

The image and myth of baseball in the American culture in the light of W.P. Kinsella's novel *Shoeless Joe* and Phil Alden Robinson's movie *Field of Dreams*

Karolina Ćwiklińska

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

ABSTRACT

The game of baseball has long been regarded as an expression of America – its history, dreams, hopes, ideals, fight for individual and collective success, for democracy and equality. As John Thorn has indicated, baseball has become “the great repository of national ideals, the symbol of all that [is] good in American life”. Baseball’s playing field is not only a place where games are held, it is a sacred place of ritual, an archetypal garden of timelessness and youth, one of the last places where people are allowed to dream. America’s love for baseball and all that the game stands for is unique and incomparable. The aim of this article is to acknowledge and describe sport as a social, cultural and historical phenomenon and to show its importance as a part of culture, taking as the example the game of baseball and its position in America. In this article the main theoretical foundations and frames are established in order to enable any further discussion of baseball and its place in American culture. It aims at outlining the position of baseball in American popular culture by examining and discussing major works in baseball literature and film. In the first part of the article, a general history and development of the game and its mythology as well as the genre of baseball literature and film is being presented. The second part of the article presents the theme and myth of baseball in American popular culture on the example of W.P. Kinsella’s novel, *Shoeless Joe*, and Phil Alden Robinson’s film, *Field of Dreams*. The two works are being thoroughly examined and analyzed in order to show certain themes that appear in both the novel and the film.

KEY WORDS

baseball, American culture, myth, film, literature.

Baseball as a reflection of the American ideals and mythology

Sport in general reflects the ideals, values and culture of a society, and as societies differ between each other, so do the sports. Therefore, certain sports are the mirrors of certain cultures and become the national games. It was mentioned by Parlebas [1, p. 16] that “social groups and people in general distinguish themselves as much by their games as they do by their languages: the Scottish Caber tossing, American Baseball, English Cricket, Basque Pelote, African dugout races or the Afghan Buzkashi are practices that are as distinctive as their home or the structure of their genetic heritage”. Therefore, certain games and sports are identified with certain countries and vice versa, and one such example is America. Americans love sports. “Sport is as much part of American society and culture as are other social institutions

such as family, religion, politics, economics and education” [2, p. 3]. They love it for the notions of cooperation and team work, fair play, hard work, personal excellence and realization of dreams. Those are the values of the American society so much reflected in its sport activity.

One American sport in particular probably surmounts all other in reflecting the U.S. Society – and that is baseball, called by the Americans themselves the National Pastime. Baseball is so closely connected with the American identity that it has often served as an expression of patriotism and a mean to build up the nation and its low morale. What is more, the game itself has also mirrored the social and political changes of the country, as for example racial integration or the emancipation of women. America is often seen as a distinctive and incomparable nation, whose history and development is unprecedented and a result of unique circumstances. It was claimed by Smith and Porter [3, p. 146]

that "it is possible to test the concept of American exceptionalism by considering the history of baseball and the evolution of its place in American life". Moreover, the history of baseball and its development also shows the importance of mythology and ritual in the game and American society. The myth has been present in baseball since its very beginnings. Actually, the origins of baseball were mythologized and turned into a story of how a schoolboy, Abner Doubleday, invented baseball in 1839, in Cooperstown, New York [3, p. 149]. It was said that baseball was invented by Abner for his mates at school, in the rural and idyllic settings of Lake Otsego. The myth emphasized the nation's rural past, ingeniousness of the people and the uniqueness of the game itself. As it later turned out, there was no evidence for this claim, but there were many proofs supporting the theory that baseball evolved from a British game called rounders and some other stick-and-ball games. The reason why the 'evolutionary theory' was not welcomed by the baseball fans is that this theory did not suit the mythology of the game which had become so quintessentially American. Still, people, fans of the game, hankered for the creation myth and so it became very strong and widely believed. People seem to prefer the story of origin by a moment of creation – for then they can have heroes and sacred places.

Getting to know baseball is a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to understand and "know the heart and mind of America", as said by a philosopher Jacques Barzun [4, p. 137]. This means that, partially, one can understand a culture by taking a closer look at its sports, and as baseball is 'the American game', a knowledge of it can help in understanding the culture of the US as a whole. Looking at baseball's history and change it is possible to learn more about American history itself. Baseball has been as big a part of America as its ideals of freedom and equality. When analyzing baseball at any given point in history it will reflect the overall tendencies in the US at that time. Baltov [5, p. 286] suggests that "to watch the events occurring in baseball is like watching the American culture in a mirror. Baseball with its mysterious underworld culture establishes certain values and habits, which are driven back into the day-to-day larger American culture". The game has been romanticized by poets, such as Whitman or Frost, turned into fiction on the cards of many novels or put in motion by film makers. Baseball represents America and carries with itself its mythology and heroes. It is more than a game. It is a part of a culture. It is an expression of American distinctiveness. And most importantly, it is probably impossible to get to know and to understand the United States without knowing baseball and what lies behind it.

Baseball in American popular culture

An interest of American writers in sports has not only limited itself to baseball, and sports as a literary theme has been present in American literature almost from its beginnings, as for example Rip Van Winkle in Washington Irving's 1819 story, who admired efforts of bowlers he came across in the mountains, or later, in the novels of Jack London (1876-1916) who portrayed and cherished physical prowess and endurance. For Ernest Hemingway, who saw sport as

a proving ground for character, F. Scott Fitzgerald, focusing on sport as a part of social relations, or Ring Lardner, who satirized the American hypocrisy, sport often became a representation of human nature and American society.

Baseball, as an infallible mirror of American society – with its strengths and weaknesses, takes a special place in American literature and has been described, glorified, given magical and mythical traits or romanticized by countless writers. As noted by Puerzer [6, p. 130ff] the literature about and with baseball is probably the richest of any other sport. A range of histories, biographies, and reference works as well as novels, poems, plays, and movies is associated with the game. Baseball, with its pace and symbolism, with its mythology and heroes, makes a perfect sport to be transferred into works of culture. One of the first, but at the same time hugely popular literary works with the theme of baseball was a poem written by Ernest Lawrence Thayer called "Casey at the Bat" [7]. It was first published in *The San Francisco Examiner* on June 3, 1888, and since that time became one of the best known poems about baseball. Apart from poetry, baseball literature abounds in journals, chronicles and memoirs written directly by baseball players or their ghost-writers. Here, it is worth mentioning Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* [8] from 1970, a controversial but funny and touching memoir of Bouton's 1969 season in Major League Baseball; or Eliot Asinof's *Eight Men Out* [9] from 1965, a thorough investigation and reconstruction of the 1919 Black Sox scandal. Nevertheless, the vast part of the genre of baseball literature consists of works of fiction. It is novels that show baseball at its best, describe its magic and emotions connected with it, transfer the myth and cherish its heroes and legends.

For a broader view of how baseball fiction developed as a genre, what major themes and tropes appeared, some of the most representative works of this genre are worth mentioning. Published in 1952, Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* [10], is one of the first and most prominent novels written about baseball and still by many critics it is seen as one of the best in the genre, mostly because it skilfully mixes the realism of the world of baseball with mythic and historical allusions and symbols. Douglas Wallop's *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* [11], is a classic baseball novel, published in 1954. The novel tells the story with wit and humor, but at the same time gives a thorough view at baseball in the 1950s and, by adapting the theme of Faust, provides a link to one of the greatest works of literature. It was an important position in the developing genre of baseball fiction, and still remains read and appreciated. *Bang the Drum Slowly* [12] (1956) was the second, and by many critics seen as the best, of Mark Harris's tetralogy of baseball novels. The second book of the four is not so much about baseball, but still the game is present there and makes a perfect background for the touching story of human struggles in life and inescapable mortality. It is also an important position in the genre of baseball literature as it beautifully intertwines the nostalgic world of baseball in the 1950s into the story of life, death and human morality. The novel published in 1968, Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* [13] is another example of the book which has baseball as a background for the plot but is not

strictly about baseball itself. The novel's plot suggests it should be read as an allegory. The book is an allegory of man's attempts to make sense of the world and its unpredictability as well as a religious allegory of god and his creations. Finally, in *The Great American Novel* (1973) Philip Roth [14] in an ironic and demythologizing way examines the 'greatness' of America by looking at the world of the greatest of American games – baseball. The book is also an ironic reflection of American fears and faults such as greed, arrogance, or downright stupidity. Roth exposes some of the America's shames: political hypocrisies, social prejudice, ethnic or gender-based stereotypes that are as much a part of the nation's history as its adoration of freedom or fight for independence. But Roth does not try to demythologize the game of baseball itself. What he aims at are the American ideals and organizations for which baseball has come to stand. Roth tries to debunk some of the cherished American myths, at the same time staying nostalgic towards other, which is baseball.

Films, similarly to novels, depict the game at its best, often idealize it and transfer the mythology of baseball and its heroes. As noted by Wood and Pincus [15, p. 7]:

Baseball and film are threads woven deeply into the patchwork quilt of American culture. For well over a century, the Hollywood storyteller has relied frequently on baseball as the subject, backdrop or explanatory device and film as the medium. Together, baseball and movies have played distinct yet overlapping roles in mirroring and even shaping America's ever-shifting cultural trends.

Baseball movies, like other films, evolved from one-reel demonstration motion pictures produced by Thomas Edison's company. *The Ball Game* [16], an 1898 short black-and-white silent documentary, was a series of scenes depicting two amateur baseball teams playing a game. The first feature film that had baseball as a main theme was *His last game* [17] from 1909. It was important not only because of the baseball theme, but also because it depicts a Native American character in a positive way, unlike other pictures at that time. Baseball became an often used topic in the early silent movies and they often showcased major league stars, such as Home Run Baker, Hal Chase, Frank Chance, Ty Cobb, Christy Mathewson, John McGraw, and Babe Ruth [18, p. 100]. In the following decades many important baseball films appeared, as for example: *The Jackie Robinson Story* [19] from 1950 that starred Robinson as himself, and was released only three years after Robinson broke the baseball color line and became the first black Major League baseball player. The 1973 film starring Michael Moriarty and Robert DeNiro, *Bang the Drum Slowly* [20], based on Mark Harris' novel of the same title, marks "subtle yet meaningful shift in the nature of baseball storytelling on film" [15, p. 12]. It is no longer a pure depiction of the game, a para-documentary, but a film that incorporates the game of baseball into a thought-provoking and touching story of human emotions and ideals. Also a later film, *The Natural* [21] from 1984, which is an adaptation of Bernard Malamud's novel, depicts not only baseball but also tells an allegorical story of success, failure and America.

W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* [22] and Phil Alden Robinson's *Field of Dreams* [23] as the examples of baseball theme and myth in popular culture

Both the novel and the film serve as a great material to be discussed in the topic of baseball's dominant and mythological role in the American culture, as they both broach the subject of baseball, dreams, myths, legends, love, and religion, among many other. It is worth mentioning that they fall into a category of a genre called magical realism. Magical realism is an artistic genre in which magical elements mix with the real world [24, p. 5]. The term has its origins in the 1920s, in the writings of Franz Roh, a German art historian, and independently in the Italian journal edited by writer and critic Massimo Bontempelli. "Roh believed magic realism is related to, but distinctive from, surrealism, due to magic realism's focus on the material object and the actual existence of things in the world, as opposed to the more cerebral, psychological and subconscious reality that the surrealists explored" [25, p. 12]. Roh's claims influenced later the art and literature in Europe and Latin America, and it was in Latin America that the genre of literary magical realism originated and developed and later moved to other parts of the literary world. The strong trend of magical realism in its more modern meaning, which is included in general movement of postmodernism, has been present from the 1960s, mostly in North American and British literature. It is a kind of narrative technique that blurs the distinction between what is real and what is magical (fantastic or mythical). And both the ordinary and the extraordinary are treated equally. As noted by Leal [26, p. 121] "in magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts". Later on he adds that often in this genre of literature certain events (even the key ones) have no logical or psychological explanation and that "the magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality or to wound it but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things" [26, p. 123]. Therefore, the reality in this genre is not distorted or altered by magical elements, it is shown as having the magical qualities in itself, as an integral part of this reality. Moreover, "magical realism, unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community, that s/he is historically constructed and connected" [27, p. 286]. Therefore, in the magic realist narrative, the frame and the surface of the story might be conventional and realistic, but the dreamlike elements – such as supernatural myth or fantasy – enter this reality and become its integral and unquestioned part.

Shoeless Joe originated as a short story which was published in 1981 under a title *Shoeless Joe Jackson comes to Iowa* in a collection of Kinsella's (born in 1935 in Canada) short stories. The story became popular and was later transformed into a narrative. Kinsella shows not only the beauty of the game, but also uses baseball as a metaphor for greater themes, such as dreams, tradition, mythology or America itself, just to name a few. His books are filled with sentimentalism, nostalgia and magic, but sometimes criticized as being too overtly mawkish, unbelievable or glorifying stereotypes. The book *Shoeless Joe* is narrated by Ray

Kinsella who, together with his wife Annie and daughter Karin, runs a farm in a rural part of Iowa. A farm on which Ray builds a unique baseball field and experiences magical encounters with baseball players from the past.

Field of Dreams is a 1989 drama-sports-fantasy film written and directed by Phil Alden Robinson who adapted the novel of W.P. Kinsella for the use as a screenplay. The film stars major Hollywood actors, such as, Kevin Costner (as Ray), Amy Madigan (as Annie), and Burt Lancaster (as Moonlight Graham). Critics praised the faithful and well-balanced adaptation of the book, its depiction of baseball and magical elements of the story, its celebration of pure American traits and dreams. It is indeed a story of how dreams may change lives of people who have the courage to pursue them, and how strong and life-altering might be passion for baseball. The film is sentimental and might make people cry or reflect for a while, which for some might be a disadvantage. Still, the movie was mostly acclaimed as a huge success and excellent adaptation of a classical baseball novel. Its traits, such as melancholy or sentimentalism and great ideals and dreams, were seen by some as the film's positive part and by others as the negative, and as stated by a *Newsweek* reviewer "this is the sort of movie you either swallow whole or not at all" [28, p. 59].

Major themes in *Shoeless Joe*¹ and *Field of Dreams*²

Baseball

The game of baseball, its heroes, legends, symbols and all it stands for is one of the main themes of both the book and the movie. The game that is so ultimately American and magical fills the life and creates the dreams of main characters of the story. Ray's love for the game leads him to do extraordinary things and makes him put unusual effort into following his dreams. Ray's life has been immersed in baseball even before he was born, as he recalls, "[m]y father, I've been told, talked baseball statistics to my mother's belly while waiting for me to be born" (*SJ*, 12). Ray grew up hearing stories of baseball legends instead of nursery rhymes. Therefore, when Ray hears the mysterious voice at his cornfield telling him, "if you build it, he will come" (*SJ*, 9), he only for a second questions the significance of this fact, [w]as it really a voice I heard? Or was it perhaps something inside me making a statement that I did not hear with my ears but with my heart? Why should I want to follow this command? But as I ask, I already know the answer. I count the loves in my life: Annie, Karin, Iowa, Baseball. The great god Baseball (*SJ*, 12).

Throughout the novel and the film, it is noticeable that the game of baseball has not changed with time. "The year might be 1900 or 1920 or 1979, for all the field itself has changed" (*SJ*, 97). The rules are the same, the ideals behind the game and ambitions people try to fulfill on the field. Because of this unchanged character of the game, it is possible for the players to move in time and play without

limitations of age or technological developments, as all they need is a ball, bat, glove and talent – all these being constant throughout the years. The players: the 'Unlucky Eight', Kid Scissons, Moonlight Graham, Ray's father, can come back to the magical field amidst the corn and play baseball as they know it and make it work. For baseball is constant, and gives a feeling of security and stability, and as described by Koprince [29, p. 349ff], "baseball's playing field itself has been viewed as archetypal – a walled garden, an American Eden marked by youth and timelessness". Ray admires this quality of baseball not only on his magical field, but also during a Red Sox game he attends with Salinger, "[t]he play reaffirms what I already know – that baseball is the most perfect of games, solid, true, pure and precious as diamonds. If only life were so simple. I have often thought, *If only there was a framework to life, rules to live by*" (*SJ*, 104). According to Ray baseball is resistant to change, and even if there are new stadiums built, or lights added, the core of the game, its ideals and beauty, remains untouched.

But the game of baseball embodies also dreams and longings of other characters of both the book and the movie. For Shoeless Joe Jackson, Moonlight Graham, and J.D. Salinger (or Terence Mann on the screen), baseball is the ultimate game, a dream, a philosophy of life and incarnation of all the American virtues. When Joe Jackson appears for the first time on Ray's field, the two men talk about baseball and Joe makes a statement about his love for the game and its meaning in his life. He expresses how he felt after being suspended for life from the game, because of the World Series scandal. He says it was:

*[I]ike having a part of me amputated, slick and smooth and painless. (...) A friend of mine used to tell about the war, how him and a buddy was running across a field when a piece of shrapnel took his friend's head off, and how the friend ran, headless, for several strides before he fell. I'm told that old men wake in the night and scratch itchy legs that have been dust for fifty years. That was me. Years and years later, I'd wake in the night with the smell of the ballpark in my nose and the cool of the grass on my feet. The thrill of the grass ... (*SJ*, 21).*

Joe not only has talent for playing and is involved in the game as a sportsman, but he also feels baseball with all his senses, remembers every tiniest detail. For Joe, losing the ability to play was like losing a part of himself. But thanks to the field Ray has built, Joe is able to come back to the game and live his dream life again.

Baseball is shown, both by Kinsella and Robinson, as a metaphor and reflection of America with its dreams and ideals. Ray on his first meeting with Salinger told him that he wants baseball to be "a metaphor for something else: perhaps trust, or freedom, or ritual, or faithfulness, or joy, or any of the other things that baseball can symbolize" (*SJ*, 109). These are the traits that Americans share and value and they all, and many more, are symbolized by baseball in the novel and film. But it is also a metaphor for American society and history, of the struggles the nation went through when fighting for its freedom and equality. Baseball is constant and so are certain values in the society. Baseball is a part

¹ *Shoeless Joe* abbreviated to *SJ*.

² *Field of Dreams* abbreviated to *FD*.

of America. This is visible in the monologue that Salinger delivers when he tells Ray of the dream he had. Salinger describes baseball as a metaphor for continuity offering a nostalgic journey into a romanticized pastoral:

I don't have to tell you that the one constant through all the years has been baseball. America has been erased like a blackboard, only to be rebuilt and then erased again. But baseball has marked time with [sic] [while] America has rolled by like a procession of steamrollers. It is the same game that Moonlight Graham played in 1905. It is a living part of history, like calico dresses, stone crockery, and threshing crews eating at outdoor tables. It continually reminds us of what once was, like an Indian-head penny in a handful of new coins (SJ, 275).

From Salinger's monologue prevails one theme, baseball as a metaphor for America, constant and reliable, with the ability to sooth the nation and to give people peace they lack. And it is peace and moral frame that is most wanted in the fast and brutal world. Baseball, because of its constancy, connects the past with the present and gives people a feeling of stability. It is also a reminder of the past (like the glorified 1960s in the movie) with its values, such as family, friendship, individualism, activism, and dreams, which is contrasted with the present of book-burners (scene of the PTA meeting at school), unbelievers and merciless bankers (such as Mark and Bluestein). And baseball field is shown as the last pure place that allows Americans to dream. Ray's field has not only magical but also therapeutic properties. All of the major characters, somehow troubled in the past, manage to receive their atonement on the field, they find their heaven on earth [30, p. 221]. "Ray Kinsella's creation of the mystical ballfield wipes all memories of sinful past and replaces them with an Elysian manifestation of baseball" [31]. At the baseball field in the America's heartland, the individual heroes of the past and the weary community is able to return to the pastoral and transcendent and regain their harmony and realize dreams.

Dreams and magic

Both *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams* are works that belong to the previously described genre called magical realism, and as such, are filled with dreams and magical elements that intertwine with real occurrences and characters. Those magical and fantastical events are included in the narrative that derives inspiration from fable, folk tale, and myth while keeping an accurate social relevance. And, as long as certain concepts are easy to convey by a written word, as literature in itself relies on imagination of its readers, in the movie, the director succeeded in transferring the magic from words into pictures.

Throughout the novel and the film one of the main themes is dreaming and realization of those dreams. It is those dreams of the main characters that shape the story and are its lifeblood. It all starts with Ray and his dream of following the voice and building the baseball field. As Ray builds the field, putting lots of effort and emotion in it, he knows he has become a part of something unusual and magical, wanting at the same time for the mysterious

promise to substantiate soon and confesses, "I want it all to happen now. I want that catcher to appear. I want whatever miracle I am party to, to prosper and grow: I want the dimensions of time that have been loosened from their foundations to entwine like a basketful of bright embroidery threads" (SJ, 31). The characters in the story: Ray, Eddie Scissons, Joe Jackson, Salinger/Mann, they all want their dreams to come true, and they all go to great lengths to make it happen. They may have doubts on the way, they might not clearly see where they are heading but they hope for the best. On his way back to Iowa with Salinger, Archie and Eddie to show them his ball field, Ray thinks of all this as of some impossible situation, as of fairy tale or fable. At one point on the way, Ray reflects.

We drive east toward Annie, my farm, my miracle; and I have no idea what is going to happen when we get there. I might as well be the Wizard of Oz, Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmanuel Ambrose Diggs, heading for a Kansas farm in company of a scarecrow, a tin man, and a cowardly lion, with one eye cocked lest the wicked witch come swooping by, riding a broom and clutching a screaming black cat to her bosom (SJ, 191-192).

The baseball field, the ghost players, the mysterious voice telling Ray what to do and where to go, it all seems for him as if the world of fantasy and fable was mixing with reality. Ray as the Wizard of Oz, accompanied by a scarecrow, a tin man and a lion, the characters of a legend, entering the real world and not knowing what lies ahead.

Another main point of both *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams* is magic. The magical elements appear throughout the story and they are a part of the main plot, and an inseparable part. Ray knows he has built something exceptional, a place in which reality and fantasy blends, where time becomes irrelevant and dreams come true. When Ray tries to convince J.D. Salinger to come with him and experience the atmosphere on his field, he says, "There is a magic about it. You have to be there to feel the magic". And Salinger, still with disbelief asks, "What is this magic you keep talking about?" Ray gives him an answer that explains the uniqueness of the field, "It's the place and the time. The right place and right time. Iowa is the right place, and the time is right, too – a time when all the cosmic tumblers have clicked into place and the universe opens up for a few seconds, or hours, and shows you what is possible" (SJ, 111). And there are many things that are possible on the field. One of the main traits and simultaneously themes in both the novel and the film is the lack of time boundaries, the transcendence of time, and characters who can "fly softly across the dimensions of time" (SJ, 269). Thanks to this characteristic, the dead players can appear on the field and play again, Ray's father can materialize and talk once again with his son and reconcile with him, Doc Graham can move back and forth in time and realize his dreams.

One of the finest, most magical, and most recognizable elements of the story is the moment when the ghost players emerge from inside the cornfield and materialize on the baseball field. In the film, this moment is filled with magic, amplified by moony music and great camera shots. The

director showed his excellence in transferring such an elusive and difficult to capture moment from words into pictures. In the novel, the description of this event is poetic, magical and wonderfully imaginative. The moment when Ray notices the players who emerge out of the cornfield and gain substance is described in a language full of poesy and magic.

Suddenly, as if the park has been inundated with butterflies and flower petals, the scene changes. The grandstands and floodlights appear, and the players file in through the gate in the center-field wall. They materialize out of the cornfield, as if from some unseen locker room. The sounds and smells of baseball are all about me (SJ, 246).

This event is the peak of magic in the story that is anyway so filled with it. With the players coming out of the cornfield, as they emerge one by one and materialize on Ray's baseball field, also the dreams and hopes of the characters in the story substantiate. Coming out of the cornfield is therefore a metaphor for the realization of dreams and becomes one of the primary points in both the novel and the film.

Religion and myth

Baseball as a game is already rich with legendary and mythic associations, which was outlined previously, but both in *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams* it has been added a new, religious, appeal. As described by Wood and Pincus [15, p. 61], "consciously working in previous folkloristic traditions about baseball, Kinsella has laid on another layer of new myth, a religious gloss, which Robinson has decked out in luscious color, making Iowa glow like heaven". American society glorifies baseball and attaches to this game mythopoetic qualities, making it a game that plays on human emotions and gives its fans a sense of belonging and a core of values, similarly to religion. *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams* might be read and viewed as a religious allegory, as they contain many references to the rituals of religion, heaven and the perfection of existence, all mixed with the perfection of baseball and its myths.

From the very beginning of both the novel and the film one might notice religious dimensions of the story. It all starts with Ray, a good and dutiful person, hearing a voice and acting obediently to it – a script not so different than that in some biblical tales. One can even find a passage in the Bible which might be taken as a model for what became the first utterance of the mysterious voice. In the passage, 1 Chronicles 28: 9-10, David tells his son, Solomon, to devote himself to God by building the temple and says, "if you seek him, he will be found by you". This fragment is remarkably similar to the command Ray hears, "if you build it, he will come" (SJ, 9). Ray experiences also a vision of a ballpark. This is not a signal sent from God, but rather as Ray calls it, from "the great god Baseball" (SJ, 12). When telling Salinger about the voice Ray heard and the visions, Salinger was very skeptical, asking, "What if it was all a hallucination? Religious fanatics are known to have detailed visions. You're obviously a baseball fanatic" (SJ, 85). Baseball and religion are mixed in this story, they influence and even replace one another. While building the baseball field,

Ray talks about digging a garden in the rich Iowa soil, the soil and occupation that he found cathartic. The work he has done on the field, which Ray calls a garden, brings him epiphany, "an experience of religious significance" (SJ, 23). Throughout the book, religious term such as "ritual", "sacrament", "sign", "revelation", "omen", "congregation", "miracle", "penance", and "faith", convey the religious dimension of the story and the impact of baseball as a quasi-religious experience on its fans (followers).

One of the greatest religious symbols in the story is the ballpark itself. Ray depicts an empty ballpark as both "eerie and holy (...). A ballpark at night is more like a church than a church" (SJ, 172). Baseball field can be understood as an archetypal garden – like the biblical Eden – a place of innocence, timelessness and eternal youth. There are no time boundaries, people, when entering the field are young and happy, at the peak of their performance. Both the novel and the film show the reasons and aspects of American society that lead to the loss of this Eden. It is modern development, the loss of traditional values, overwhelming urbanization, merciless bankers and the demise of activism and idealism. But when building a baseball field on his farm in Iowa, Ray recreated the archetypal Eden. Also Salinger emphasizes the cathartic quality of the field, and when telling Ray about his dream of people coming to the field to watch the magical players says, "They'll watch the game, and it will be as if they have knelt in front of a faith healer, or dipped themselves in magic waters where a saint once rose like a serpent and cast benedictions to the wind like peach petals" (SJ, 275).

Those who see the beauty and power of baseball are the 'chosen' people, both the spectators and the players, and their eyes are open to its magic. For the players, members of the 'Unlucky Eight', the ballpark is a synonym of heaven, as they have presumably repented for their sin (which was throwing the World Series in 1919) and now have the ability to play again. That is why Joe Jackson assumes that "this must be heaven" (SJ, 26) when first appearing on Ray's baseball field. Therefore, sometimes the space beyond the borders of the field, into which players disappear after each game, is interpreted either as hell – with no baseball at all – or as purgatory, with a limited access to baseball [32, p. 72]. But the field is not only heaven for those players, it is so also for the mortals, the spectators who watch the games and believe in baseball. If they do believe, baseball gives them a promise of redemption and escape from the dull and mundane reality. As for Salinger, whose "rapture", which is again a word with strong religious connotations and used in Christianity to describe a direct transfer of a believer from earth to heaven, becomes his transportation into the world of baseball, into heaven.

One of the most significant moments that captures how closely knit is baseball and religion and how overlapping those two notions are is when Eddie Scissons talks about baseball from Ray's bleacher as if he were "an Old Testament prophet on the side of a mountain" (SJ, 247). He talks as if he was preaching a gospel of baseball, he equates the name of the game to the Word, the Logos, used in Christian sense as a word of God, or even in some cases as God himself. Eddie speaks in "evangelical fervor":

I take the word of baseball and begin to talk it. I begin to speak it. I begin to live it. The word is baseball. Say it after me (...) Can you imagine walking around with the very word of baseball enshrined inside you? Because the word of salvation is baseball. It gets inside you. Inside me. And the words that I speak are spirit, and are baseball. (...) The word healed them, and delivered them from destruction. (...) Praise the name of baseball. The word will set captives free. The word will open the eyes of the blind. The word will raise the dead. (...) Walk into the world and speak of baseball. Let the word flow through you like water, so that it may quicken the thirst of your fellow man (SJ, 247-249).

Eddie Scissons lived all his life with false identity, only to see at the end that the realization of his hopes and dreams falls short of the expectations. But he still believes in baseball and its ideals, in its cathartic powers. Eddie is a strong believer in the redemption that is inherent to the game of baseball. Eddie understands his own mistakes, but preaches to others that it is only through baseball that they can find fulfillment, recognition, and immortality. He is like an evangelist opening eyes of others, giving them a chance to change their lives and receive an eternal salvation.

Ray, Joe, Eddie and other characters consider baseball as one of the highest values in their lives. They glorify it, worship, replace religious beliefs with the game, ritualize it and spread the word of baseball. Ray, in order to realize his visions connected with the game, puts his family's future and prosperity in danger. The events taking place on his field completely overwhelm and take control over him. Once, when Salinger tells Ray that he could be accused of being possessed and asks if there is a baseball devil, Ray answers, "Anything taken too seriously becomes a devil. Do I take baseball too seriously?" (SJ, 174). But in his mind, Ray hopes he will not have to answer that question and asks himself, "What could be done to exorcise me? Would the ghost of Kenesaw Mountain Landis, (...) appear with crossed baseball bats, and stand over me as I lay pinioned to the pitcher's mound? Would he swat away baseballs that circled about my head like bumblebees?" (SJ, 174-175). The name of judge Landis, is a synonym of Devil for Ray (cf. SJ, 14), but even he would not be able to make Ray disavow baseball, for the faith in the game and its powers is stronger than anything else.

References

1. Parlebas P. The destiny of games heritage and lineage. In: Lipoński W, Jaouen G, eds. *Studies in physical culture and tourism: Special issue on ethnology of sport*, 2000; 15-27.
2. Delaney T, Madigan T. *The sociology of sports: An introduction*. Jefferson: McFarland; 2009.
3. Smith A, Porter D, eds. *Sport and national identity in the post-war world*. New York: Routledge; 2004.
4. Barzun J. *God's country and mine*. Little: Brown; 1954. In: Sands RR, ed. *Anthropology, sport, and culture*, Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey; 1999.
5. Baltov VA Jr. *Baseball is America: Origins and history: The good, the bad, and the ugly*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse; 2010.
6. Puerzer RJ. *Baseball literary journals: The grass-roots literature of the game*. *Nine* 2005; 14: 130ff.
7. Thayer EL. *Casey at the bat*. Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine Publisher; 1988.
8. Bouton J. *Ball four: The final pitch*. New York: Midpoint Trade Books Inc.; [1970] 2001.
9. Asinof E. *Eight men out*. New York: Henry Holt; [1965] 2000.
10. Malamud B. *The Natural*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1952.
11. Wallop D. *The year the Yankees lost the pennant*. New York: W.W. Norton; [1954] 2004.
12. Harris M. *Bang the drum slowly*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press; [1956] 2003.
13. Coover R. *The Universal Baseball Association, inc: J. Henry Waugh, prop.* New York: Plume; [1968] 1971.
14. Roth P. *The Great American Novel*. New York: Random House; [1973] 2011.
15. Wood SC, Pincus JD, eds. *Reel baseball: Essays and interviews on the national pastime, Hollywood, American culture*. Jefferson: McFarland; 2003.
16. *The Ball Game*. 1898. (Produced and distributed by Edison Manufacturing Company).
17. *His Last Game*. 1909. (Produced and distributed by Independent Moving Pictures Co. of America).
18. Rielly EJ. *Baseball: An encyclopedia of popular culture*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press; 2005.
19. *The Jackie Robinson Story*. 1950. (Directed by Alfred E. Green). Jewel Pictures.
20. *Bang the Drum Slowly*. 1973. (Directed by John D. Hancock). Paramount Pictures.
21. *The Natural*. 1984. (Directed by Barry Levinson). TriStar Pictures.
22. Kinsella WP. *Shoeless Joe*. New York: RosettaBooks, LLC; [1982] 2002.
23. *Field of Dreams*. 1989. (Directed by Phil Alden Robinson). Universal Studios.
24. Zamora LP, Feris WB, eds. *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; 1995.
25. Bowers MA. *Magic(al) realism*. New York: Routledge; 2004.
26. Leal L. *Magical realism in Spanish American literature*. In: Zamora LP, Feris WB, eds. *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press; 1995. pp. 119-124.
27. Foreman G. *Past-On stories: History and the magically real, Morrison and Allende on Call*. In: Zamora LP, Feris WB, eds. *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press; 1995. pp. 285-304.
28. Ansen D. *Baseball diamonds are forever*. *Newsweek*, 24 Apr. 1989: 72. In: Wood SC, Pincus JD, eds. *Reel baseball: Essays and interviews on the national pastime, Hollywood, American culture*, Jefferson: McFarland; 2003.
29. Koprince S. *Baseball as history and myth in August Wilson's: Fences*. *African American Review*. 2006; 40: 349ff.
30. Aden RC. *Popular stories and promised lands: Fan cultures and symbolic pilgrimages*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press; 1999.
31. Ardolino F. *Ceremonies of innocence and experience in: Bull Durham, Field of Dreams, and Eight Men Out*. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 1990; 18, 2: 43-51. In: Aden RC, *Popular stories and promised lands: Fan cultures and symbolic pilgrimages*, Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press; 1999.
32. Hye AE. *The great god baseball: Religion in modern baseball fiction*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press; 2004.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Karolina Ćwiklińska, School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Al. Niepodległości 4, 61-874 Poznań, Poland, e-mail: karcwi@gmail.com