a commonplace, uninspiring name like Horace Zifferblatt and Damon Rutherford or a Woody Winthrop is, indeed the "weight of perpetuity." The signification of the names fashion no 'deference,' it only generates a 'difference'; the difference in the geniuses of the players.

When Damon came in to pitch for the first time as a Rookie, "Henry could pick out the ripple of Damon's famous surname," from "the bullish roar of the crowd" (*UBA* 7-8). The Rutherford family is the most famous dynasty in the Association. In the last twenty-six Association years the Pioneers home ground has not witnessed such

delirium in the stands. "... in what seemed like the founding days of the Universal Baseball Association." Damon's father, "the all-time great Brock Rutherford" was "one of the game's most illustrious Aces" (*UBA* 8). It is such animated moments that make the fifty-six year old protagonist, exhilarated and keep going. Unmindful of his age he 'works' late into the night with the help of the necessary paraphernalia of baseball spectating viz. beer and hot dogs.

The eight teams that comprise the Association are the Knickerbockers, Pioneers, Pastime Club, Keystones, Haymakers, Beaneaters, Excelsiors and the Bridegrooms. Brock had come up as a Rookie in year XIX, "... he had powered his way to an Ace position that first year ... lifting the long-suffering Pioneers out of second division into second place" (*UBA* 8). Now when his son plays in front of the proud father, the gamewright himself becomes nostalgic. Brock had remained a star player in the Association for seventeen years: "Still had the record to this day for total lifetime wins: 311! ... 311! ... Brock the Great, Hall of Fame, of course" (*UBA* 8). Henry, lost in the thoughts of Association's yesteryears, noticed the indifference on the face of the batter, Pappy Rooney who "... cared little for the peculiar aesthetics of the moment" (*UBA* 9).

Names form the emotional centre of the game and the Association. Once a player is named, the performance of the player in the games gives him a certain character. Coincidentally, certain names

about which Henry has a great deal of expectations, often display brilliance on the field, as though the impersonal dices heed to the magnetic appeal of the names. "But the basic stuff is already there. In the name. Or rather: in the naming" (*UBA* 48). Since the demand for appropriate names was very high, Henry was very observant. He searched for the right names on the street, in the bus stop, wherever he went and whichever person he came across. "Everywhere he looked, he saw names. His head was full of them" (*UBA* 46). The creative act of naming becomes a double metonymy, a language game, a game-game, in which Henry tries all combinations and recombinations of morphemes, phonemes and words for the right name.

The metaphor of the language game is not confined to the act of naming. It pervades Henry's outer life too. Henry is a frequenter to the Pete's Bar, close to his flat. He is most playful when he is at Pete's—called Jake's by him, because Pete reminds him of "Jake Bradley, one of Henry's ex-ballplayers, a Pastimer second baseman" (*UBA* 21). The bar being his favourite place, all the regular customers are his close acquaintances. The constricted environment of the protagonist's kitchen allows little 'space' for 'playfulness,' when he is seriously at the game. At Pete's, where he relaxes from the game or celebrates from its triumphs he becomes a 'player' in every sense. "A neighbourhood B-girl named Hettie, old friend of Henry's ..." (*UBA* 21), one night in the midst of the glorious performances by Damon went up to kid with him.

Since the setting up of his 'inner world,' Henry hadn't gone to bed with her. The only female in the narrative, Hettie, is both an insider and outsider to the fictive play world of the protagonist. References to this B-girl and conversation with her are part of the historical discourse of the Book of the Association, which runs into several volumes:

> On the title page of each volume were the volume number and the words:
>
> OFFICIAL ARCHIVES
>
> THE UNIVERSAL BASEBALL ASSOCIATION
>
> J.HENRY WAUGH, PROP.
>
> Into the Book went the whole UBA, everything from statistics to journalistic dispatches, from seasonal analyses to general baseball theory. (*UBA* 55)

Hettie is ignorant of the make-believe world of Henry's Association. But she is acutely aware of the man's predilection for the game of baseball. "She no doubt supposing he was one of those ball-park zealots who went crazy every season during the World Series ..." (*UBA* 22).

Conversant in the language of baseball vocabulary and matchingly playful, Hettie and Henry "... often used baseball idioms" (*UBA* 22). After sharing a drink or two with Henry, Hettie complains: "You ain't pitched to me in a long time, you know" (*UBA* 24). Henry does not respond to this invitation, his mind was preoccupied with the

images of the perfect pitches of Damon in the ongoing games. When they were about to part, Hettie in the mood to be in bed with Henry, in an enactment of pre-sex ritual, typical of her, "switched top knee again: call from the deep" (*UBA* 24).

After sharing another drink with Henry asks Hettie, "How would you like to sleep with ... Damon Rutherford?" In a complete identity switch, Henry not only adopts the name of his favourite Rookie pitcher, but assimilates the vigour of the youthful Damon, to have an enormously successful night of sexual play with Hettie:

> The greatest pitcher in the history of baseball, he whispered. Call me ... 'Damon.'
> 'Damon,' she whispered, unbuckling his pants ... sending his pants earthward ... and that girl, with one swing, he knew then, could bang a pitch clean out of the park. 'Play ball!' cried the umpire. And the catcher stripped of mask and guard, revealed as the pitcher Damon Rutherford, whipped the uniform of the first lady ballplayer in Association history ... then ... they ran the bases, pounded into first, slid into second heels high, somersaulted over third, shot home standing up, then into the box once more ... and 'Damon!' She cried, and 'Damon!' (*UBA* 29)

The narrative subordinates the language of sex "... to a lengthy and clever sequence in baseball jargon that describes their night of gala and bonanza scoring" (Gordon 36). The use of baseball jargon in sex is not uncommon among the American youth. Hollywood movies and popular fiction abound in the use of baseball metaphor.

Henry, after "... a best night's sleep in several epochs" (*UBA* 31) and Hettie, perform "ablutions and purifications" (*UBA* 36) went out for noontime breakfast. "Hettie Irden—presumably Gea-Tellus, the earth mother" (Cope 37) has enlivened the sexual life of the ageing recluse through a bedded game of in and out. "Learning Henry's mythic game vocabulary, she absorbs its geometrical limits into the unlimited world of play ..." (Cope 39). Hettie's adeptness at incorporating the baseball metaphors into sex prompts Henry to consider her as a playing partner. "... he felt the loneliness of the game; longed for an equal with whom to reminisce, to judge, to plan" (*UBA* 40). If not as an equal, at least as vice-proprietor. Hettie, the "everybody's type" is an experienced 'batter'; but after absorbing into sex play the metonymic baseball, she admitted: "Baseball was a lot better game that she'd ever guessed ..." (*UBA* 33).

Hettie's sexual encounter with the subject-player "... is one of the book's most dazzling examples of verbal playfulness" (Berman 214). After the 'night game' and the 'forenoon game' of sex with the girl, Henry reports at his office after the lunch hour. His only friend, Lou,

who is his colleague too, casts a sympathetic look at him. The proprietor, lost in the thoughts of his fantasy world, is brought back to the consciousness of the present, by the imposing presence of his boss, Zifferblatt in front of him. "What could he say? Playing baseball between the sheets with a B-girl? Celebrating Damon's Day in the UBA?" (*UBA* 41) Henry smiles at Zifferblatt and looks at the blunders he had made with the ledger entries. "Henry, the mathematical genius ... still suffered from that professional pride of computational infallibility ..." (*UBA* 42). His total absorption in the game world has rendered him impotent to function outside that world.

Trapped in the thoughts of his inner world, the subject utterly sidesteps the power and compulsion of the authority, Zifferblatt. In a carnivalised moment in the narrative "he saw Damon Rutherford down in the locker room ... heard him say: How's that, fella?" (*UBA* 42) Zifferblatt in terrible wrath asks Henry to meet him at his chamber the next morning. With utter disregard to the consequences, "His mind went drifting back to his kitchen table. Big night tonight ... the perfect game. The boy with the magic arm" (*UBA* 43). The pre-match hype and the 'horizon of expectations' was too much for him to contain. Nine minutes before the office hours ended, he closed the books and shut the door to the real world and walked off to his play world.

Numbers and statistics constituted an important aspect of his microcosmic world; it filled the mathematical part of his game. As

Roger Angell has described the game: "Baseball is the most mathematical of sports" (303). The beautifully proportioned, geometrically shaped, diamond—the inner geometric grid, appeals to the mathematically inclined. In his kitchen, before the big game, "The first thing Henry did ... was to bring the Team Standings Board up to date" (*UBA* 52). The proprietor had the forms printed for all the statistics of the game. With absolute precision:

> ... he recorded Games Pitched, Complete Games, Games Won, Games Lost, Shutouts, Strikeouts, Walks, Hits Allowed, Innings Pitched, Earned Runs Allowed, and Special Remarks. There were spaces for writing in, at year's end, the Won-Lost Percentage and Earned Run Average ... At Bats, Runs, Hits, Doubles, Triples, Home Runs, Runs Batted In, Stolen Bases ... with special columns to record Injuries, as well as Most Valuable Player points. As for injuries, these occurred with a dice roll of 3-3-3 ... Finally, the dullest job—recording of fielding statistics. (*UBA* 53-54)

The job that Henry enjoyed most was the writing of these charts and forms into the Book. The Books run into forty volumes. The Association is meaningless without the records—the numbers and figures: "the machinery of the charts" are only the skeletal framework of his text, "he gives the Association body, heart and soul as he sees

the stadium, the sun and the field, as he invents the playing styles, characters and physical appearances of the players" (Caldwell 164).

Before the arrival of Damon, the wonder-boy, for several Association years, the seasons were mechanically played out. The absence of a real genius, after Brock, had left a void in the play world of Henry. Brock was flamboyant; Damon the reserved type. The natural genius of Damon has revitalized the game and the gamewright:

> Henry hadn't been so excited in weeks. Months ... games lived through ... all of it happening in a fog, until one day that astonishing event would occur that brought sudden life and immediacy to the Association ... *The magic of excellence.* (*UBA* 13-14)

Even in the dullest of league years, Henry never played foul with his simulated game. From his vantage position, he remained as a mere observer, to the undramatic narrative rolled out by the dices.

Damon entered the "alternate secondary world" (Jackson 2) of the accountant in the LVIth year of the Association. A twenty-six year patient going-through-the-act for the creator. "Things went routinely through the forty-eighth game of the fifty-sixth season in the UBA" (*UBA* 62). The game at hand was the forty-ninth and Henry plays it on the night after the depressing reprimand he received from his boss. The proprietor's strong desire to make Damon pitch again that night, was a deviation from the normal practice: "It wasn't the recommended

practice to start a pitcher after only one day of rest, but it wasn't against the rules" (*UBA* 63). In such matters the discretion lied with the proprietor. He decides to start Damon and to evenly match the contest, pits the brilliant rookie pitcher, Jock Casey for the Knicks, the opposing team. The crowd went wild at the sight of Damon, "when he appeared on the field to take his warm up pitches." The hometown Pioneers fans started shouting: "Rutherford! Rutherford! Rutherford!" and the dice-roller, the agent of the impersonal hand of fate was too much into the world of his private fantasy. "Henry tried to sit, but he was getting pretty excited himself" (*UBA* 64).

The simulated stadium was filled with an unusually large number of past greats from all those great teams. As Henry made a quick go-through of the history of the Association, his "heart leaped" at the most "incredible" of coincidences: the number 56 had a magical ring about it. In the LVIth season of the Association, the creator and his all-time great Brock, both were fifty-six years old. Wilson's comment merits attention here: "... the godgame depended on a godlike character's creation of an impenetrable illusion ..." (144). After quickly jotting down such "details of pre-game ceremonies ... the game was on" (*UBA* 67). The opposing managers, Barny Bancroft of the Pioneers and Syncamore Flynn of the Knickerbockers, in a rare display of camaraderie had come out with arms over each other's shoulders.

As the game progressed, Damon with a string of records to his credit, and clearly on the way to becoming the greatest: " ... the wicked dice unfold the most catastrophic stroke of bad luck the Association has ever seen" (Caldwell 165). The dice rolled out 1-1-1, not once but twice:

> ... (It) brought the Extraordinary Occurrences Chart into Play! ... Henry could see only one line:
>
> *1-1-1: Batter struck fatally by bean ball*
>
> And the first batter facing Jock Casey ... was the ninth man in the Pioneer line-up: *Damon Rutherford*! (*UBA* 70)

The dice rolling out triple ones, twice against Damon's name had only brought the Chart into play. One more similar throw would seal the fate of the batter. "... there was only one chance in 216 that he'd throw a triple one." (*UBA* 70). But Henry had a sense of foreboding that "the benevolence of fortune will not long endure" (Caldwell 165). In an instance of foreshadowing in the text of the Association, the narrator-author, the omniscient god, foresees the fate of Damon: "Not just a duel of dynasties, but a real duel, a duel to the death between Jock Casey and Damon Rutherford ..." (*UBA* 55). Turning to the table, the gamewright, victim of his own creation faced the inevitable: "Casey pitching to Rutherford on the Extraordinary Occurrences Chart" (*UBA* 71). Caught in the dialectic between the rigidity of the rules and

the unpredictability of chance, the proprietor unwittingly gets transformed into the role of the agent of death:

> The dice felt sticky in his hands ... held his breath, pitched the dice down on the table
>
> He knew even before he looked: **1-1-1**
>
> **Damon Rutherford was dead**
>
> No one moved. All stared at home plate. Damon lay there, on his back, gazing up at a sun he could no longer see. (*UBA* 73)

The god had nothing to do with the death; it was only the internal mechanism of his godgame that accounted for this terrible catastrophe.

Unable to comprehend the reality of his unreal world, "The proprietor of the Universal Baseball Association ... brought utterly to grief, buried his face in the heap of papers on his kitchen table and cried for a long bad time" (*UBA* 76). He felt as if the edifice of his fantasy world had come crumbling down. The fabula of his counter world meets a dead-end. The game halts as the gamewright helplessly watches Damon's teammates closing in on Casey. Unmoved, the pitcher stood by the mound: "Kill him! They cried, they all cried, and now the fans ... Ingram hit him first. Smashed his bony face" (*UBA* 75). Hines, Patterson ... one after the other, the Pioneers beat him up. "No!" Shouted Brock, which brought an end to the assault on the body of

Casey. "Brock stood over his son's body and his quiet mournful gaze shamed them all" (*UBA* 76).

As the centre of his imaginative life meets with an untimely death, evil enters the mind of the creator. "Damon's ... death marks a point of inflection in the novel, from equilibrium to imbalance" (Miguel-Alfonso 98). Utterly unable to come to terms with the death of 'his own man' and completely alienated from the outer life, he spends a few Association days in mourning. Like a possessed man, Henry walks to Lou's apartment/cathedral, with the funeral wreath in his hand. This is the most moving scene in the text of the Association. Henry expects all the players to be present: the old timers and Damon's contemporaries. Lou could only comprehend that somebody close to Henry has passed away. The disjointed, nonsensical manner in which he replied to the questions of Lou left his friend "... wide-eyed ... in a state of total and mournful perplexity" (*UBA* 91).

One of the retired players, Sandy Shaw, a folk-balladeer cum ex-baseballer sings a number of country songs "that touches on the eternals of sex and death" (Cope 37). Songs form an integral part of the inner world of the protagonist. Baseball and country music are two staples of American culture according to Frank W. Shelton: "Country songs serve as a vehicle for the folklore of baseball" (82).

Oh, rookies, come along

And hear m' sad song!

Old age is the bane of mankind

So enjoy while ya may ... (*UBA* 99)

At Jake's bar, the ex-players are treated to a number of songs, all dwelling upon baseball heroics, the glory of the game, the passage of youth and nostalgia. Sandy voices the "athlete's acute awareness of the impermanence of the flesh" (Hume 130).

The death of Damon marks the beginning of Henry's extinction as an impartial proprietor and record-keeper. "He was destroying the Association ... he kept no records, hadn't even logged a single entry in the Book" (*UBA* 176). He started retreating from his mimetic world and "the impartiality of objective reference" (Miguel 96) gradually slipping into the abyss of "a narcissistic consideration of himself as absolute owner" (Miguel-Alfonso 98). Visions of authorial powers and self-consciousness fill his mind. The virtues of flawless mimetic artist had kept him aloof from the fray. Even in the twenty-six, uninspiring 'league years,' he desisted from any self-conscious act. With religious devotion, single-mindedly, he had observed his role as creator-god. His unmediated play world has now become the locus for the designs of a radically self-consciously creator. "He'd been obsessed with a single idea; to bring Casey and the Knicks to their knees ..." (*UBA* 176). Jock Casey, the murderer became the object of his wrath. To this end, he alters the fundamental structure of his operation and gives up the randomness of his game, "to assume a full-scale godlike attitude

toward the UBA" (Miguel-Alfonso 97). Strategies of individual teams have now become the subjective whim of the gamewright. "Despite these modifications, Waugh continues to respect the aleatory operation that generates the course of events" (Caldwell 166). At least for a day, he wished to see the Knickerbockers drop behind the Pioneers in the team standings.

Before realising the potential of his authorial control, Henry had a mind to do away with the Association altogether. On second thoughts, he understood that surrendering to the powers of a self-conscious creator is as good or as bad as killing or quitting the Association. The games have been turned into worthless events; skeletal frames of numbers and statistics, stripping it of excitement. Wilson's theory of godgame postulates that:

> In a godgame, one character (or several) is made a victim by another character's superior knowledge and power ... A godgame signifies a game-like situation in which a *magister ludi* knows the rules (because he has invented them) and the character-players do not. (124)

Jock Casey the character-player becomes Henry the character-creator's target in particular, and the character-players of Knicks' team and team management, his other victims. At another level the author plays on the consciousness of his subject. Henry begins to perceive himself as the author-creator. Berman has this to say in this regard:

"... has always intended the reader to see him: as both the subject and object of play, as player and toy, as creator and participant" (218). The coincidence of the death of Damon, exactly on Brock Rutherford's Day, is an "authorial machination, a contrivance designed to point up the limitations of Henry's commitment to the dice. This is precisely the point where the author-god starts playing the game of 'entrapment.' Jock Casey is victimised by the gamewright, but the gamewright himself becomes a victim to the "superior knowledge" and power of the super-god.

Henry's initial design was only to bring Casey and Knicks down to their knees, at least for a day. He longed for the resurgence of the Pioneers. "But in mocking irony, the more he crushed Knicks, the more the Pioneers fell away" (*UBA* 176). Things came to such a state that he witnesses the Pioneers plummeting to the bottom half of the table. At this point, his friend from the real world pays a visit to him at his flat. As a means of "infusing life and meaning into the game" (Berman 211), Henry entertains the idea of sharing the game with Lou. For the first time an 'outsider,' enters the "temporary world circumscribed by play" (Huizinga 135). Henry and Lou share the pizza and beer that he had brought. In a rather profane manner, Lou with his sticky hands handles the records; for Henry, his play-sphere is sacred, hence washes his hands and starts the game. Lou doesn't care to listen to the inner dynamics of Henry's play-world. He says "I'll pick it up as we go

along ... inexperience was one thing, complete and disinterested ignorance another" (*UBA* 179). Huizinga calls such intruders "spoil sport" (38), Robert E. Neale uses the term "funster," to describe such violators of the play-spirit. He explains that: "The funsters seek diversion from work, but the result is only diversion from life" (173). The gamewright takes up the next game, which is incidentally between the Knicks and the Pioneers. He offers Lou the Knicks' side and takes for him the Pioneers team. In all earnestness, keeping aside his evil designs, Henry makes an attempt to restore the play-world's faltering order. "He didn't seem to be playing with Lou, but through him, and the way through was dense and hostile" (*UBA* 185). Lou, failing to understand the magnitude of the fictive world, merely concentrates on his team's fortunes. Henry displays amazing self-control and submerges his consciousness in these moments. But Lou only manages to complicate things for Henry, which reaffirms the highly individualistic nature of the fictive game.

In an unguarded moment, Henry painfully witnesses Lou accidentally spilling beer all over his Association and its history. "It's all over, he realized miserably, finished. The Universal Baseball Association, proprietor left for parts unknown" (*UBA* 199). The 'spoilsport' and 'funster' in Lou allies to shatter the table, Henry presents the picture of a man bereft of all hopes. "Great moments from the past came floating to his mind, mighty old-timers took their swings

and fabulous aces reared back and sizzled them in ..." (*UBA* 199). The protagonist dismisses Lou from the game, cutting off his only remaining connection with the outer world. In an earlier scene, Hettie went off from the accountant's life after having a second bout with him. In that sex-play, Henry had assumed the role of Swanee Lee, the veteran pitcher. That was in the post-Damon era and although he had banked on the "phenomenal staying power" of Lee, his "performance lacked magic" (*UBA* 186). Unyielding to Hettie's demand for the ritual "benedictive slap on her bottom" (*UBA* 175), she walked off from his life. The alienation becomes complete when Zifferblatt dismisses him from the job.

Neither the play-world, nor the outer world, at his disposal, Henry now turns inward to his mind. He decides to "liberate the league from the tyranny of chance" (Caldwell 167). The only solution that remains for him is to murder the killer of Damon. The player-protagonist can now be very specifically placed in the "semiotic quadrant" that Messenger has mapped out (12). Using the semiotic theory of A.J.Greimas, Messenger frames a semiotic square, a paradigm: "... a four term homology designed in quadrants to elicit 'semes' of meaning" (*Sport* 12). Henry and his players, traverse each of these quadrants. Messenger explains his semiotic construct with reference to the text of the Association as follows:

> The structure is richly fleshed out along every axis. We move from the individual passions of Henry Waugh and his 'sons' in *individual sports heroism* to the enormous material responsibility of the Association's history in day-to-day operation, a massive *collective sports heroism*, to the historical crisis and resultant collapse into spiritual rebellion in *anti-heroism* of the players in the Damonsday ritual, where they pointedly desire to 'become' their roles in ritual, to witness order and to *be* it. (*Sport* 344)

The four poles on which the 'semiotic square' is hinged are 'play,' 'individual sports heroism,' 'collective sports heroism' and 'anti-heroism'. From pure unadulterated play Henry too—not merely his players—moves to the realms of individual sports heroism. In creating visions of heroism through such players as Brock and Damon, the player in Henry too rise to the level of heroism. The cumulative success of his Association and individual teams, until the death of Damon, can surely be attributed to Henry too, as much as his players. From collective sports heroism, Henry plunges into the depths of anti-heroism or even the extreme form of it: 'villainy'. In deciding to wilfully manipulate the dice to kill Casey, the creator-player has completed a 'home run,' symbolically, by touching the four bases of the 'semiotic quadrant.' Henry's home run, rather than being acknowledged as an

act of heroism, is a clear act of 'transgression.' He has transgressed from the discourse of self-imposed rules and morality.

Playing with the transgressive act of cheating: "He saw the dice, still reading 2-6-6, and demonstratively reached forward and tipped the two over to a third six" (*UBA* 200). The dices now show 6-6-6, the sign of Anti-Christ. Henry Waugh, the mimetic artist has become a thing of the past. Huizinga's play theory states: "The reality of the natural rhythm of genesis and extinction has seized hold of his consciousness, and this, inevitably and by reflex action, leads him to represent his emotion in an act" (180). Only the second time in its fifty-six Association years' history, the game now moves to the Extraordinary Occurrences Chart. The bottom line of the Chart states:

> ***6-6-6:*** *Pitcher struck fatally by line drive through box; batter safe on first; runners advance one.* (*UBA* 200)

One more triple six and Jock Casey would be done with it. Himself a victim of godgame, Henry "... finds himself in the bewildering necessity of having to think himself out of a context that he cannot understand" (Wilson 125). He paces up and down the flat, unable to come to terms with the impending murder. He thinks of burning the whole thing and getting back fully to the real world. Unable to decide the next course of action, he goes to bed and come back to the 'entrapment' he is in, the next morning. The gamewright and his Association become part of a

larger game being played by another god-figure—the author. Wilson postulates the theory of godgame as:

> ... the literary situation in which one character of superior intelligence and cunning creates a context of contrived bamboozlement that forces another character to struggle, as within a complex cognitive trap, to discover the godlike gamewright's hidden rules (that is, to think his way out or to 'play through' ... (7)

Jock Casey, the only mortal in this 'contrived bamboozlement' was still seen waiting in the mound: "Sometimes Casey glanced up at him—only a glance, split-second pain, a pleading—" (*UBA* 202). Without calling it a day the proprietor had gone to bed, leaving his players in a state of suspended animation. But not capable to sleep, he got up and made his way to the kitchen table. Picking up the dice and shaking it he says: "I'm sorry, boy," consequently, "... holding the dice in his left palm, he set them down carefully with his right. One by One. Six, Six, Six" (*UBA* 202). Damon has been revenged. The proprietor of the Association vomits profusely after the murderous act, and then falls asleep.

Henry, the participant-god has vanished; he no longer plays a simulated baseball game of chance and probability. His game has transformed to "a game-game, a meta-game ..." (Caldwell 167). The outer narrative remains as conventional as ever, the author-

gamewright still invisible. "The master of the game is godlike in that he exercises power, holds and advantageous position, will probably be beyond detection ..." (Wilson 124). The author as gamewright and Henry as gamewright, both characterise and "capture the pure insideness of a godgame," which his akin to George Steiner's remarks upon the "queer, still violence that chess engenders" (Wilson 174). The Association and its activities take the season to its logical end. The murderer-gamewright has done away with a major player of his games; the quietness with which a pawn is removed from a chessboard.

The text of the Universal Baseball Association enters a new phase. In Caldwell's view: "The gamelike qualities of the narrative disappear as *alea* yields to authorial design as the fundamental operation of text production" (167). The games are now played out in a time-vacuum. "Players hit balls, moved around bases, caught flies, but as though at rest, static participants in an ancient yet transformed ritual" (*UBA* 203). The Association now runs only on its skeletal frameworks; numbers and game statistics. Even the records are not kept, "... the endless possibilities that loomed large at the beginning ... evaporate" (Miguel-Alfonso 99). Bancroft's Pioneers started winning games and in the final standings in the year LVI, the Pioneers rose to the third position from the bottom. "The static part of the game, this between-seasons activity ..." (*UBA* 205) of writing the history and bringing the records up to date was uppermost in his mind.

Henry conceives of every possible event, to highlight the LVIth Association year, as a special year in its history. "He'd considered a UBA anthem, a monument, a violent change in the playing rules, even a revolution ... a revolt that would establish, ultimately a rival league" (*UBA* 205). Damon and Jock Casey have already been inducted to the Hall of Fame. Henry successfully compiles the statistics of the year. "From the Era of Chance, the Association passes into the rich and turbulent Era of History" (Caldwell 167). Finally, Henry decides to produce "a compact league history, a book about those fifty-six years." The book would be entitled: "The UBA in the balance" (*UBA* 212). He entrusts the task of writing this book on Barney Bancroft, his alter ego: "the only ... truly human participant in that incredible drama. Maybe the only real one" (*UBA* 223). By assigning his own function as league historian to one of his characters, Henry creates another frame and infinite possibilities for a further narrative. The figure of Barney Bancroft looms large in the final section.

The last unit of the narrative of the Association effects a change in narrative technique. The action is narrated in present tense as against the past tense used in the rest of the narrative. The text of the "Great Confrontation" (*UBA* 168) is essentially an interpretation of the Association from the point of view of Bancroft. Caldwell has rightly described this phase of the Association as "the Age of Interpretation" (168). The players become Bancroft's spokesmen, in effect, voicing the

author-narrator's views. They freely voice their concerns in a philosophical vein. From being mere players in the Association, the present generation of players has become individuated and is capable of raising existential questions. They question their role in the myth and the symbolic value of the game in which they are asked to play. However, they are very much aware of their helplessness. Neil Schmitz' comments: "... (they are) characters aware of their characterization, fictional pawns trapped in a text that has failed to give them life" (133). The characters become narrators themselves. The development of the narrative from mimesis to self-consciousness becomes absolute. As Miguel-Alfonso observes: "... self-consciousness is the *necessary* final stage of any mimetic construction." Henry, the creator-god has disappeared completely from the 'Parable of the Duel.' The author/game frame of reference is lost and the "Effacement of the author" (105) has taken place. Henry the creator has now only the role of a reader/spectator.

The importance of historical discourse does not disappear with Henry. The Association is now one hundred and fifty seven years old. It is:

DAMONSDAY CLVII (*UBA* 219)

The narrative of the Association has taken a big leap to the year CLVII, the 157th year. The ritual enactment of the duel has been going on for a century now. "The annual rookie initiation ceremony, the

Damonsday reenactment of the Parable of the Duel, is an Association secret" (*UBA* 220). The text of the ritual enacted in this last inning of the narrative opens the possibility of endless speculation on the part of the player-actors. The fundamental basis of the ritual is a "Return to the simplistic and pious view of Damon as Good and Jock as Evil" (*UBA* 221).

"... Damonsday is a day of judgment for the rookies, an initiation ceremony for each new crop of innocents (Berman 219-220). One of the best rookies of the season, representing either Rutherford or Casey, will inevitably be killed by a bean ball. Paul Trench and Hardy Ingram, play the roles of Royce Ingram and Damon Rutherford, respectively. The myth of the text does not rely on any popular myths to enact the 'duel'. The rich tradition of the Association, the legendary battle between Damon and Casey becomes the source, out of which the author creates his own myth. The most important transformation has occurred in the consciousness of the player-participants. The participants question the "divine nature of the universe; it questions the pattern which men impose on events and the myths which arise from events" (Shelton 87). They are no longer mere participants but player-actors. The players in the Association are now trying to distinguish between the reality of their own world and the ritual they are about to perform, a play-form within the play-world (Berman 221). As Cuss McCamish, the most notable player-philosopher remarks: "We

are mere ideas, hatched whole and hapless, here to enact old rituals of resistance and rot" (*UBA* 230). The reactions of the players vary from harmless philosophical musings on the meaning of life to highly critical interpretations of the relevance of such a 'sacrifice' of the most brilliant rookie every year. The focus of the text of the parable is on the attitude of the players to such a duel.

The last part of the 'duel' focuses on Hardy and Paul, the most philosophically aware participants, discussing at length about the meaning of the league's history. "Hardy Ingram is actually a Caseyite and cannot quite believe that by some ironic twist he must play the role of Damon Rutherford (Berman 221). Paul Trench, destined to play the role of the Royce Ingram is powerless. "He wants to quit—but what does he mean, 'quit?' The game? Life? Could you separate them?" (*UBA* 238). The 'Great Confrontation' is a text, the climax of which has been decided elsewhere. The actor-players are mere pawns in the hands of a none too benevolent god, who witnesses the events from a position high above.

Bizarre events, bordering on the level of black humour marks the last part of the text of the duel. The reader/spectators aware of the impending act of violence on the field wait with abated breath for the ritualised murder. In a very interesting discussion between the players of the duel, one player comments that: "Hey, I just got the word, men, this game is fixed!" Pat comes the reply from Cuss McCamish: "That,

my boy,' ... is the immortal parable's very message!" (*UBA* 225). Skeeter, one of the enactors of the duel, advises Hardy/Damon to step back when the pitch comes his way: "... they're really gonna kill you out there today! ... Hardy feels a cold chill rattle through him ..." (*UBA* 227). Screaming "Damon!" ... "Damon!" and "Damon!" ... "Rutherford! Rutherford! Rutherford!" (*UBA* 228-229). The players walk miserably toward the centre of action, thinking of life, death and the meaninglessness of the universe.

The "story-time" of the narrative of *Whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus of the Chicago Bears?* is set in the depression-hit America of the 1930s. The order of events is not in a linear progression. Meyer, the scrap-metal, sculptor-artist is the first-person narrator of the events. He specialises in athletes, jugglers and acrobats, and is based in Chicago working for the Works Progress Administration. A politically radical individual, his companionship is with people who have enlisted in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Meyer's apartment is their meeting point. Leo, the most articulate and influential labour strike organiser is the ideologue of the group.

Gloomy Gus, the celebrated half-back of the Chicago Bears football team of yesteryears, is the protagonist of Meyer's narrative. The outer diegesis is the tale of the group's present activities, which happens in the year 1936, to which Gus is a recent addition. The inner diegesis narrates the story-events of Gus's past life: from his school

days to his professional football days. Meyer focalises the events of the narrative, through the technique of flashback. The narrative opens with the information of the death of Gus: "And here in Chicago Gloomy Gus is dead" (*GG* 9). He died during the steel workers' strike at Republic Steel. It was Leo's idea to have an ex-football star among the demonstrators, to boost the morale of the striking workers. "... a lot of steelworkers are football fans. Leo thought that an expression of solidarity from a famous star like Gus could make a strong impression on them" (*GG* 32).

Gus had just been released from a mental institution. Meyer is in a deep identity crisis. As a socialist with leftist ideology, his commitment to the cause of humanity does not facilitate his creativity: "... the unresolvable conflict—between the demands of artistic excellence and of ideological commitment" (Frick 217). He is caught in a creative paralysis, after hearing about the massacre at Guernica. The narrative, through the stream-of-consciousness technique, effects an endless 'play' of the past and the present through the mind of Meyer. The historically verifiable events and anecdotal references to the past life of Gus commingle in the narrative. Christian K. Messenger describes the coming together of the protagonist and the narrator as: "Gus and Meyer meet in the football realm of 'collision.'" (*Sport* 296). Meyer is not a football fanatic, but he has an appreciation for the aesthetics of the game. The speciality of Meyer's sculpture is in

capturing the beauty of calisthenics. Using flattened metals scraps, he depicts "motion through an inert object" (Messenger, *Sport* 296). His major diversion from work, is watching children playing football, baseball and basketball, in the school ground in front of his studio. On one such instance he reflects on games, its aesthetics, philosophical import, metaphors and its place in his life:

> Participation was what I loved about ballgames, still do. Participation in the movement. It's what I love about socialism, theater, life itself, but it's a real involvement just the same, a real dialectic ... more in love with the choreography of gesture than with its aims ... Gliding toward a flyball, I often arrived too late for the catch ... (*GG* 82)

For Gus, participation was not everything. "Winning was everything for him." In a magazine interview he said: "I never in my life wanted to be left behind" (GG 82). In his characterisation of Gus, Meyer adopts both types of "textual indicators of character ... direct and indirect presentation" (Rimmon-Kenan 59). Through a series of adjectives, spread out throughout the narrative, Meyer vividly portrays the character of the protagonist.

In the narrative, only the footballer's girlfriend—Golda, a Jewish girl, in the outer narrative—uses his real name, Dick. Right from his school days he has been know by his 'onomatopoeic' and 'articulatory'

nickname, 'Gloomy Gus.' The title of Meyer's narrative, owes to a journalistic feature on Gus after being out of the team: "... the genre of news articles that seeks out that oxymoronic creature, the forgotten celebrity" (Frick 218). The phenomenal rise and fall of the Bears' football star made him the most enigmatic player of the decade. Success became a monomania for the highly temperamental player-protagonist. His chosen fields were football and sex. The spectators and the public have no clue to the sudden 'obliteration' of the halfback from the team and the NFL. Thomas Pugh's comments would throw ample light on the character of Gus:

> His success, it turns out, was not due to his being a natural, but to his being a marvel of discipline. He learned every single move by heart; in order to function, he had to rehearse all of them daily, re-booting himself like a computer. The same approach to success was taken in the field of sex. He achieved perfection in both at the price of turning into an automaton. (74)

In his adolescence and youth, in the school and college, he had tried his hand at almost everything and met with success. He had been a good actor, good at academics, politics, and public speaking. Frick makes an interesting observation in this regard: "Gloomy Gus is a failure at the two things that the adolescent American male is told

matter most: football and girls" (218). The rest of his life, he devotes to a relentless pursuit of success in these two fields.

The narrative has a "meta-comic structure" which allows Meyer to probe "some of the aesthetic and ideological problems involved" (Pugh 74) in analysing football and politics. The artist-narrator reconstructs the bizarre life of Gloomy Gus which borders on the grotesque and has elements of black humour in it. The star football player is brought to the group by one of its members. Gus had been out of the team by that time, and was an actor in a WPA project, for which Ilya, the person who introduced him to Meyer, was composing a score for. "It was a couple of weeks before we found out who he really was, and then thanks mainly to a reporter for the Hearst chain assigned to do a 'Whatever Happened to —?' story on him" (*GG* 43). It took them a while to understand his character. His personality was marked by unresponsiveness and discourtesy. He was completely oblivious to the surroundings and abhorred all kinds of niceties and sensitivity. Meyer colourfully describes the first impression the ex-celebrity has created on his newly acquired friends:

> He was a bulky man—too bulky for an actor ... rather small for a pro half-back—with a wide sloping nose, an intense but unfocused gaze, and a bushy black beard ... Gus not only lacked political awareness, he lacked awareness of any kind. He had no core at all. Unless

> pure willpower has some kind of substance, amounts to some kind of character ... it was this nothingness at the center that we all settled on as the essential Gloomy Gus. (*GG* 43-44)

'Pure willpower' is his forte. The inflexible will is a necessary quality for any professional player. He sweats it out in the field, trying to sharpen his skills in capturing the ball in its aerial flight and the consequent touchdown. As Messenger remarks: "Gus takes repetition to nightmare lengths" (*Sport* 296). In taking the football metaphor of 'repetition' to such a bizarre level, he fails to imbibe 'play-spirit'. His practice sessions become a 'computer programmed' regimen, devoid of joy, freedom and creativity, the essential elements of any play.

Meyer collects information about the practice schedule that Gus worked out to get into the Chicago Bears team from many sources. Gus's brother retrospectively reflects upon his brother's insistent efforts. The first-person retrospective narrator constructs the text of his discourse on Gus's football career from other sources as well. He consults the Hearst reporter:

> ... doing the whatever-happened-to wrap-up ... Neither man was very intelligent and I had to piece a lot of it together myself, but I was helped by the sportswriter's notes and a scrapbook of Gus's football career ... with some testimonials from girls he'd had. (*GG* 94-95)

The narrative takes us back to the college days of Gus, at a point where he decides to simplify his complex life. He had been into so many activities and as he revealed in an interview later he confines himself to 'playing football' and 'screwing girls.'

The 'repetitive mode' that Gus stuck to in horning his football skills is indiscriminately applied to matters of sex too. As a pro "Girls admired Gus apparently, but they didn't have much fun with him." He was victim to a strange paranoia; "stimulated by some advertisement maybe, about having bad breath." As in football, failing to elicit any emotional joy or creativity out of his sexual exploits, he went through every conquest as a ritual stripped of ceremonies: "the artist fixated on technique" (Frick 218). One of his freshman teammates described the essential Gus in this manner: "Dick had two left feet. He couldn't coordinate" (*GG* 97). Incapable of free motion or lacking the intelligence for any improvisation Gus epitomised the pinnacle of discipline.

In spite of his efforts, his "uncontrollable overeagerness" led him to the offside trap immediately after the game began. Meyer calls it "... a short-circuited stimulus-response system in which everything operated on the knee-jerk principle" (*GG* 99). The tragic flaw in the tale of this footballer made him turn to an automaton. Practicing endlessly to alter his destiny, he worked ceaselessly and "... set aside thirty minutes every day to practice not going offside" (*GG* 101). The habit of scheduling his time was with Gus from his childhood.

Unlike baseball, football has nothing to do with 'numerology,' but Gus's football practice, his games and even his life is stimulated and patterned by the number '29.' To get rid of the problem of offside, he used his younger brother as the dummy defender against his offences. The number '29' did not have any significance in Gus's life until that moment when they arbitrarily chose it. All that Gus needed for a perfect touchdown was "that split second delay" for not being offside. Gus's tough practice schedule to get into the team began in 1930 and his brother feels that Gus chose '29' thinking that it would bring that much needed 'delay.' The practice schedule did pay-off in the field, as Gus got into the team and "for the first time in his football career Gus managed to stay down until the ball was snapped." Off the field, it did have drastic fallout. He was locked in the rest of his life, into a programmatic response, such that: "Everytime somebody shouted '29' after that, he was off and running" (*GG* 103).

Sacrificing every other activity in his life, except his dates with the girls, the protagonist went on increasing the hours of his practice schedule. In between this schedule he squeezed in a thirty minute every day, practicing the art of sex. Since it was not easy to find girls to practice with, his brother doubled here too as a "tackling dummy" (*GG* 106). He soon gives over entirely to mastering these two crafts. Through disciplined technique, he understood he could learn the "virtually infinite" responses "with which opposing teams and girls

might confront him" (*GG* 108). Since nothing came naturally to him and having mastered football's principle of repetition he played at "the constant repeats and the abrupt dismissals" in his sex-play too, to the utter consternation of the consenting girls.

Caught in the labyrinth of the formal structures of his response mechanism, Gus completely shuts out the outside world. The obsession with aesthetics has been a vexing problem for the narrator too. Meyer confesses: "I'm afraid we had a lot in common, Gloomy Gus and I, more than I've sometimes wished to admit" (*GG* 107). The view of the narrator that the protagonist is his double, make him self-conscious. He fears that Gus's fate is awaiting him too. Meyer too tries to isolate himself from human contact. Frick's comment would throw more light on the mental state of Meyer:

> Feeling a catharsis in Gus's death, that inspires him to work, the artist declines a series of invitations to join in fellowship with his friends ... Gus could become a great 'lover' and football player only at the cost of his humanity, Meyer too must make a similar sacrifice if he is to realize his creative dreams ... Art steals from life, while leaving its practitioner less than fully human. (219)

But Meyer the protagonist keeps the door to his flat unlocked, inviting fresh ideas and the comfort of humanity. For the better part of the

narrative, the artist-narrator had been in search of finding the right eye for his life-size sculpture of the Russian writer Maxim Gorky. He gives up his quest for the "unachievable perfect state" and resigns to "a diversity of expressive forms" (Frick 219-220).

Aesthetics of football and aesthetics of art are two of the dominant discourses in the narrative. Gus displayed brilliance on the field, although for a short duration, by imbibing the basic patterns of the game, viz. repetition and collision. "... (He) 'lurched out of control' slamming into the opposing line or some poor potential lover ... "and attained glory (Messenger, *Sport* 74). In his prime, which only lasted one single season, he broke almost every record in the game. But lack of imagination, and the inability to creatively respond to the situation at hand, other than the rehearsed one, brought his career to an abrupt end. "The other teams started filming his play and soon discovered a number of seemingly fixed patterns. They began to predict and intercept his moves" (*GG* 137). It was the Giants who tackled him by having a spy from the Bears. The reserve Bear lineman was used to obtain first hand intelligence about Gus's practice routines. "They shouted out numbers when plays were being called, and by halftime had hit on '29' to make him go offside" (*GG* 140). The magic number '29,' passed on to other teams as well and all of his playoff opponents learn that he reacts only to numbers and his football career comes to an end with the most bizarre incident on a football field:

> That was when the Giants played their sneaky ace in the whole. They had got hold of one of the professionals Gus slept with for his night time sex drills ... The Bear quarter back called a long downfield pass to Gus. Gus broke out of the huddle to see the girl standing behind the Giant line. He walked forward, going offside as the ball was snapped, and the Giants opened up to let him go through ... in Giant territory ... Gus was giving the packed stadium a show of his own. (*GG* 141)

A fatal flaw in his system is the cause for this terrible mix up of his two disciplines. The referee did everything in his powers to separate the two. But Gus had been programmed to perform his drill for thirty minutes and as he went through the act in full glare of the spectator and players, the cops intercepted and broke it up. They beat him up so heavily that, "To a man like Gus, with no past and no future, such a beating is a kind of death ... The intricate mechanism comes unglued ... and like with Humpty-Dumpty, there's no way to put it back together again" (*GG* 142-143). Gus ends up in a mental asylum and out of it he joins the radicals.

The narrator, although metaphorically a static figure, narrates the entire event in the course of his walking home from the hospital after Gus's death. Meyer has the quality of omniscience that Rimmon-Kenan identifies as "familiarity, in principle, with the characters' inner

thoughts and feelings; knowledge of past, present and future; presence in locations where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied ..." (96). Meyer at one point is forced to look at the sexual intercourse between Golda and Gus in his flat. Upon Golda's request, he watched the whole scene, to understand how Gus went on with the act of seduction "without ever feeling lust, much less love" (Frick 218). This act of seduction had been a regular Friday afternoon schedule in Gus's life in the outer narrative. Golda loves Gus very much, but for him it was a passionless act like the rush to the 'endzone.' Once when Golda said her age was '29' Gus's 'stimulus-response system' spurred him to treat her like and opposition tackle and the result of which was severe injuries.

Meyer the artist does not succumb to the neurosis, which affected Gus the athlete. Although the narrator identifies himself with the protagonist, he aspired to remain in balanced motion, both in life and art. He explicitly states his conception of the aesthetics of art and football:

> ... bodies in motion, for me the central thing about life ... motion is all the magic I need. And these figures of mine are real sentient bodies at full stretch ... The strange ambiguity of the ball fascinates me ... I prefer the greater dynamism of the ballplayers ... the collision of forces ... And football is not about violence or atavistic impulses,

> it's about balance. The line of scrimmage is a fulcrum, not a frontier, the important elements of football being speed and weight. The struggle is not for property, it's for a sudden burst of freedom. And the beauty of that. In football, as in politics, the goal, ultimately, is not ethical but aesthetic. (*GG* 91).

In art, in his sculpture, he combines the aesthetics of art and play. The concept of play is internally connected with the concept of the artwork as is evident from the idealist concept of play in the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller.

The concept of 'pure play' or the most important elements of play: joy, freedom, creativity, mystery and beauty, as enumerated by the play theorists are lacking in Gus. What drew him to football was the challenge it offered. He was not good in football as in other things. According to his nature: "What he did well, he took no pleasure in, while what he did badly made him very upset" (*GG* 94). Gus had become the eleventh fatality at the Republic Steel strike. It was during the violence of the 1937 "Memorial Day demonstration Sunday" (*GG* 12). The labour confrontation that erupted there was mainly between the strikers on one side and the strike breakers and the cops on the other side. Gus was neither an organiser nor an activist. He became a victim of his own neurotic 'stimulus-response system,' "caught offside once again and for the last time, his original sin" (*GG* 12). When the

shooting broke out Gus was "mesmerized by all the fireworks. You know what big crowds always did to him." Grabbing the gas grenade, in midair, lobbed by some cop, like a football he "sprinted the whole battle line between cops and workers" (*GG* 34). After a fantastic end run, for a touch down, in the open field, he walked "toward the cops with arms stretched out in a V above his head," and was shot dead by one of the cops.

CHAPTER IV

THE AESTHETICS OF SPECTATING: THE WITNESS/HERO AT THE CENTRE

A Fan's Notes is an autodiegetic narrative of Frederick Exley's discordant life. "The manic-depressive author-narrator" (Sterling 39) is obsessed with the quest for fame and holds a hypnotised liking for American sports' phenomenon: Football. Football is essential America: it becomes a grand metaphor of the monolithic American success myth. Exley is a non-participant, a witness-spectator "whose constant reference points are football and its, attendant glories and heroes" (Messenger, *Sport* 224).

His team is the New York Giants and his ultimate hero, Frank Gifford, the celebrated wingback. Sitting in a bar in Watertown, New York, awaiting the kick-off of a televised game between his beloved New York Giants and the Dallas Cowboys, Exley recalls the fascination the sport has always held for him. "Why did football bring me so to life?" He asks himself:

> Part of it was my feeling that football was an island of directness in a world of circumspection. In football a man was asked to do a difficult and often brutal job, and he either did it or got out. There was nothing rhetorical or vague about it; I chose to believe it was not unlike the

> jobs all men, in some sunnier past, had been called upon to do. It smacked of something old, something traditional, something unclouded by legerdemain and subterfuge. It had that kind of power over me, drawing me back with the force of something unknown, something remembered, as elusive as integrity—perhaps it was nothing more than the force of forgotten childhood. Whatever it was, I gave myself up to the Giants utterly. The recompense I gained was the feeling of being alive. (*FN* 10)

A die-hard fan, whose life revolves around the changing fortunes of his team and its hero. Every aspect of his life is viewed from that perspective. Gifford, the innocent, sober hero is the alter ego of Exley, his flighty imaginative witness.

The witness-spectator's 'concretization' of the text of football is absolute. He labours to get a reading on the meaning of the heroic figures. The correlation that he develops between notoriety and success is the difference between the millions of unknown fan-spectators and a few well known players. The chasm is deep and painful but is a reality. It is a game of brutality and the one that calls for the manly virtues of self-discipline, patience, bravery and team work. They represent the best of America. The text of the game, then offers the beholder different 'schematized views.' The reader/spectator has to make the play

vicariously in his mind. "From here on the characters are clearly delineated: either they play the game, realize life's promises, and live out their visions or they sit on the sidelines" (Sterling 41).

The subject-narrator's deep and lasting attachment to his father is reminiscent of the traditional, adolescent school sports' hero's bond with fathers. Exley's father was that most pathetic of heroes, "he had in his day been a superb athlete" (*FN* 27). What Frank Gifford was to become in New York, Earl Exley was to Watertown. The burden of like-father-like-son was too much upon the young Exley. "His fame, his toughness, his manliness upped the ante: Exley felt he had to be better—more famous, even tougher—if he was ever to emerge from his father's enormous shadow" (Chabot 91). In one of the trips to New York with his father, young Exley was witness to a confrontation between his father and the New York Giants coach, the stout Steve Owen. Owen rejected a proposed exhibition game, between the Watertown Red and Black and New York Giants, giving Earl Exley his first humiliation in the eyes of his ambivalent son:

> My father's shadow was so imposing that I had scarcely ever, until that moment had any identity of my own. At the same time I had yearned to emulate and become my father, I had longed for his destruction. Steve Owen not only gave me identity; he proved to me my father was vulnerable. (*FN* 56-57)

In Exley's future romance with New York he attempts at an emulation of and a struggle to excel his father.

The second unit entitled 'Cheers for Steve Owen' sets up the discourse of the father-Gifford antithesis. Earl Exley's fame brought him the fans he required. The fractured chronology of his memories brings forth the role of the fan-spectator in driving a wedge between the father and son. The crowd usurps Exley's own place in his father's affections and he becomes one among many sons. Messenger observes that "The pressure of being only one of Earl Exley's many 'sons' is intense" (*FN* 225). It becomes an adolescent wound and breaks the circle of his love: "It is a terrifying thing to have a wedge driven into one's narrow circle of love" (*FN* 33). This private childhood scar accounts largely for the deep felt urge for mass adulation and fan following. As Exley puts it:

> Other men might inherit from their fathers a head for figures, a gold pocket watch all encrusted with the oxidized green of age, or an eternally astonished expression; from mine I acquired this need to have my name whispered in reverential tones. (*FN* 35)

The player/son's attitude to his precursor/father is characterised by the same anxious mixture of love and rivalry to which the Freudian term Oedipus Complex has been assigned. At a very early stage in his life, when he was thirteen and a freshman in high school "... I was

already having my abilities unfavorably compared with those of my father" (*FN* 205). One night prior to the junior varsity team's basketball game against "the old-timer's team led by my father" he felt sick and wanted to quit not only the team but the world of sports itself. In order to avoid a confrontation with his father in the test of basketball skills and thereby exposing his vulnerability and inadequacies, Exley decides to stay away from the game. But the father persuades him "to go through this one game for him" (*FN* 205). For the better part of the game, in front of the packed gymnasium, he "sat on the bench stupefied." Unlike the benched players' eagerness to be in the court and 'raring to go' mentality, Exley wavered between fear of the game and nausea. "In an effort to humor the crowd, the coach ordered me in to guard my father in the waning moments of the final quarter" (*FN* 205). In the remaining two-minutes time of the game the father-player went past the son-player to basket three set shots.

The aspirant player-son unable to destroy the power of his precursor/father subsides into a pall of gloom on the way back home. At thirty-nine and with such heavy smoking, the father/player's display of game skills, although at the expense of the son, should have made the son proud. But Exley sulking at the slighting from his father thinks even nature is harsh to him: "The cold was fierce, the moon was bright, and the snow uttered melancholy oaths beneath our boots" (*FN* 205). The father overcome by filial affection, in penance, places his

hands on his son's shoulder and utters these words: "I'm sorry about tonight." Young Exley repressing his urge to weep and to shout at him for the humiliation that he has showered just mumbles a few unintelligible words. At a later stage in the subject's life he always felt sorry for not shouting that humiliation. Neither could the father muster up courage to tell the son, "why he so needed The Crowd." In an instance of prolepsis in the narrative the subject-narrator informs the reader of the death of the father in little over a year's time. It was the realisation of the son's thoughts at that moment of agony, "wishing he were dead." The words of apology that the son thinks should have rightfully come from the father's mouth get stuck in his throat. "Among unnumbered sins, from that damning wish I seek absolution" (*FN* 206).

The aspiring player-son who undergoes "the anxiety of influence" gives up the sport of basketball completely. But throughout his later life, in his quest for fame which was initially generated by his father, he suffered from a sense of belatedness as Harold Bloom theorises it in the case of poet/son vis-à-vis precursor/father. A sense that he or she has come after important things have been said. The 'potent patriarchal' whose power could neither be destroyed nor could it be imbibed and transformed into one of strength and authority.

His father's famed status converts Exley into one of the crowd, all of whom bask in that fame. He thus grows into his desire as other from his father, balancing vulnerability and immortality, famelessness

and fame. In one of the climactic scenes in the narrative, Exley engages in a brawl with two men; one white and the other black, in Greenwich Village. Brooding over this incident he retrospectively comments:

> I fought because I understood, and could not bear to understand, that it was my destiny--unlike that of my father, whose fate it was to hear the roar of the crowd--to sit in the stands with most men and acclaim others. It was my fate, my destiny, my end, to be a fan. (*FN* 357)

He does not however completely submit to his fate. He takes to writing; endeavours to create his own reader-fans. In his attempt to launch his writing career in New York, he suffers from "the inability of a man to impose his dreams, his ego upon the city" (*FN* 70) and spends the latter part of the 1950s in and out of mental institutions.

His first stint at the "Avalon Valley State Hospital for the mentally insane" (*FN* 72) was induced by heavy alcoholism. Standing at the window and looking outside at "the stunning autumn valley" (*FN* 74), Exley caressed the illusion that he was in the "sheltered bosom of a university." It was only the interruption of "a blue-black" paranoiac "negro" (*FN* 73) that woke him up to the reality that he was at no university.

The hospital relied on a system of "moving-up" and "moving-down". When a patient's case has been diagnosed, he had only to go downstairs where the inmates are tortured by "... the hideousness of

the food to the gross inhumanity of the attendants." Those who have been down-hill advised the others to avoid that "trip downward" (*FN* 75). The indignities heaped upon the patients worsened their mental condition. The social derelicts at Avalon were both "non-players and non-fans ... They were America's rejects, the anonymous that Exley fears himself becoming" (Sterling 41-42).

This consciousness of anonymity is reinforced into the mentally deranged Exley's mind with the death of a young, unknown boy who had hung himself. "... he had stood astride the edges of a toilet bowl, tied the loose ends of his necktie ... and swung himself free from the hot, awful agony of his life" (*FN* 97). Exley had not known the boy but he never revealed this fact to the other inmates. He felt the stranger-boy's death as much as any other patient's in Avalon. For the narrator-protagonist the boy's face was faceless and the death of the boy signified as one who never lived in his 'reality'. Visions of famelessness and fame; anonymity and stardom flash across his mind as he philosophises the death of another unknown American with these words: "... and now quite suddenly it occurred to me that it was possible to live not only without fame but without self, to live and die without ever having had one's fellows conscious of the microscopic space one occupies upon this planet" (*FN* 99).

The player-fan, fame-failure antithesis, that the narrative of the unknown boy's suicide bolsters, is emblematic of the larger America

outside the hospital. Exley identifies the hospital as a microcosm of America, where, if one plays the game according to the rules, one can become a minor success. In the world outside, in American society they had been dubbed misfits and rejects: "We had failed our families by our *inability to function properly in society* ..." (*FN* 75). The doctors failed miserably to probe and understand the "perverse realities we had fabricated for ourselves" and what they did in turn was to impose "society's realities" into their incompatible minds. Hence the witness-protagonist evolved what came to be called "Exley's Law of Institutional Survival." The idea being to leave the mind "as malleable as mush" and allowing the doctors to institute "any inanities" (*FN* 76) upon his mind.

Among the patients were "repeaters" and "first-timers." The repeaters were mostly grotesques who had no sense of bodily proportion. They "... were the ugly, the broken, the carrion." They are total misfits in an America "drunk on physical comeliness" (*FN* 77). America's conformist individuals can be seen in advertisement commercials; its ideal of a common humanity with no grotesqueness. The paranoiac negro, believes that a devil is inside him. He underwent the most unwanted, nightmarish of operations by the doctors and attendants who are devoid of any imagination. "His devil was, like those others, his alienation from his countrymen ..." (*FN* 78).

The subject-narrator decides to keep "his devils" within himself and surmises that "one still has to learn to live with them" (*FN* 79). To

rid himself of the devils in his body and mind it was decided that he "undergo insulin-shock treatment" (*FN* 82). After long deliberations with the doctor about his mental state and his fantasies, the initially unresponsive doctor, to the extreme shock of the subject started talking at length in unintelligible manner about the way insulin works on the human cell. After his attempts "to get away" from the hospital, he was caught and "ordered onto a bed to receive (his) first electroshock treatment" (*FN* 86) at the tender age of twenty-nine.

Striking friendship with a doctor in the hospital, he convalesces in his aunt's guest house, adhering to a strict diet to reduce the weight. But without much time-gap he makes his trip to the Avalon hospital as a repeater. This time around he was housed in an open ward with seventy others. Each morning before breakfast, they lined up for treatment. The hospital employees were made up of Negroes and Whites in almost equal numbers. "Both groups looked down on us patients as little more than animals, loathing us ..." (*FN* 95).

In Dr. K., Exley found a man "— a not altogether common phenomenon in America" (*FN* 96). He was a short man with a big heart, ready to listen to even the silliest of complaints of the patients and "we had large love for Dr. K." Dr. K. made the patients at Avalon hospital, feel at home. The subject perhaps for the first time in his life had a calmness of mind and an equanimity that he started believing that he

could spend the whole life at Avalon: "... live it there as well as live it any America I had yet discovered" (*FN* 97).

The protagonist's first encounter with Paddy the Duke, a fellow inmate at Avalon, was in the reception building on the day of their psychiatric consultations, with the doctor. He had an air of gravity about him but he nonetheless made an impression upon Exley. In the ward he was a loner and a patient who refused "to accept the camaraderie of his fellow-patients" (*FN* 103). He did not speak to any other patient, nor did he care to even listen to anyone. His arrogance was most visible when a queue was formed in the hospital which "was a piece of endless and fatiguing waiting." He simply proceeded to the head of the waiting inmates and on occasions when his "cafeteria etiquette was challenged" (*FN* 103), he browbeat them by his imposing bearing and the cold look in his eyes. Exley and the other inmates could merely be docile and servile and allow him the privileges that are accorded to the high and mighty.

Paddy the Duke, "finally committed a profound sin of commission" (*FN* 104). He beat all the other inmates in ping-pong. Ping-pong being the favourite game of their ward, his invincibility "rallied us and made us One." The rules of the ward stipulated that "the winner of the game retained his paddle until he was defeated ..." (*FN* 105).

Some of the better players carried on for one or two days, but Paddy made a beginning to his undefeated run for nine days, by defeating the subject-player twenty-one to two. Paddy hardly knew the serve, backhand, offence or defence of table-tennis; all that he knew was to return the ball:

> ... and that return became our monomania. It was the fever in our brains. It was the longing in our hearts. It was the Ahab enlisting us in a blasphemous bargain toward our own destruction. We went to bed with that return; we dreamed about it. We rose to that return; we lived all our waking hours with it, trying to fathom its perverseness. (*FN* 106)

With his girlish way of holding the paddle, Paddy had the most unconventional of table-tennis grips. They tried every strategy, permitted by the game, to defeat him. But Paddy with little mobility while returning did return every ball with precision.

The other players are now turned into mere spectators. The subject-player is also transformed into a witness among the partisan crowd. Paddy represents the American ideal of success and monomania. The hostility of the crowd does not deter the anti-hero/player going from strength to strength. The hostility turns to plotting on the previous night of the ninth-day of his successful retention of the paddle. Exley unwittingly becomes the leader of the

plotters, who gang up to devise various ways to coerce the monomaniac into submission. The perceiving subjects fail to bully and sniff out the perceived. On the ninth day after being undefeated, Paddy allows the subject-narrator to beat him in a seemingly close game. After which he lays down the paddle, achieving a sense of counter-humiliation. "A loner, he had known exactly how to gauge the hostility of the crowd, precisely the moment to go out the door" (*FN* 109).

The Avalon valley's chapter of "Alcoholics Anonymous" had a regular meeting on Wednesday evenings. Every patient "whose trouble was compounded by booze, or whose trouble had become booze" (*FN* 110), attended that meeting. Paddy, who occupied a table of his own, took down note, almost every word of the confessions uttered there. Exley, a confirmed boozer, one night had a discussion with Paddy on alcoholism. He declared that "I've discovered what alcoholism is ..." Suppressing a sarcastic laughter, Exley waited for the discovery made by Paddy. He declared: "It's Sadness" (*FN* 114). For the first time the subject took Paddy's words seriously and pondered on the weighty statement:

> Despite the arrogant ignorance, Paddy was a poet ... Paddy had come to a kind of truth ... a truth that to this day will not let me divorce the term alcoholism from sadness. (*FN* 115)

Paddy was to leave the hospital the following day and the inmates gave him a farewell befitting a hero. From anti-hero to hero, his transformation in the eyes of the crowd had been phenomenal. For Exley, the witness-subject, Paddy became a successful persona in the image of the father-Gifford man.

Exley's life in Chicago is marked by his falling in love with that city and with a girl named Bunny Sue Allorgee. Bunny, the only fully developed female character in the narrative, other than Patience, his future wife, walks into the life of the narrator-spectator on "one blustery June morning." His love-life supplies him with a few precious moments and the love of the city doubles the effect. "It was a splendid arrangement, first the city and then the dream-maiden, for love, in its awful intimacy, demands to be played out against familiar backdrops" (*FN* 119). Tired and exhausted by the never-ending defeats in his life; donning forever the costumes of the spectator/non-participant, cheering others on their way to victory and fame, Exley begins life anew with the job of the managing editor with a publication of the Public Relations Representative. However, his alcoholism stays with him.

His evenings were invariably spent in the bars and saloons of that city. Evening to late night he hopped from one bar to another. He lived in that section of the city called the "Near North Side, a paradise for the young men and women" (*FN* 139). He had his own band of

companions, whose major pastime was booze and flirting blatantly with other men's dates. His life in that city was ridden with lust and sexual perversions. From 'The Singapore' to 'Larry Lounge,' and then onto 'Mister Kelley's' and finally to 'Gus' Pub'; this was his usual schedule at night with the bars and pubs. In a tone coloured with remorse and apology Exley comments upon his life in Chicago: "I was neither comely, brutal nor subtle. I knew something of America's vulgar yearnings and I played on these unmercifully" (*FN* 142).

Bunny Sue was only nineteen years old. "She had honey-blond, bobbed hair ... She was Hudson's Rima, Spenser's Uma, Humbert's Dolly ... But oh, she was so very American." She was the very epitome of American beauty. The girl who was chosen as the "Homecoming Queen" (*FN* 149) in the sophomore days of her college. She is the "paramount cheerleader," the "Miss America--the girl football players always get, the ultimate American male fantasy" (Sterling 42). For Exley the fan/non-participant it was a prize catch. At USC he fought with Gifford for the attention of a beautiful girl.

Girl's cheerleading is an institution by itself and a permanent fixture in America's mass spectator sports. As a sub-text to crowd-gathering, it communicates in varied ways. Bunny Sue's persona images the America that offers symbolic brides to its heroes. Cheerleaders are part of the spectators/non-participants. But they swing into action at times when the action at the centre is 'absent'.

This 'absence' of the 'presence' is fulfilled by the synchronised sexist play of the non-players in the stands, in the sidelines and at times in the centre itself. In this act they transform from themselves from the perceiving subject to the 'perceived'.

They perform synchronised, regimented acrobatics and teach the value of uniformity and teamwork. Although subject to sexist interpretations, the popularity of the cheerleading group is on the rise. It provides fun to the non-players/non-participants and is a source of prestige to them. The spectacle of cheerleading depends on various looks: that of the spectators/non-players within the stadium, that of the viewers of the televised action at the centre and the stolen gaze of the player participants. 'Scopophilia' or the pleasure of looking at the "stake of the game" is immense. They are expected to fill the vacuum created by the "playing males" when they are resting or plotting strategy and thereby paves the way for a possible gaze by the "paying males" (Kurman 58) who constitute a majority of the witness/ spectators. The voluptuous acts presented by the beautiful females is completely orchestrated and rehearsed but attempts at an illusion of spontaneity and extemporariness. The females strutting her stuff in public is traditionally associated with the desire of sexual contact and fulfills a basic male-voyeuristic fantasy.

Bunny Sue as cheerleader and 'Home-Coming Queen' represent America's middle-class values, which Exley cannot imbibe in reality.

He is being rejected by them in the figure of Bunny Sue. "With Bunny Sue, Exley is impotent" (Sterling 42). He fails to couple with her and therefore with America's ideals. The reality ensnares him and he explains his incapacity to do so with these words: "... had not been with her but with some aspect of America's with which I could not have lived successfully" (*FN* 202).

Exley's proximity to various 'potent males' account for his deep-felt feeling of insecurity and the psychic need for the reassuring presence of 'father-Gifford successful types'. He had spent several months in the apartment of his friend, the Counselor, as a guest. The house was open to any acquaintance of the Counselor, and his married peers used the apartment for their extra-marital sexual exploits. The subject, fresh from his experiences with the grotesque characters at the Avalon hospital, has a look at the grotesquery of the outside world. The non-participant/spectator leading normal life is not different from the witnesses inside the mental asylum. The middle-class, non-participants representing the cream of the American society are as crazy and paranoiac as the patients inside.

Exley casts a long and concentrated look on America and its well-bred children with the eyes of a witness-spectator. Although, most of these salaried, educated men are in the mould of the father-Gifford success paradigm, they too are non-participants, non-players and fameless people. Unlike Exley they are potent males who have struck

success in their love-life. The wanton nature of these 'American specimens' and their indulgence baffled the subject-narrator. They skilfully play up to the American ideals. Exley the witness was rendered impotent when offered with a cheerleading, 'homecoming queen' in the form of Bunny Sue.

Studs is by profession a plaintiff and "had been in a series of one-car accidents" (*FN* 248), a regular visitor at the apartment of the Counselor. Another of the long line of visitors to the apartment is Oscar, a "high Episcopalian" (*FN* 250) who had obtained a divorce from his wife and six children. Girls came in and went out of the back door of the apartment and the counselor "was most magnanimous with his castoffs." One girl arrived one sunny Saturday and departed the following Friday "only because she was the next day being married" (*FN* 253).

The exemplary, middle-class successful American, 'father-Gifford figure' was Mr. Blue, "who seems to embody all of the football American ideals" (Sterling 43). By the time the fifty-year old Mr. Blue arrived at the apartment Exley had been mentally prepared to witness the worst. The narrator-protagonist had hardly then understood that this man would be the cause of his getting off the davenport and moving on.

Mr. Blue is a short, stout person with amazing strength and agility. He is a health freak, who perfectly fits into American football's ideals of physical fitness:

> From a stand-still position he could do either a front or back flip, in machine-gun-like succession twenty hand springs without even winding himself; and on anyone's suggestion he would drop proudly to the floor and oblige the apartment's stunned occupants with a hundred push-up. (*FN* 255-256)

He is a successful aluminum storm-window salesman, travelling with two or three "canvassers" and was a "closer." The narrator became a very close friend and business associate of the enterprising American salesman.

Mr. Blue could talk about professional football at length, although he knew nothing much about the game. The only two things that interested him were aluminium sliding and cunnilingus "on which he expected I was an authority" (*FN* 256). His sexual fixation slowly started arousing distaste in Exley, and Mr. Blue on the other hand, found the subject wanting in persuasive powers needed for a salesman. In their sales outings, Mr. Blue and the narrator became regular visitors at a deaf middle-class housewife's place. There Mr. Blue could mouth "aloud all sorts of scabrous suggestions related to his fixation" and partially realise his "fantasy of the archetypal housewife" (*FN* 274).

Mr. Blue fails to realise his vision and renders himself grotesque. Nevertheless, he is perfectly in line with the American consciousness and his success, unlike that of the patients at Avalon, lies in his ability to acquiesce in the system.

Mr. Blue's "common-law spouse, the U.S.S Deborah" kindles interest in the subject-narrator and he understood why Mr. Blue "approached cunnilingus with such single-minded and fastidious wariness." She is a girls' high school gymnasium teacher, six feet one inch tall. Initially they lived in adjoining apartments and now "for all practical purposes hitched" (*FN* 278). A domineering lady, she feeds her husband with a health dinner and carrot juice.

The witness-narrator's odd identification with Frank Gifford serves both as a means of parallel and contrast. Gifford's success parallels Exley's failure and Exley's anonymity contrasts Gifford's fame. For the witness-spectator his major anxiety is his inability to become an individual sports hero. Exley first encounters Gifford face-to-face at U.S.C., where Gifford is already a football hero. He wants to shout, "Listen, you son of a bitch, life isn't a goddam football game! You won't always get the girl! Life is rejection and pain and loss" (*FN* 65). But he does not shout, foreshadowing his later realisation that life is indeed a football game but that the game itself includes pain and rejection and loss. Gifford smiles politely and says hello. He goes on to become the darling of the crowd. He actualised what Exley could only

dare to hope for him. The subject-narrator does not allow any personal intimacy with his alter ego. He witnesses the ascent of his hero from a distance, magnanimous enough to desire for the hero's survival. Exley is not interested in the ritual sacrifice of his hero. The public Gifford is his idol although coming to grips with this idolisation is slow.

Years after his university days he remembered that polite smile of Griffith, while walking toward the Polo Grounds. His subconscious mind was filled with the looming shadow of anonymity, amidst the crowd pouring into the stadium. He viewed with suspicion, every laughter and giggle, even the subconscious ones made by the fellow spectators on their way to the grounds. The message conveyed by such laughter and body language was met with a cynical apprehension. He began noticing a "redheaded family," who were moving along with him occasionally whispering to each other. Between laughs and giggles they threw stares at him, which made the narrator-fan self-conscious. But when they were at the entrance to the ground, the father offered Exley the extra ticket that he possessed. The match was between his favourite New York Giants and the superb Detroit team. The narrator-spectator went through "the most unforgettable afternoon of (his) life." When the father "in an egregiously cultivated, theatrically virile voice" to Exley's profound horror, began "commenting on each and every play" (*FN* 66). It is a fan's ultimate nightmare: the reality of the TEXT of the game being unfurled and directed by the subjectivity of another

reader/spectator. The father's mediation in constructing the reality/ fantasy of the game was completely unacceptable for a highly perceptive reader/spectator like Exley. But he had to tolerate the proceedings as he was the beneficiary of the man seated next to him.

To all of the comments the mother, daughter and son in perfect unison exclaimed "Really!" (*FN* 66). Exley's reluctance to join this 'interpretive community' results in a reproaching look by the father and he had to acquiesce and parrot the 'really' to his utter frustration. The father's denial of the fellow fan's right to construct a subjective response reaches a point where the witness-subject could no longer control himself. In spite of the "terrible diffidence" that he felt "in the presence of that family," at a climactic moment in the game he "went berserk" (*FN* 68).

Exley could read the text of the match, leaving no blanks or gaps. Engaging this magnificent Detroit football team was not an easy task for Griffith and company. But he had a half procrastinated, half-studied reading of the narrative of the game, which told the spectator in him that the Giants would evenly match the Detroits. They would be motivated by the thought that it is the parting match of their coach, the Stout Steve Owen. Exley is not an ordinary witness-fan but a perceptive one with a 'horizon of expectations.' He believed in his hero and Griffith rose to the expectations of his subdued fan. "The Giants recovered and began to play as if they meant to win" (*FN* 67).

The match oscillated between advantages to both sides and in a spectacular moment of the game when Griffith was all set to move to the end zone, Exley displaying his fanatic backing of the Giants and his hero, jumped up and down and pummeled the father furiously on the back "putting them (the family) in a state of numbing senselessness" (*FN* 69). The Giants failed to score and lost the game. In a rare display of the subjective whim of the individual reader/spectator of the textual outcome of the game, Exley started coughing vehemently. "I was coughing only very few moments before it occurred to me that I was also weeping." The father overcome with compassion consoles Exley saying "Look here, it's only a game" (*FN* 69).

Exley found it hard to be consoled with these words from the father-fan; for him it wasn't only a game, but 'the last game' of Steve Owen in whom he saw a father-figure. Steve Owen had been the Giant football coach from 1931 to 1953 and the narrator-subject "links the death of his father with the professional death of Steve Owen" (Messenger, *Sport* 225). For Gifford, Owen was not merely a coach but a father with the Giants. Gifford's failure to present a parting gift to his mentor-father, in the form of a victory, does not however belittle him in the consciousness of the fan-spectator. For Exley, Owen was another one of those long list of potent males with whom he love to be associated with.

In New York, he continues his identification with Gifford. "Frank Gifford, more than any single person, sustained for me the illusion that fame was possible" (*FN* 131). He became hooked to the game and his hero, Gifford. On Sundays he purchased every newspaper on the stand, and read through the football news during his long breakfast. Later in his room he would reread those pieces about the Giants only to kill time until it is time for the match. At around noon he would get up and walk in the direction of the Polo Grounds.

The entire gamut of sports writing acts as 'frames of reference' for the average fan. It is through the reading of the pre-match analysis that the reader/spectator achieves 'naturalization' by assimilating the game to be played, with the deja-vu models. Though a perceptible spectator, Exley keeps abreast of the games' details from the dailies. But according to him "the writers were beginning to clamor ... making it difficult to isolate the real from the fantastic" (*FN* 131). The "secondary text" of sports journalism has always been important in understanding, and interpreting the "primary text" of the game itself. Every sporting text tells a different story to its various readers/fans. Individual matches are chapters in the long narrative that is football. In this narrative, the players tend to isolate the sportswriters and even fans as 'outsiders.' The professional football players have the same contempt as that of the artist, for the 'uninitiated outsiders.' The journalists and commentators feed on the glory and wealth created by

the players. Paradoxically, these very 'outsiders' are capable of making a hero of a player or breaking his career. The ambivalent relationship between the players and the outsiders strengthen the bond between the players. Male-bonding becomes a biological necessity. Every game brings the players closer to the most intimate knowledge of mortality. Poor performance, team's loss and injuries can bring the career of a player to an abrupt end. The secondary texts attain greater importance in the face of such information passed on to the reader/spectator.

As far as the subject-spectator is concerned, every game played by the Giants and the major role enacted by his hero, Gifford is a new text to be savoured. In the Polo Grounds, during the first part of the game, he usually stands at the back of the stadium keeping an eye on the unoccupied seats. He had a motley group of fans with whom he usually formed a community, in the Sunday afternoons. It comprises an Italian, an Irishman, two or three Longshoremen; all belonging to the working class. To keep themselves warm, they chain-smoked, drank a lot of beer and jogged up and down on the concrete. Exley called them the "Brooklyn guys" and they were fond of issuing statements. "Dat guy is a pro" (*FN* 132), being their ultimate praise for some superb display of skill by a player.

They enjoyed each other's company so much that as the season progressed, they decided to stand *the entire game. Empty seats would split the company and mar the enjoyment of the game. "Brooklyn guys"

had a sophisticated, quietly-enthusiastic way of watching the game which made them different from Exley's "churlish, extravagant partiality to Gifford" (*FN* 133). For this they considered him a "freak." Braving cold winds from the back, with running noses and large laughs in between— they shared a bonding which is so characteristic of fan-spectators in the stadium. When the play was "astonishingly perfect, we just fell quiet. That was the most memorable picture of all" (*FN* 133). The narrative of the game attains another beautiful dimension in the minds of the spectators in such moments of blissful viewing. It is football fraternity at its best. The spectator-viewer, dazzled by the brilliance and skill displayed on the field, becomes nostalgic and thinks of his playing days in the childhood or youth. Football signifies many things for the diverse audience: nostalgia, rugged masculinity, violence etc. No single reading can represent the game's diverse audience. The community formed by Exley and the "Brooklyn guys" is best summed up in his own words:

> We were Wops and Polacks and Irishmen out of Flatbush, along with one mad dreamer out of the cold, cow country up yonder, and though we may not have had the background, or the education to weep at Prince Hamlet's death; we had all tried enough times to pass and kick a ball, we had on our separate rock-strewn sandlots taken enough lump and bruises, to know that

> we were viewing something truly fine, something that only comes with years of toil, something very like art. (*FN* 133)

Exley's moment of acceptance as a fan came in 1954, when he along with the "Brooklyn guys" witnessed an astounding catch made by Gifford. His career is characterised by a series of incredible catches. The catch which resulted in an injury to Gifford was responded with an "awesome, forbidding silence" by his band of fans. All that season, the narrator-subject waited for the "Brooklyn friends to bestow on him the name of pro." The Italian truck driver after moments of silence, theatrically proclaimed, "He's a pro" (*FN* 134), which was repeated by others. Tears of emotion brimmed at the subject-fan's eyes.

Exley started drawing parallels between Gifford's and his life. Both were at USC together, their having moved to the East almost simultaneously and "the unquestionable fact that we both desired fame" (*FN* 133). Throughout the season he cheered frantically for number 16. Gifford as hero/star is not merely a construct of the fan in the subject. Gifford possesses 'markers' of his own 'authenticity' in the football field. The skills and acrobatics displayed by him over the years, braving and sustaining injuries have played its role in mythifying his persona.

Gifford's acts within the field provide a vicarious gratification for Exley. The subject-fan explains the construct of his hero in these words:

> Where I could not, with syntax, give shape to my fantasies, Gifford could, with his superb timing, his great hands, his uncanny faking, give shape to his. It was something more than this: I cheered for him with such inordinate enthusiasm, my yearning became so involved with his desire to escape life's bleak anonymity, that after a time he became my alter ego, that part of me which had its being in the competitive world of men; I came, as incredible as it seems to me now, to believe that I was, in some magical way, an actual instrument of his success. Each time I heard the roar of the crowd, it roared in my ears as much for me as him; that roar was not only a promise of my fame, it was its unequivocal assurance. (*FN* 134)

In his mother's davenport resting after the treatment at Avalon hospital, Exley watched the games on television. Save for football, he hardly watched any other programme on the tube. It opened up another chapter in the narrator-fan's attempt at keeping a close watch on the performances of his team and his hero. This provided Exley with a chance to reorient his view of the game. The spectators' perception of

the game is limited in the camera's eye and it robs much of the true fans' pleasure in making judgments. The commentator and the tube act as meta-narrative on the viewer. But it does emphasise the spectacle that is football. Heroes are transformed into celebrities and spectators into dumb witnesses, lacking imagination. Television-football, unlike spectator-football, does not appeal to the mind or emotions; it only appeals to the eye. Converting the game into one continuous action and distraction in between, in the form of advertisements and show-girl cheerleading.

In New York, at times when the subject had been unable to make it to the stadium, he discovered "Fitzgerald's saloon" where he could watch the Giants' home games with a large group of fans assembled there. The place was always crowded, but that season Gifford played in a sluggish manner. There were even rumours about his imminent retirement. Gifford, by then had grown into a celebrity, larger-than-life figure, "having his own television and radio-shows, his own newspaper column in the *Journal-American*, his photo in nearly every publication one put hands to ... he had wedged a place in the city's mentality: he had become unavoidable" (*FN* 333). He had established himself as a star with capital value. The football star is a construct in the minds of the spectators and his image is bolstered by the media hype created when he enters the field. Talent is no passport to stardom; star attains cultural value when he mediates between the real and imaginary. The

spectator's expectation is transferred on to the star and the signification changes with the ups and downs in his career. The visual media fetishises the persona of the star in the fans' imagination. Gifford becomes an icon of the fans of NY Giants. Exley, the star-gazer attains fulfillment when Gifford was "voted by the other players in the league, the Jim Thorpe Trophy-which made him, for that year at least, the greatest player in the world" (*FN* 325). The witness' perception of the hero as the embodiment of fame is a construct of the absence/presence paradigm. The star on field is absence made presence and in this respect the field is analogous to the Lacanian mirror-image with which he has a momentary identification. The spectator in Exley then perceives his difference and becomes aware of the lack/absence. Consequently the spectator recognises himself as the perceiving subject, which in turn creates desire.

In those weeks Gifford and Giants were all that sustained me, and I lived only from Sunday afternoon to Sunday afternoon" (*FN* 337). Exley had a chance meeting with one of his adolescent friends, J., who volunteers to treat him to a football game in the Yankee stadium: "a heart-stopping, an awesomely imposing place" (*FN* 345). It was a game between the Giants and the Philadelphia. They got the tickets from the Giant's quarterback Charley Conerly. Exley had watched games in Los Angeles' vast Coliseum and Chicago's monumental Soldiers' Field, but the Yankee stadium was too imposing a football venue for a fan

"... where the stadium, riding as sheer as a cliff, is one quivering mass of color out of which there comes continually, like music from a monstrous kaleidoscope, the unending roar of the crowd" (*FN* 345). It is every fan's desire to be present at such a stadium witnessing the game and its memorable moments. Exley could hardly imagine a rookie coming for the first time, out of those dugouts before the kickoff: "When the stadium is all but brimming its great steel beams with people." Imagining himself as the rookie player, as is the voyeuristic inclination of every spectator, he wonders "whether it be all a dream which might at any moment come tumbling down, waking me to life's hard fact of famelessness. The stadium stays. The game proceeds." His inability to imagine himself as the rookie star ready to plunge into the world of stardom and fame, accounts for his life's futures. The desire for fame is still strong in his mind; his temperament and limited talents do not evenly match the desire. In his early days he believed that Fame is "an heirloom passed on from my father" (*FN* 30). Before long he understands the reality and resigns to submission, terminating his desires for football fame.

In a play-by-play description of the match watched by Exley and his friend J., the Giants were losing 17-10 with two minutes remaining. Gifford displayed his brilliance in the dying moments of the game, and the Giants reached the line of scrimmage, and he made a superb catch amidst the thundering roar of the crowd. Gifford entered

the end zone as "... the crowd was wild. The crowd was maniacal. The crowd was his" (*FN* 347). Chuck Bednarik, the Philadelphia linebacker pounded on Gifford from the back and brought him down. "For what seemed an eternity both Gifford and the ball had seemed to float weightless, above the field" (*FN* 348) ended in a tragedy as the play had to be carried on a stretcher out of the stadium. He was severely injured and the newspaper headlines ran

GIFFORD OUT FOR SEASON (*FN* 348)

Implying that his career was at an end. In Gifford's fall Exley had a glimpse of his own mortality.

Gifford, proved his mettle, by staging a comeback, after being laid up for almost a year nursing his concussion. By then he was thirty-three, aging for a running half-back. But his yearning to "walk out of the stadium with his legs under him and his wits functioning" (*FN* 375). The crowds had by then forgotten the legendary player and had their adulation and love fixed on other stars. The subject-narrator, however, remained steadfast and continued to be a devout fan of his hero. The player-hero, in turn, did not disappoint his fan and from match to match, as the season progressed, he had several incredible catches to his credit. Giants had their divisional title and reached the NFL championship game.

Exley, the witness-protagonist confronted the reality that football fame was elusive to him years after becoming a devoted fan of the

Giants and Gifford. After his marriage to Patience and fathering twin sons, he divided his life between watching football and several futile attempts at writing a novel. His professed goal was to be the Frank Gifford of the literati. Exley, the epitome of the directionless man; spent a life of indecision and inaction. Football was the only referent in his life which served as a means of purpose and certainty. He has understood what directionlessness can drive a man to: "Suicide", he says, "is the most eloquent of all wails for direction" (*FN* 136). Football steered clear of such thoughts and to sustain the quest for fame he commits to writing a novel.

Exley, early in his life saw fame as his birthright, but later vowed that fame will "come to me on my own terms" (*FN* 44). He launched his writing career in New York but the promises of the city prove illusory and it is only later in his life, after marriage and becoming a father that he takes up writing again. The subject-narrator considered marriage as a means of closure of all possibilities, not as a form of fulfillment. He hardly paid any attention to his wife and children. "If the elder father figuratively deserts the son in favor of the fans, so too does the younger—the only difference being that the new fans are readers of the novels not spectators at a football game" (Chabot 93). He fantasises himself producing the "Big Book" and imposing himself "deep into the mentality of his countrymen" (*FN* 99). After many attempts at writing, spending months over it in many spells he just manages to fill the

dustbin with his torn manuscripts. Realisation dawns upon him that he lacks the technical skills to write a successful book. His dreams of fame come to nothing in the face of his new-found knowledge.

The narrative of the fan-spectator, attempting to writing a novel in quest of fame results in the "eloquent wail" that is *A Fan's Notes*. He remains nothing more than a fan at the end of the narrative; faceless and superficial as the America that he witnesses throughout his life. Fulfillment in life, he understands is a mirage to be chased and emasculation becomes his destiny.

The *Field of Vision* is a fragmented, third-person narrative from the perspective of five witness-participants: the middle-aged, Mr. Walter McKee and Mrs. Lois McKee; Tom Scanlon, the eighty-seven year old father of Lois; Gordon Boyd, another middle-aged man and Dr. Leopald Lehmann, the aged psychoanalyst. The other characters in the narrative are two witness-spectators who are actively present in the consciousness of the others and also perched on the curve of the bullring in Mexico, watching/unwatching the action in the centre: the eight-year old grandson of the McKees, Gordon McKee and Paula Kahler, the silent transvestite. The narrative is set in Mexico, where the hot sand of the bullfighting arena and the highly ritualistic sport of bullfight, focalises and unifies the action through a wide range of symbolic and metaphorical associations.

The McKees; their father and grandson are one set of tourists from Nebraska in America, who meet up with Boyd, Lehmann and Paula, another group from the same place and they decide to watch a bullfight together. Sitting in the shady side of the bullring, they look at the action for two-and-a-half hours. McKee and Boyd have been friends from their childhood, but it is a chance meeting at Mexico after several years. The novel is structured into a twenty-four section division, each given over to an account of a single character's mind serially. The sequence of narrative focalisation—McKee, Mrs. McKee, Scanlon, Boyd and Dr. Lehmann is repeated four times; then the fifth cycle omits Scanlon and Lehmann and the final one starts and ends with McKee. The sequential positioning of the focalisers/spectators is highly symbolic and a logical "movement from the person least able to transform to the one who speaks for a complete transformation ..." (Waterman 35).

The bullfight witnessed by these characters is a six-bull *Corrida*: The sequential, dramatically progressive structuring of the ritual of the bullfight serves as a foil to the undramatic and fragmentary structuring of the narrative. The fighting of each and every bull is divided into three phases known as the three *TERCIOS*: *The tercio of the Varas, the tercio of the Banderillas and the tercio of the Death.* The six bulls and the three matadors fighting below in the ring mature, as the phase progress, and "progressively move closer to the transforming

power of art and heroic action" (Waterman 35). The metonymic and metaphoric tropes of the bullfight, intrude upon the witnesses as reenactments of past events. "They would feel and see what they had brought along with them" (*FV* 54). The particular literary competence the reader/spectator brings to his act of reading/spectating. The same event, the text of the bullfight, narrated in the third-person, but from the locus of character-focalisers not only means something different to each observer, but remains different to each observer. As Umberto Eco says: "The text is nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader" (10). The dynamic character of the reading/spectating process comes into full play in the text:

> This crisp Sabbath afternoon forty thousand pairs of eyes would gaze down on forty thousand separate bullfights, seeing it all very clearly, missing only the one that was to take place. Forty thousand latent heroes, as many gorings, so many artful dodges it beggared description, two hundred thousand bulls, horses, mules and monsters half-man, half-beast. In all this zoo, this bloody constellation, only two men and six bulls would be missing. Those in the bullring. Those they would see with their very own eyes. (*FV* 59)

Each reader/spectator transforming himself into a Model Reader, based on each one's intertextual knowledge, every witness creates

his/her own semantic universe. The text of the bullfight generates individual narrative structures in every spectator. The 'frames of reference' created by the spectator, construct individual texts. Within the arena, the beasts and the men see and perceive only one reality—death. For the matador and the bull what is at stake is each one's life. In the ritualistic encounter between the man and the beast of utmost significance is their iron-nerve and bravery, respectively. For the bull, death is certain: either inside the ring or outside. As Ernest Hemingway puts it "... and the bull is certain to be killed. If the matador cannot kill him ... the bull is herded out of the ring ... (to) be killed in the corrals" (20-21). The matador on the other hand, emerges a hero either way. "To be gored was honorable" (Hemingway 19), and to emerge victorious, thrusting the sword into the crest of the bull's neck muscle, in the "hour of truth," is to become a hero and be honoured.

The fabula of the bullfight in the arena focuses and intensifies the witness-spectator's insight. These insights invite codes of meaning which only help them construct their past in their consciousness. Rather than constructing new semes of self-knowledge and evolving ways of transforming the self, the subject-focalisers plunge into a constant review of what they have always known. The solipsistic witnesses: the McKees and Scanlon fall into the hazards of creating "a still-bracketed possible world" (Eco 31). Finding deja-vu models the action in the ring becomes an act of forming narrative structures based

on self-focalisation. As J.C.Wilson rightly observes: "Each character has his own field of vision where the ritual is enacted and then evaluated imaginatively through the prism of his experience" (155). Mrs. McKee, the only 'true woman' character in the narrative, "unloving and unloved," remembers very clearly the one moment when she was kissed, in the porch of her house, by Boyd. Converting her fiancé McKee into a mute witness, the hero in Boyd, his childhood friend infused life into that one kiss and, "at least at the time, there in the kiss" (Booth 386), she saw life. That act of kissing was the one "moment of truth" in the life of Mrs. McKee. She had been in the company of her friend, Alice Morple and "the crazy thing about it was that he had them both—but he had kissed Alice second, so that she had a little time to prepare herself" (*FV* 34).

McKee, the childhood best friend of Boyd, has always been a witness to Boyd's heroics/antics. He is a man of common-sense, who had always been in awe of Boyd. The witness-hero relationship they share is intact even after several years of separation. The chance meeting in Mexico revives the memories of his hero in McKee, and it is in his initiative that they all spent two-and-a-half hours of bullfight (un)spectating. In Mrs. McKee's consciousness the 'kiss scene' remains indelible. She reminisces that "... he (McKee) had once stood, like a wooden Indian, and watched his best friend be the first man to kiss his future bride" (*FV* 34). The ability to generate love in the heart of the

witness is unmistakably the most enduring quality of a hero. Boyd remains deep in the psyche of the couple: while Mrs. McKee is jittery in the presence of Boyd at the bullfight, McKee has the gratification of the reassuring presence of his hero.

It is this dreamlike subjectivity that structures the life of Mrs. McKee. Her life has never made a linear progression from that 'still-point.' The organic-continuum of life that has been stunted by this kiss becomes a constant referral point in her consciousness. Dazed and unable to sleep for many nights, she would jump at the mere touch of McKee or Alice Morple. "... a current all over her body and a feeling that if she touched something it would spark" (*FV* 35). Unable to trust her own senses, she decided to play it safe by getting married to McKee. David Madden makes an interesting comment about their marital relationship: "Yet Boyd is the cause of any love McKee and his wife ever felt ..." (276). For thirty years, she lived frozen in that memory and when McKee met Boyd after several years in the Mexican street, the first thing he did was to ring up Lois in the hotel and asked her to guess who he ran into. "... her body had been crawling with goose-pimples before she heard. *It* knew, even before *she* did" (*FV* 36). Thirty years of suppressed sensuality has been aroused in the ambience of hot and exotic Mexico. But she is not the woman to give in. She methodically avoids even a cursory glance at Boyd in the stands of the bullring.

The McKees see very little of the bullfight. Mr. McKee is a matter-of-fact man. With hardly any imagination, he fails to transform himself. He misses the key moments in the bullring. He either gazes at the antics of Boyd or gets lost in his own thoughts. A beguiled witness, both in life and at the bullring, he nevertheless, provides a stable relationship to Lois as a husband. "If there had ever been anything like a real misunderstanding between McKee and his wife, it had been when he named his first son Gordon, after Boyd" (*FV* 18). According to the agreement worked out between them, if the first child were to be a son, it would be McKee's choice of name. He had no doubts whatsoever about his son's name. Mckee's idea of maintaining a connection with the past through his childhood friend's name seemed absurd to Lois McKee.

Mrs. McKee tired of hearing the exploits of her husband's hero, once asks Mckee: "Why it was he never talked about himself, only about this Gordon ..." (*FV* 37). His reply was that he almost felt responsible for Gordon being half an orphan. It was the Crete family, after their own child's death, who more or less adopted Gordon Boyd. Growing up in Omaha with them, he went on to become a playwright. "... the crazy play he wrote about the sandpit had made a big hit in New York" (*FV* 37). The McKees' own son, the one who was named after Boyd, twenty years after the first show, went on to play the lead role.

The Oedipal tendencies in Boyd's namesake, the young Gordon McKee, started to manifest. In a deja-vu act of "brazenly kissing the girl, the fiancée of his own best friend" (*FV* 37) he lives up to the consciousness of his mother. But in attempting to emulate the crazy Boyd's attempted childhood act of trying to walk on water and nearly being drowned, the young Gordon falters:

> Not intentionally, but with the full understanding that if he failed to walk on the water, which he naturally did, it would prove that he was not truly worthy of her ... The meaning of the play, so far as she could understand it, was that if he had managed to walk on the water he would have come back and run off with the girl he had just kissed. (*FV* 37-38)

Boyd did attempt to walk on water; McKee testifies this act to the utter bewilderment of his wife. He had been witness to this heroic act too. The audacity of this heroic act boosts the credentials of his becoming a hero in the eyes of the witness. It becomes another addition to his list of failures. Madden's comments are pertinent at this juncture: "The hero exists only in the lives of the witnesses ... he has almost no identity except as hero; he is only what he does" (34). Boyd tries to give permanence to this failed physical act by raising it to the level of art in his play version of the incident.

Boyd the hero was devoid of any witness/spectator since his youth. Most of his heroics he acted out in the presence of his key witness, McKee, when they were together. In the bullring his heroics are limited to snatching the "boy's Pepsi-bottle" and squirting pop "over the rail" (*FV* 54). Buoyed on by the wonder-struck kid's expression, he shakes the bottle again to make it fall on the sand in the runway. "One of the bullfighter's *peones*, leaning on the funk hole, gazed at him with admiration" (*FV* 54). Although zany and grotesque in his aberrant actions in the shady side of the bullring, "his psychological growth from stasis to lucidity is the only action per se" (Wilson 156) in the narrative. Boyd is the only character apart from Scanlon who makes attempts to imaginatively recreate his past. Through such grotesqueries he closes in on to "the moment of truth" and to a consequential "transformation."

The metaphor for such a transformation is the ritual enacted in the bullring, by man and the beast. Ritual in the ring gets transformed into myths, thereby rendering them timeless and eternal. He witnesses the bullfight in intervals of freedom from the captivation of his past memories. In one such look at the present:

> He turned to gaze at the bullring, the parade of matadors in their suits of light, their artificial pigtails, gliding across the sand with the slinky gait of cats that had learned to walk on their hind legs. Behind them the

> padded nags, with their fat-assed Sancho Panzas, the pom-pommed mules dragging. Then heavy chains, and then the proletariat prepared to endure it all—then clean it up. The head and tail, as Lehmann liked to say, of the bull himself. (*FV* 58)

When McKee wanted to know what the mules were for, he let Dr. Lehmann answer it. In the meanwhile, he turned his attention to the woman of his desire in the past/present. He wonders what thought would be passing her mind: "What had brought her to the bullfight had also brought her, thirty years before, to the edge of darkness; that twilight zone on the porch" (*FV* 58). The analogy is that of the bull coming out of his "natural querencia"; the young Lois being lured by the capework displayed by the matador/Boyd submits to the sword/kiss of the matador. It becomes a two-bull corrida as Boyd consequently lures the other bull/Alice Morple too from its "querencia" for the ki(ss)ll. "The porch becomes 'Invisible zones' like the circles in a bullring that were meant to stylise and limit the action ..." (*FV* 58).

Boyd's act of squirting the pop at the runway, splashing it on the bull's "moist snout" is essentially "transgressive." In the carnivalesque discourse of the bullfight and the witness-spectators' involvement in it, the antics of Boyd become richly dialogised. Unconventionality and playfulness are distinctive characteristic traits of the man. Among the crowd, he solely emerges a hero and his buffoonery appeals to them.

As he shakes the bottle again and streams the cola into his mouth he "heard the crowd roar behind him—Someone shouted *Ole*! And he turned to seep off his hat, made a bow" (*FV* 61). Traditional bullfight is a ritual festival enacted in front of the authority: the rulers, the aristocrats and those with the power of imposing laws. In deviating from the traditional bullfight-fan's norms, Boyd tries to hold the centre of the arena. He plays up the unofficial voices of the people against the official voices of authority. In a bullfight, between every *tercia,* at the beginning and ending, the *toreros* have to bow and seek permission from the "Presiding Authority who sits in a box high in the stands and acts as *Juez* or judge of the *Lidia*" (Lea 7). The changing of the *tercios* is signalled by the blowing of a bugle from his box. Boyd's pranks are at the same time acts of transformation and transgression.

Boyd "kissed the frothy tips of his fingers, blew them at the crowd. They loved it, the shouting grew louder, he gave the bottle a last frenzied shake, and then, with every eye fastened on him, he turned the bottle from the bull toward himself. Was this *la suerte suprema*? ... In the thunder of applause that followed he bowed, took his seat" (*FV* 61). The official discourse of the bullfight and the heroic gestures of the matador is parodied in the dialogised, many-voiced actions of Boyd. His exploits in the past have rendered him a man "stripped of success." All his endeavours have been failures and he had chosen "as new territory the field of failure" (Trachtenberg 50). His failure at wooing

and winning the hands of Lois and the terrible disappointment at not being able to walk on water brings him to the consciousness of the necessity for transformation during the course of the bullfight. "The clichés of success, from which he rebelled, had taken their revenge in his passion for failure" (*FV* 63).

McKee had been a witness to another heroic act of Boyd in his adolescence. They had gone to watch a baseball match involving the legendary Ty Cobb. They had seats along the rail, the way they sat at the bullring. The stadium was bustling with spectators and fans who had "all come out to watch Cobb play, and may be hit a home run." Ty Cobb hit a huge one: 'he did—and he didn't' hit a home run. He never got as far as home with it: "... when he rounded third, they headed him off. I mean, I did" (*FV* 232). In the middle of the game Ty Cobb had hit a foul ball and Boyd made a catch in the stands. After the home run hit, Boyd rushed off over the fence to get it autographed:

> I crossed the foul line between first base and home plate, and by the time Ty was rounding third, I was on the line with this ball in my hand. I had him blocked off ... All I know is that he came around third base, saw me with the ball, and headed for the dugout. *Touring* out he also saw, coming up behind me, about five hundred kids who had the same idea, half of them with new balls they had bought and autographed. (*FV* 233)

In the melee that followed Boyd got his hands on Ty Cobb's pant. When he kept going onward, the pocket came off, but later he came to realise that he had dropped the ball. Witnessing with an awed gaze was McKee. "In that act: hero, witness and pocket were one in a moment of transformation" (Madden 140). The talismanic pocket had ever since been part of his person. The artefact and the act of his heroism complement each other in a life of failures.

When he came to Dr. Lehmann, he was a "dedicated no-man, one who turned to failure as a field that offered real opportunity for success" (*FV* 61). Boyd, the self-described failure carries with him the burden of unrealised potential. He had been a young man of much promise, "whose promise was now fifty-some years old" (*FV* 64). Sitting by the bullring, playing upon the duality of the past and present, his sights turn into visions of transformation. His audacious acts, both past and present, stir up feelings of nostalgia in the McKees. Randall K. Albers observes that "McKee is trapped in a separation of the past and the present, the attraction of the past rests simply with its opposition to the present" (99). His heroics have been a means of vicarious pleasure for McKee. As for Mrs. McKee, she is caught in the dichotomy of nostalgia and 'past guilt.'

Dr. Lehmann "specialized in mental cases, usually female" (*FV* 65). A psychoanalyst/psychiatrist by profession, he is both a witness and a hero in his own respective. He is as odd as the patients who

stayed with him. Leon Howard succinctly describes the character of Dr. Lehmann and his role as spectator: "The half-clown and half-charlatan, Lehmann, could see the fights and also Paula at his side, quietly knitting and unaware of what was going on" (22). Dr. Lehmann's language is characterised by "a blend of Brooklynese, German and grunts, in proportions entirely his own" (*FV* 64). A German by birth, lived part of his life in Vienna and thirty eight years in Brooklyn. He is a man of imagination, who has "an arrangement of sorts with the soul" (*FV* 66). Madden refers to him as a "compassionate bystander" (277) who "had other people's problems, but few of his own" (*FV* 65). He had only two kinds of patients, those who left him and those who stayed with him. On the slightest pretext of being queried about things within his knowledge he would come up with the story, sipping his brandy, a stimulant to his poor blood circulation. Gordon Boyd had become "a Lehmann man" ever since he met him and Paula Kahler was another. "She was not so much his patient, as he often hinted, as his practice" (*FV* 68).

Dr. Lehmann did not take much time to analyse Boyd, when he first met the doctor without an appointment. Boyd was recognised as "The professional soldier of failure, waging the cold war within himself" (*FV* 68). It was the piece of flannel cloth, soiled and grass stained, Ty Cobb's pocket which did the trick for Boyd. It had fallen down from his raincoat and Dr. Lehmann took it "to be a sort of a shoe rag." He did

not pay much attention to it, but later when Boyd was about to leave he flaunted the artefact, to which Lehmann asked:

> "For apful Polishink?
>
> Ty Cobb's pocket
>
> ...
>
> then added
>
> Little Gordon Boyd's piece of the Cross.
>
> (*FV* 68)

That sealed the fate of Boyd; for he had etched a place for himself in the consciousness of the doctor. He had been in his forties at that time and since that he has been with Dr. Lehmann:

> Bringing with him his pocket, the portable raft on which he floated, anchored to his childhood, on the glassy surface of the sandpit where he had failed to walk. Something of a hero, something of a madman, something of an ass. (*FV* 68-69)

The success/failure antithesis worked out in the narrative is central to an understanding of the character of Boyd alone. No other character endeavours heroic acts. The McKees and Tom Scanlon have been rendered fossils and are incapable of neither imagination nor any imaginative/creative act. Lehmann and Paula Kahler live in a world isolated from the community of humans. Physically, they are with human beings at the bullring but far removed from the web of common

humanity. Perhaps Gordon, the grandson of the McKees, who is the only other witness-spectator, is capable of any heroic action or imaginative transformation.

The metaphysics of failure is consummately worked out through the character of Boyd, during his association with Dr. Lehmann. He had gone to Lehmann, "When it was clear that he had failed to fail" (*FV* 69). Lehmann provides an objective appraisal of the psychological condition of Boyd. From his viewpoint the discourse of failure attains philosophical and psychological dimensions. Boyd's failure "to touch the floating bottom within himself" (*FV* 69) made him go back to Lehmann after his first visit, for a permanent session with the psychoanalyst. He went back with a photograph he had torn from some camera magazine. "The photograph showed a bum, seated on a park bench, sharing his last crust of bread with a squirrel" (*FV* 69). Lehmann smiled seeing this cover page, unaware of the fact that the bum is none other than Boyd, photographed in Washington Square. In his youth, he had gone through the realms of "success-clichés" and "had found failure a nut that refused to crack" (*FV* 69). Surrounded by beguiled witnesses and mute spectators he was a "wonder-boy in the theater." Lehmann refers to the prologue to a play written by Boyd, a play that was never produced. "Boyd advised his public that he *hoped* to fail, since there was no longer anything of interest to be gained in success" (*FV* 70). He became engrossed in the subject which became

most suitable to him. "This was failure" (*FV* 71). Through failure Boyd had hoped to reach his true self. Lehmann, the perceptive mind-reader, had understood that Boyd has been obsessed with the subject of failure. He hoped that "In his failure, at least he would be a success" (*FV* 71).

In adopting failure as his credo, he had undergone transformation from a hero to a witness. If the first phase was burdened with the "success-cliches," the failure phase was ridden with the "clichés of failure." Because of his "armor of cliches," Boyd had "actually failed to fail" (Trachtenberg 51). Lehmann succeeds in converting him to an observer, a witness. But the latent desire for heroism is too strong in Boyd to be suppressed.

> *The cliché of failure, like that of success, hung on the walls of the room he decayed in, and through the hole in the ready made frame he popped his own head.* (*FV* 71)

If Boyd had failed to "touch the bottom," Lehmann's other patient, Paula Kahler had been there. The mute-witness Paula, blind to the events of the world and to the bullfight succeeded where Boyd failed. Lehmann corroborates to the fact that she has been successful at making 'failure a success.' "He had let Boyd, a good observer, judge the facts for himself" (*FV* 72). She is a patient-student of Lehmann, who is through with the subject of failure. For Boyd, Paula becomes a specimen to study and analyse the concept of failure. "The words that

Paula Kahler had made into flesh—the words, that is, and the music—called for a further transformation, back into words again" (*FV* 72). The first thing that she learnt was to do away with speech. Seen quietly knitting away at the wool, unmindful and oblivious to the happenings in the bullring. Wayne C. Booth's appropriate comments on the character of Paula sums up her persona:

> Paul Kahler, now Paula, frustrated in his attempts, to find a meaningfully creative life as a male, 'lives' through having imagined himself, transformed himself, into a totally harmless—though ineffectual—woman. (386)

In her "brave new world," there are no males. Even in her "large collection of miniature animals" she kept no females. "The males and their aggressive ways had been weeded out" (*FV* 115). Stripped of her maleness, she rejects all aggression, all brutality.

In the doctor's income-tax documents, she is "a dependant, classified as his housekeeper, Paula Kahler was the woman—strange to say—in Dr. Lehmann's life" (*FV* 115). In transforming herself to a wo-man, she becomes the embodiment of tender love, a source of comfort and help to the doctor in his old age. "She had an aura, an air of peace about her, usually associated with genius or the simple-minded." With the feet of a man, and hands disproportionately large, she looked fragile "with the large sad eyes of a goat" (*FV* 72). The Paula Kahler case came to Dr. Lehmann as a consequence of the patient

strangling "the amorous bellhop in the servants' life" (*FV* 74). The murderous act was perfectly and quietly executed in the lift where the bellhop tried to molest the (wo)man. The next morning when the lift was opened she was seen sitting on a pile of bed sheets which she was supposed to deliver. In one of the sheets the body of the molester was neatly covered. "She had been a little bruised, physically, but psychologically undisturbed" (*FV* 74). Dr. Lehmann, the house physician upon examining 'the lady' found that "Mrs. Kahler, as she was known, was not a *Mrs.* at all." But "in her own eyes," says Dr. Lehmann, "there was no disparity between the body she had and the clothes she took off" (*FV* 74). In observing the fe-male for over two years at his house, lies the clue to "the making of Leopald Lehmann, professionally. It would be of service to the troubled world, generally" (*FV* 75).

Dr. Lehmann discovered Mexico in a theatre, where he saw a man fight a bull. "The image of the man as part of the bull ... became fixed like a poster, in his mind" (*FV* 73). Having been fixated with the sport he enquired where he could witness men fighting bulls. With his patients, Boyd and Paula, he sets out to the hot, alien Mexico. An old man's witless passion for the life of action and romance. The passion lied elsewhere; he is interested in the perception of man and bull meeting and merging; "in such small compass" he perceives "so much basis for inexhaustible generalization. Man and bull. Man into bull.

Bull into man" (*FV* 73). Lehmann is the sole character in the narrative who approaches to wisdom. His task in life is to clean up the mess the others have made their life of. He symbolically witnesses this act in the ring where "the riffraff, the mules, and the men with brooms and shovels who cleaned up the mess" (*FV* 35). He sees the parade and procession preceding the bullfight as a "parable of life" (*FV* 31). With the hero in the front, mounted on a horse, cloaked in black costume, "A somber foreboding of what lay ahead in the hero's life" (*FV* 31). The bull, the horse and the man become mere playthings in the hands of fate.

"In the tragedy of the bullfight, the death of the horse is a comic episode." As Hemingway explains:

> The tragedy is all centered in the bull and in the man. The tragic climax of the horse's career has occurred off stage at an earlier time; when he was bought by the horse contractor for use in the bull ring. (6)

Death for the horse and the bull is certain; whether within the ring, or in front of the eyes of the spectators, or outside of it. The matador dominates the bull by knowledge and science. The bull should be utterly lacking in the knowledge that he is in a ring; every bullfight has as its fundamental premise that the bull has never been in the ring before. The matador exudes "a feeling of immortality," which is the "essence of the greatest emotional appeal of bullfighting" (Hemingway

213). This "feeling of immortality" is imbibed by the spectators, which transforms the mortal beings/witnesses in a flight of imagination to the planes of immortality in "the moment of truth."

The bullfight scenes in the narrative are mainly seen through the eyes of Boyd, the genuine witness-spectator. When Boyd closes his eyes to the past, and opens it to the present action unfolding before him:

> ... (he) watched the bull make his charge. The man erect as a post, heels and calves together, his entire body exposed to the horns since he held the cloth in his left hand, the bull charging from the right. A pass called the natural. The most dangerous and beautiful. No ass wiggling, no fancy footwork, no sleight of hand with the hand of cunning. A moment of grace when both man and bull were sure of themselves. The illusion of an 'irresistible' force wheeling around an immovable object. A mere nothing. A man armed with a cloth. (*FV* 192)

In the art that is bullfight, each and every *suerte* enacted by the man is a play with death. He plays at death, at immortality, at imagination and at transformation. Through this play he defers death by. The three periods of 'play' are "designed as progressive punishments to the immensely powerful neck muscle of the bull" (Lea 10).

The Schillerian sense of play points to the human potential to explore, to play up and through the possibilities of a given paradigm, to create metaphors. The matador creates metaphors out of his capework; transforming the mundane, material world into one of permanence and timelessness. "Boyd could see the still point where the dance was" (*FV* 192). But it is the 'still points' in the witness' past lives which make the majority of them (un)see the present action. Boyd awake to the reality of the present converts his sight into a vision. Through his 'field of vision,' his imaginative powers and yearning for transformation—he effects a deeper understanding of the nuances of bullfight:

> The bull could understand movement, but not its absence, the man could understand both movement and its absence, and in controlling this impulse to move, the still point, he dominated the bull. Except for the still point there would be no dance. The cloth, not the sword, brought the bull to heel. The moment of truth was at that moment, and not at the kill. (*FV* 192-193)

The bull is not interested in the 'play,' the *suerte*; it sees only the movement and the colour in its charge. Even the man is not in its 'field of vision' when charging. A slight movement from the 'still point' becomes a 'dance of death' for the matador.

Boyd turned to look at Lehmann. The old man was damp with perspiration. "The sour prospect of murder in cold blood." Boyd recalls

the recent goring of the young matador Da Silva and the recently killed bull, Traguito. "Words" would indicate "what had happened" (*FV* 193). But mere words would be incapable of conveying the spectators' contemplation of the *Estocada* or "the hour of truth" after the tiring *faena* for the bull. Conversely, the goring of the matador, although honourable, evokes revulsion in the minds of the spectators. "Nerved up bullfighting is sad to watch. The spectators do not want it. They pay to see the tragedy of the bull; not the man" (Hemingway 167).

The division of the bullfight ritual into *tercios* "represents an attempt to impose order upon the chaos of existence" (Crump 116). Boyd and the other witnesses see different bullfights: "Each man his own bullfighter, with his own center, a circle overlapped by countless other circles, like the pattern of expanding rings rain made on the surface of a pond" (*FV* 193). The multiple consciousnesses that the narrative throws up brings the past and present experiences of four generations. From the eighty-seven year old "fossilized" blind Tom Scanlon to the "non-still point" eight-year old Gordon McKee, they represent: the turn of the century, the arid planes of Nebraska in mid-western America, trans-continental culture and the ambiguously sexed.

Tom Scanlon, Lois' father is the hermit of Lone Tree, in Nebraska. Lone Tree is a small town with a lone cotton tree, rows of tin-roofed buildings and the railroad tracks as prominent landmarks.

At the turn of the century witnessed by Scanlon, there was just a tree. "A lonely tree in the midst of a lonely plain" (*FV* 47). From the time of his father, Scanlon's family had been living in "The Western Hotel ... where the caboose of the westbound trains comes to a stop" (*FV* 46). Tom Scanlon occupied his father's old room at the rear of the hotel, sitting by the window; he spent years looking into the plains. The younger generation Scanlons have seldom seen him, "... he was the ghost in the family closet" (*FV* 48). Gordon Scanlon McKee, the old man's great-grandson, the spectator at the bullring, took a fascination for the "mummified effigy of the real thing" (*FV* 101).

The old man sitting at the ring "... couldn't believe his eyes—the ones he had—but his ears told him the worst." He could hear only the "crowd yell" *Ole* and the "fizzing squirt of the pop" (*FV* 41), for he was literally blind. The literal blindness of the old man is pitted against the "figurative blindness" of the other characters. Except Boyd and the young Gordon McKee, the other subject-witnesses who are capable of seeing do not respond to the immediacy of the sight. The "varieties of sight" manifested through the witnesses "provide the major symbols" of the narrative according to Trachtenberg. He elucidates this aspect:

> ... each character looking at the events of the bullfight, sees only himself; However, because they are unable go focus beyond the narrow rim of their own pasts, they do not really see themselves. Unable to see each other and

> to see themselves in the eyes of each other, they are figuratively blind. Their limited vision expresses their limited self-knowledge. (47)

Each character looking at the bullfight, constructs a discourse out of the dialectic between the "reality of the text" and his own subjectivity. Every individual spectator adopts a "writerly role" in "constructing their own texts." Although blind and incapable of effecting any creative act, the plainsman Scanlon, too, symbolically sees the vast Nebraskan plains of his 'vast life'; "acts as the curtain puller on the drama of the old Midwest" (Madden 138). The sanded pit of the bullring transforms in his consciousness as the frontier plains; the desert-like terrain, the region east of the 98th meridian.

Scanlon, while witnessing the turn of the century, failed to turn with it. Not merely at the bullring, but in his yesteryear life too he shuns the present for the past. In the ring he and the matador become one as Madden points out: "... when the gored matador yells for 'agua,' Tom, dying of thirst in the desert of his imagination, calls for water" (138). He becomes conscious and physically aware of his blindness only after his trip to Mexico. The familiarity of sight, sound and smell at Lone Tree had lulled him into the thought that his sight was not altogether bad. "In Lone Tree, where nothing had changed, he saw things in their places, without the need to look at them. They were there, in case he wanted to see them, in his mind's eye" (*FV* 51).

Through his mind's eye he imparted visions of the land, the country and the mythic past to his great-grandson, Gordon. He has been telling the boy about the wind, the dry river, the dusty wagon and the harvest. "... there were always wagons that kept going, and they could hear the whips when they went off" (*FV* 95). The wagon and the railroad for the Midwestern plainsman symbolises the trek west.

His father, Timothy Scanlon had come from the East. Scanlon's consciousness is filled with the images of the journey "across the desert"; the symbolic journey "through the inferno of self-discovery" (*FV* 52). He had never been west of Lone Tree; only in his fantasies does such a journey across the desert takes place. The legend of the bizarre event is a powerful motif in the narrative and perhaps the only consistent and progressive narrative event in the novel. The symbolic scope of the journey is heightened by making the crossing an imagined act. Scanlon's imagination is vividly sketched in these words:

> The wagons were like ants in the neck of the bottle, and all along the trail, wherever you looked, they were busy putting something down, or picking something up. Everybody seemed to have a lot more than they needed, and right beside the trail, where you could reach out and touch them, were sacks of beans and sugar ... Anything that was heavy, that would lighten the wagon, they dumped out first. Some had brought along every

> fool thing they owned, rocking chairs, tables and barrels of dishes, and others had big frame pictures they would like for setting up house. Some had brought along books, trunks of fine linen, all the tools they might need for building a home, and you could see what a man valued most in his life from where he put it down. Towards the last you began to see people, friends who had sworn they would never part, or relations who had got too old, or too weak, left to shift for themselves. They weighed too much. So they were just dumped like everything else. (*FV* 95-96)

The frontier journey narrated by Scanlon is "the divestment of civilization" as Trachtenberg calls it. The "grotesque humor" of the act encompasses "the dumping of books and the paraphernalia of civilization (as) a necessary ritual" (52).

Scanlon and Boyd represent opposed views as their conception of heroism is diametrically opposite. Scanlon is incapable of transmitting 'charge' to others around him. He fails to pass on the charge even to his children, which he received from his father. His father Tim had "put the story of the pioneer trek he led across country to Nebraska through one transformation after another" (Madden 137). Scanlon, completely devoid of any sense of the present, never cared to live for anything nor die for anything. The witness in his life is only the

scorched planes. The desert of his life and life-as-desert. When he closes his (un)seeing eyes, the bullring becomes a desert, where he gropes for water and stumbles on the body of a man lying in the sand. "One who had been dead for some time." The wind produced "a ghostly music" (*FV* 186), from his mouth. Upon close examination he understands that "the dead man was himself" (*FV* 187). Although he arrives at no moment of truth here, he unmistakably comes to terms with the reality of the loss of his self-hood. The father-Scanlon, Tim, had by then completely pervaded the imagination and consciousness, with the events of his past. "There were two men within him, and he knew for sure that one of them had died" (*FV* 187). His highly charged imagination fails to effect any transformation in others. Even his great-grandson turns hostile and pledges allegiance to Boyd. Madden explains that "... the old man, stranded in the wasteland of the present, recedes deep into the better world of the past and transforms himself: he *becomes* the past" (138). No other witness-character so much as completely withdraws from the present and falls into the abyss of regression.

Both as hero and witness, Boyd is far superior to Scanlon. As hero he attempts to hold the centre of the arena; a futile attempt akin to chasing a mirage. But he does succeed in capturing and holding the imagination of himself and others around him. For Mrs. McKee, enraptured by the kiss on the porch, thirty years back, Boyd the hero

is in her consciousness as a "... strong aggressor, the male, the bull ..." (Booth 392). The repression of sexuality and sensuality had converted her into a being of little imagination. In the "durable fragments" of her life, the "still-point" of the kiss, had converted her to an eternal state of limbo. She is yet to come to imaginative terms with that act. At the bullfight, she faints, imagining the boy who went over the fence, being hit by the bull. She puts it as "oxygen hunger." When the Mexican doctor queried: "Due to the altitude?" She said, "Well, I've been higher in my time." Alice Morple could have told the doctor that "the highest point in her life ... was on the front porch of her home in Lincoln" (*FV* 88). Although the altitude was nil the symptoms were the same. McKee accompanies her to the car where he would offer her a cup of Java. McKee grasps the irony of the situation: it wasn't the bull in the ring but the bull in her life which had hit the boy; the "being reminded" syndrome.

In the third night after the kiss, Lois Scanlon had a strange dream. Alice Morple and Lois were sleeping on the porch at the back of the house, on the folding bed. The bed on which they had slept for two nights collapsed. "More weight had been added to it." Somebody had spoken to her 'Open up sweetheart'" and she did just that. It was as if "a man climbed to the roof—the roof of her dream" (*FV* 181). Only Boyd had the audacity to do that: "the brazenness to try anything" (Crump 8). Alice Morple was prone to exaggeration, but the ground beneath

Lois' feet had been shifting. She was unsure of herself "after tasting the candied apple." Aware of the fact that "a girl could be swept off her feet, and in the plainest sort of way never be quite the same again" (*FV* 182). Bewitched, she could neither trust her mind nor her body. For when her first child was born, the boy child did not take after McKee: "If he was like any human on earth, it was Gordon Boyd" (*FV* 183). In the bullring the tension between the perceived present and the imperishable memories of the past weighed too much upon Mrs. McKee. Crump's observation on this aspect is interesting:

> Frozen into the stereotype of the pure woman, she has let the fire of her instinctive passion die out. Her purity is willed, not natural. The original tranquility of the American Eden, the seemingly eternal innocence of the fresh adolescent faces in the summer twilight on the front porch, was shattered by the serpent Boyd, whose kiss meant more than all years with McKee ... what is left of her passion is sublimated into the overprotective maternal fussiness she showers on her grandson. (119)

For thirty years she had suppressed the passion, moulding herself into the most conventional of America housewife.

Boyd's audacity lacks intentions; his heroics are bereft of goals. In traversing from his boyhood daredevil acts of snatching the pocket from the hero's jersey, attempt to walk on water and the bewitching

kiss; through the realms of failure to the antics of a comic-hero in the fifties of his life, he has completed a full circle. At the bullring his profile ran like this:

Profession? Hero

Situation? Unemployed. (*FV* 101)

But his former witnesses are his current ones too. McKee, his rapt witness, and his wife Lois have neither tread the circle nor arrived at 'the moment of truth.' Unable to transform they still remain at the 'still-point.' Boyd's buffoonery at the ring makes him a comic-hero among the spectators. A man at the ring comments: "... there's nothing the world loves so much as a goddam fool." Boyd, in all sense one of the "goddamdest" was one of the "few men in his time (who) had been so well loved" (*FV* 102). Although heroism, imagination and love merge in the character of Boyd, he lacks a 'cosmic vision.' His enormous power to transmit the charge of the hero to the persons he come into contact with makes him stand out from the crowd. "In his heroics a potential bungler, and in his bungling a potential hero. In him every man loved the hero in himself" (*FV* 102). On the clapboard house of the hero the bronze plaque would read:

Birthplace of

THE HERO

Widely Loved and Known As

A GODDAM FOOL

and a little away from this house, the board on the home

of Walter McKee would be:

Birthplace of

THE WITNESS

Without whom there would not have been

A HERO. (*FV* 104)

It is the witness who benefits from the "foolhardy act of unmistakable physical courage" (Madden 265) by the hero. McKee knows that only a fool would try to walk on water, but this foolish act attains a symbolic meaning for the witness. McKee forever the man of common sense would never attempt such an act, but in his inaction he remains the same eternally. It would never be possible for him to transcend the boundaries of the mundane. In spite of the witness's inaction and lack of imagination, admiration for the hero has two manifestations: servitude and the immense capacity to love. Admiration, awe and love; qualities of a witness abound in the persona of McKee.

McKee, passionless and lacking in imagination is the embodiment of convention. His "insights are only skin-deep," the result of which is the display of most "commonplace sensibility" (Crump 118). He has been rendered into an impotent man of inaction, denying his manhood. Caught in the no man's land between the past and the present, his wife Lois exacts utmost self-discipline from him. In the narrative, McKee's nostalgia stays clear of Boyd only once. At the ring,

in the overwhelming presence of his hero, he narrates to his wife, the event of "killing a hog," as a boy. The only significant moment in his life happened when he visited his uncle at Texas. The hog belonged to his uncle and at the back of his house his uncle gave him the gun and asked him to shoot it as it reached closer. He bungled with the gun, but the bullet did hit it. "Who had fired it? McKee himself had no memory of it" (*FV* 132). Whether it was his uncle who pulled the trigger or he himself? It remains a mystery. He hadn't killed the hog; the hog had laughed himself to death" (*FV* 133). The event reviewed from the backdrop of the bullfight—where the man and the beast join together to transform the brute struggle into art—is merely an unimaginative act of murder. McKee's narration of this antiheroic deed, converts him into more of a cuckold. Spurred by the sight of heroic acts of the matador in the ring, his attempt to impress his wife falls flat. At the end of the narrative, McKee is seen holding a pair of imitation bull horn. Literally and figuratively, he remains unchanged as a mute witness, and a figure of ridicule.

The mock heroic gestures, actions and words of Boyd affect the young witness-spectator, Gordon McKee the most. The boy comes through transformation, as his viewpoint is substantially altered by the personality of Boyd. Initially he valued his cap for its face value; toward the close of the narrative he bluntly refuses to take the paper bull bought by his father, McKee because, "It's not a bull if you buy it"

(*FV* 249). In an earlier scene, Boyd snatching the coonskin hat from the boy's head and placing it on his head, says, "It's a real hat now ... because it's been on the head of a hero. That makes it real" (*FV* 226). The boy looks at him quizzically. Unable to comprehend the concept of heroism and failing to make a distinction between the genuine hero from the clownish one, the boy looks at the matador: "... on the runway below them, holding like flowers, the bull's two bloody ears" (*FV* 228). The ear is presented as a trophy of honour for the matador; it is with this that he makes a circuit of the ring, receiving applause. It is the ultimate recognition that a matador receives, if he is acknowledged by the judge as a brave man and as an artist. The matador becomes the genuine hero in the boy's mind only for a few fleeting moments. Boyd, through his comic heroics, has managed to go deeper into the consciousness of the kid. Unaware of the significance of the stinky flannel pocket that the hero possesses, Gordon is curious to know what importance it has in the subject's life.

The bull, not dead yet, with "the darts waving in his hump" went "along the fence looking for what no bullring offered. A corner" (*FV* 233). The matador's assistants and the attendants to the ring stalked the bull as the boy kept his eye on the ring and listened to Boyd. Varied visions of heroism tumble in the mind of the young Gordon: bull, baseball, slain bull's ears, Ty Cobb's pocket. "Boyd has raised the curtain on a great drama in the boy ..." (Madden 143). Boyd once again

takes the coonskin hat from the boy's head and throwing it into the ring, says: "Your uncle Gordon will now bring a dead coon back to life" (*FV* 234). Gordon asks the young boy to get it back and helps him over the rail into the arena. Gordon McKee retrieves it. "Boyd, the dead coon, is brought back to life in the audacious boy" (Madden 143). Boyd succeeds in transforming the little McKee from an awed witness to a young hero in the making. In the process he ceases to be one himself: "Touch bottom," he said, to himself and "pushed off" (*FV* 235).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: PLAYING BACK TO

Contemporary American sports fiction has for the best part remained conventional in the form and treatment of the subject matter. The ludic impulse among sports fiction writers is not as pervasive as in the writings of many postmodern writers. But the few writers who have experimented with *avant-garde* techniques in language, narrativity and theme have been the most successful achievers (Delillo, Roth, Coover and Morris). These writers do not conform to the dictum that sports narratives should incorporate into their structure the characteristic of games having a distinct beginning, middle and ending. It has been shown in this study that fragmentary narration and disjointed dialogue, as techniques to depict sporting themes are not uncommon in this sub-genre. The narratives on sport examined here justly represent the corpus of sports fiction written in the second half of the twentieth century.

Though the configuration of the antithesis, 'seriousness-frivolity' is still current in the critical circles, sports fiction in the present age is not derided upon. Strangely, the novelists themselves have often taken pains to apologise, for adopting sport as a subject matter in their works. One of the best known sports fiction writers, Mark Harris, dismissed his successful baseball trilogy as merely the apprenticeship

for his more 'serious' fiction. Philip Roth tried to establish that his baseball novel is not about baseball at all, but about more important contemporary American realities. The debunking of sport as a "serious subject" is taken up by sports fiction writers as well.

True to the protestation of Philip Roth, all the six novels analysed in the thesis, have much more in them, than the mere mimetic representation of a particular game, season or a player's career. "Serious" sports fiction cannot afford to be in the same vein as juvenile sports fiction. Delillo and Roth combine language play, literary games and sporting games in their narratives. The former reaffirms his faith in language and communication. For him language is the only means of "imposing order on random events" (*CLC* 78). Roth's protagonist indulges in an exhibition of language prowess to parody many things American at once.

Coover's narrative strategy is not the same in his two novels. His baseball novel is more experimental than his football novella. Such a difference is perceptible in the novels of Delillo and Roth. Delillo's football novel is narrated by his player-protagonist Gary Harkness, and he is sometimes used more as a narrative device than as character. Parenthetical asides scatter in the narrative. The authorial voice at times intrudes upon the protagonist's chronicle of football, war and philosophy of language. The circular structure of the plot is not in

accordance with football's spatial metaphor of linear progression. The narrative begins where it ends.

The ambivalent relationship between sport and spectator and text and reader, provide the structural framework for two of the best sports spectating novels ever written in American literature. Christian Messenger observes that: "Exley has several of the most impressive scenes of spectating in contemporary sports fiction" (*Sport* 227). Unable to identify the centre of American heroism for himself, he tries to equate writing with football. Exley's hero is an emasculated man, who in the process of spectating writes a discourse on the aesthetics of failure. *The Field of Vision* more pointedly probes the aesthetics of failure. In Morris's narrative the power of transformation is the essence of witness-hero relationship. Messenger writes about the aesthetics of spectating:

> Witnesses all have their own particular bullfight, or baseball hero and conception of heroism in the mind's eye. The spectacle in the arena gives back what they need. What witnesses see in the arena is what is for them and they act accordingly, heroically, foolishly, but always in human desire for some revelation. (*Sport* 223)

In both narratives, the witness is at the centre of the narrative arena, replacing the hero at the centre.

The several levels at which 'playfulness' and 'gamefulness' exist in narratives of sports is manifest in the study. Language is the basic tool with which all writers represent illusion/reality. The intellectual capacity to twist words to effect various modes of textual play is varied among authors. Authors manipulate language to surprise and provoke the readers. The expectations of the reader of sports fiction is thoroughly undermined by the exuberant play at language and literature. The Saussurian prioritisation of speech over writing and the Derridian conception of writing as prior to speech become authorial concerns even in sports fiction. Football and language 'collide' in *End Zone*. The author's firm belief in the "ritualistic qualities of language" (*CLC* 78) prompts him to satire the rhetoric of nuclear warfare and "... that verbal plummage, which so often attend the sects and subsets of American life" (*CLC* 79). In his interview with Tom LeClair, Delillo comments on the use of language in his football novel. "... language was a subject as well as an instrument" (81). For Delillo, Roth and other experimental writers, language has transcended from the status of a tool to represent reality to one of experiencing reality through language. Roth's free play at language mixes the "credible incredible" and the "incredible credible," (Interview 76) of baseball and the bizarre reality. The double ordering of play is the characteristic feature of all fiction the study deals with. The structural framework of sport ordering the fiction is embedded with multilayered play within that matrix.

The reader's "ideational activity" cannot be laid to rest for a full understanding of the textual representation of sport. Imaginative and allusive playfulness is the challenge before any reader confronting this type of fiction. More often, Sport becomes only a formal element in such discourses. The author or the narrator becomes the real player, acknowledging the presence of self or the reader in his play. Though many of the novels discussed have a considerable number of pages of realistic description of a game of football, baseball or bullfight, the game and the players seem relegated to the background in most of the narratives. For every character-player his life within the sport—the actual game situations, and the immediate life outside his play-sphere is the initial reflexivity built into any sports narrative.

An important aspect of the novels considered is the depiction of its sporting characters/protagonist-spectator as heroes as the "Horatio Alger dream gone mad" (Oriard, *Heroes* 135). The juvenile sports novels of the early decades of the twentieth century are the "formulaic sources of American sports fiction" according to Wiley Lee Umphlett (*Achievement* 25). The school sports stories written by Horatio Alger, Jr. (1834-99) emphasised freedom of self-expression, discipline and hardwork as the principal guidelines of young heroes. The utility value of sports was largely restricted to finding an outlet for the pent-up energies of the ascetic demands of school and family life. "Strive-and-succeed" (Umphlett, *Achievement* 26) became the motto of young boys

engaged in sport. This is true of Frank Merriwell stories and other innumerable school and college stories of athletic contests, baseball and football.

The development of sports fiction from campus sports heroics to ritual sports heroes of Hemingway, Faulkner and Lardner and to that of the modern "collective sports heroism" and "anti-heroism" (Messenger, *Sport* 30) amply underscore the fact that sports narratives are products of the socio-political conditions of the age. It is not merely the social and political conditions of the age in which the narratives are written for that matter. Factors of economy, cultural changes and the role of media determine the way in which heroes are modelled in sports narratives. The ritual sports hero represents modern man's struggle to define himself. These fictional heroes thrived in their "encounter with nature, taking sustenance from the "pragmatic philosophy of Franklin ... and the idealism of Ralph Waldo Emerson" (Umphlett, *Achievement* 36). Self-reliance and individuality were the high points of such characters.

The protagonists of the narratives in the thesis wallow in the realms of anti-heroism. Sharing only a few qualities of the Horatio Alger mould of hero and the ritual sports hero, they predominantly display a helpless groping in the labyrinth of uncertainty. Sports novels, taking the path of contemporary experimental writing, has to a very large extent done away with the traditional notions of heroism and

strength of character. Many of the protagonists in these sports novels are not character-players themselves, and the character-players lack individuality. They are mere voices and the author holds the centre in all the narratives.

Delillo's Gary Harkness and Coover's Gloomy Gus are the only true character-players in the mould of a sporting hero. Both are football players and protagonists who actually play a sport. But anti-heroism is their essence and their author-creators play hidden games with them. Anti-heroism is used as a thematic device to mask the linguistic, aesthetic and political concerns of the writers. Coover's hero Henry Waugh and Roth's hero Word Smitty are victims of a godgame played by the authors. These two novels are sports fiction's exemplary representatives of 'new writing.' The aesthetic construct of utopian worlds in the two novels create diverse paradigms of confronting the inhospitable outside world. Coover's Henry Waugh constructs a completely internalised world of baseball, by means of which he removes himself from the society around him. Roth's Word Smith fights against the insidious reality around him through the construct of the history of a utopian baseball world. The former silently resigns to the fantasy world and the latter blatantly uses his fictional world to fight omissions in history. Neither of them plays a real sport.

Coover and Roth have not contributed to a further growth of literary self-consciousness. Authorial self-reflexiveness is however

central to the conception of these baseball novels. The 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue' of Roth's narrative is a direct address to the reader of the novel, rather than Smitty's monologic talk to the fans of the Patriot League. The narrator-writer takes up the role of an informant about his/author's text. The intrusion of the author is prominent in the 'Epilogue' and the meta-fictional motives become very obvious. In the final chapter Smitty apprehends the possible rejection of the manuscript of the text by publishers. The obliteration of the protagonist Henry in the last chapter of Coover's novel facilitates "a self-reflexive (authorial) consideration of some larger problems involved in fiction-making" (*CLC* 50).

Spectating is an important dimension of any sport spectacle. Every organised sports competition presupposes the presence of a huge crowd. Exley's narrative is obsessed with football and his hero, while Morris's spectators are not madly after the sport of bullfight. American football or 'gridiron' (as the rest of the English-speaking world calls it) is a spectator's delight. Through the electronic media, the players have become household names among the fans and the identification with them is easier. "... the objectification and fetishisation of the athletes' bodies and selves creates a bond with the other which becomes a bond with the self" (Reinhart 32). Exley's protagonist views life through the prisms of football and one of its heroes. The spectator in him makes a reading of not just the games

that he witnesses, but the contemporary America and its absurd heroes as well.

The witness-characters in the study come through to no victories. They are a frustrated lot, constantly trying to mend the broken threads of their life. Of utmost importance is the relationship between the hero and his witness(es). Exley's hero is known to him personally from his college days, but he keeps away from him throughout his life. In Morris's narrative the act of heroism in a bullring attains more significance than the persona of the hero. In such narratives, the hero does not appear as the chief character, but the effect of the hero (and/or his heroism on the field) upon his witness(es) is important. The power of transformation is central to these novels. Exley inwardly turning to himself understands that he is just another emasculated American male and Boyd as hero/witness tries to hold the centre of the arena. Both do not conform to Joseph Campbell's conception of heroism:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (41)

The two narratives of sports spectating marginalise the sporting hero in the middle, replacing him with the witness-hero at the centre. But

the witnesses are all lonely individuals in a crowd. They play upon their hidden desires and the hurdles to it. Frustration is their lot. As messenger comments: "The voice of the spectator is most often an intelligent and vivid confessional voice, richly dialogized with accents acquired through rueful experience" (*Sport* 212). Identification with the hero and the heroism at the time of sporting action is naturally followed by an estranged feeling. Sports spectating, more often than not, result in the construct of texts, which record the personal insights.

In the end, defining the sub-genre of sports fiction becomes the most difficult task. Oriard's simple definition "... a sports novel is one that is about sports" and sports novel as one "... in which the protagonist is an athlete or in which athletic activity is given considerable space ..." (7) is faulty and insufficient according to himself. Play and many forms of games are pervasive in American and world fiction. The writers can play with narration, language, form and a variety of other literary plays. Novelists make use of different game structures and game situations especially in experimental writings. Sport orders play and structures games. "Part of the dynamism of sport is that it not only carries play into the center of simulated winning and losing, but that the tally sheet of a sports contest is a control against life's randomness" (Messenger, *Sport* 426). The representation of sport in fiction is not easily done. It cannot merely

cast sporting heroes and depict or describe sporting situations and actions. Conversely, sports fiction would cease to be sports fiction if all writers engage in 'unbounded play' to venture way beyond the sporting fields.

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