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金塞拉棒球小說中的異常身體與神話詩學

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摘 要

美國當代小說家金塞拉以精彩的棒球小說聞名，然而他的作品中卻經常出現與傳統運動書寫截然不同的怪誕、病態、混種異類身體的意象，本篇論文即以《愛荷華棒球聯盟》為例，討論這篇小說中的巨人(北美原住民戰士 Drifting Away)與侏儒(芝加哥小熊隊吉祥物 Little Walter)角色。仔細考察美國棒球文化史會發現，金塞拉對運動員身體的畸異化、殘缺化其實大大顛覆了棒球代表的美國核心價值觀，例如崇拜陽剛、強身建國的美國國族主義理想，在宗教與醫學論述雙重影響下對於神聖的潔淨的追求，以及奮鬥競爭、爭取成功的「美國夢」神話等等。然而，另一方面，金塞拉筆下的怪物運動員卻又隱含另一層神祕的、甚至神聖的高度：巨人與侏儒角色不但能上溯西方上古神話的巨神與地精傳統，也可能與北美原住民部族的巨人神話、「搗蛋鬼」民俗傳說以及「神聖小丑」的儀式傳統有所關聯。如此，金塞拉實則恢復了怪誕身體在前現代思維中曾有過的傳達神諭、體現奇蹟的超越性意義，對抗啟蒙理性與科學論述致力於掃除蒙昧、排除異常的知識論暴力。金塞拉的棒球小說因此獨樹一幟地昇華了世俗化、商業化的現代運動賽事，將之回歸到其原型──帶有深刻宗教/性靈意義的古老遊戲原初形式之中。

關鍵詞：金塞拉、美國棒球小說、怪物、巨人、侏儒、搗蛋鬼、神聖小丑、北美印地安神話

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"The Enfreakment of the Sporting Bodies in W. P. Kinsella's *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*"

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Abstract

W. P. Kinsella has unrolled peculiar imagination about bodies in many of his baseball tales. In this article, I focus on his fascination about the freakish bodies and investigate their meanings in the context of sports narratives. I explore the mythologized Giant and Dwarf in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, focusing on the Native American giant warrior Drifting Away and the Chicago Cubs' mascot dwarf Little Walter. The freakish sporting bodies in Kinsella's work--being disease-stricken, deformed, alien, hybrid and so forth--are apparently not conformable to the ideals of American nationalism, rural "purity" and holy cleanliness which classic American baseball literature has often eulogized. These disturbing figures constitute what I regard as the *enfreakment* of sporting bodies, which is essentially against the American baseball myths. On the other hand, I am to reveal the other, opposite and potentially redemptive aspect of Kinsella's freakish bodies. A considerable part of his fantasies about human bodies draw on mythical and religious traditions; however, they are not exclusively based on the spiritual heritages of the whites, the Europeans or the Judeo-Christians. Drifting Away could be drawn from Native American Giant myths and also embodies essential characteristics of the Tricksters. We could also discern in Little Walter fundamental traits of Native American sacred clowns. Kinsella's innovative rendering of the Giant and the Dwarf reveals his attempt to recover mythicity and holiness in these fabulous bodies, which have been disenchanted by overriding scientific/medical discourses. Kinsella might intend to, I argue, indicate the latent propensity for religiosity and sacredness in the ancient form of play/game that is hoped to redeem the overly secularized and hallowed modern world.

Keywords: W. P. Kinsella, baseball fiction, the Giant, the Dwarf, the Trickster, Sacred Clown, Native American mythology

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Canadian writer W. P. Kinsella has unrolled peculiar imagination about bodies in many of his baseball tales, with which he creates some of the most extreme body fantasies in contemporary baseball literature. [1] In this article, I focus on his fascination about the freakish bodies and try to indicate their complex significations in the context of sports narratives. *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (*TIBC*) touches upon several issues which I would like to investigate: the freakish body, its evocation of ancient myths and archetypes, its implication of cross-boundary fluidity and hybridity and also its ambiguous signification for sports fiction. I would discuss two particular types of freakish body--the Giant and Dwarf--in this work and accordingly focus my analysis on the Native American giant warrior Drifting Away and the Chicago Cubs' dwarf mascot Little Walter. Creating unconventional baseball "anti-heroes" in *TIBC*, Kinsella brings forth very ambivalent representation of freakery. On the one hand, the freakish sporting bodies in Kinsella's work are apparently not conformable to the ideals of American triumphalism, Christian healthy recreation, rural "purity" and holy cleanliness which classic American baseball literature has often eulogized. These disturbing features constitute what I regard as the *enfreakment* of sporting bodies, which is essentially against the traditional American baseball myths. In some sense, as I will elaborate later, the entire novel of *TIBC* attempts to portray "*freaking out*" as a chosen way of life through its multifaceted depiction of eccentricity. Even the true spirit of baseball is, according to Kinsella, an eccentric game for the spiritual freaks. I will try to demonstrate how such attitude is embodied by the baseball freaks in *TIBC*. On the other hand, however, I am to reveal the other, opposite and potentially redemptive aspect of Kinsella's freakish bodies. A considerable part of his body fantasy draws on mythical and religious traditions, only that they are not exclusively based on the spiritual heritages of the whites, the Europeans or the Judeo-Christians. Drifting Away might be drawn from Native American Giant myths and also embodies essential characteristics of Tricksters. We also discern in Little Walter fundamental traits of Native American sacred clowns. By associating the game with mythic/religious figures and thorough them with Native American spirituality and other ancient mythologies, Kinsella achieves paradoxically both *enfreakment* and consecration of American baseball. I would argue that Kinsella's innovative rendering of the Giant and the Dwarf reveals his attempt to recover mythicity and holiness in these fabulous bodies, which have been disenchanted by overriding scientific/medical discourses. Kinsella might intend to, I assume, indicate the latent propensity for religiosity and sacredness in the archetypal form of play/game that is hoped to redeem the overly

[1] In fact, the aberrational bodily images disperse in many of Kinsella's baseball stories: werewolf, heron/butterfly-woman, Haitian dwarf, twins, and particularly abundantly in *Butterfly Winter*— Milan Garza has a real arm and a spectral arm taking turns on pitching duty; Cedeno Crispo's middle finger is mutilated from his pitching hand and displayed in a glass jar in a memorial hall (211); Hasslewaite's hand is amputated from his right wrist, where daffodils grow and make him a literal freak exhibited in a carnival show (152); most thrillingly, Milan Garza's corpse is dressed in team uniform with both his hands and feet missing, possibly stolen and sold as medicine, fetishes or charms (214).

secularized and hallowed modern world.[2]

Gideon Clarke, the protagonist of *TIBC*, lives a financially carefree life in the small town of Onamata in Iowa in 1978, only that he has been obsessed with the secret knowledge about "the Iowa Baseball Confederacy." Due to sort of mystic subconsciousness inherited from his father, Matthew Clarke, Gideon has been convinced that the Chicago Cubs traveled to Onamata in 1908 for an exhibition game against the all-stars of the Iowa Baseball Confederacy, an amateur league composed of local farmhands. Since the game appears in no official record books, Gideon has never been believed and regarded as a freak. Gideon's best friend, Stan, is a minor league baseball player who shares his passion for baseball. One day past midnight Gideon meets up with Stan on the site of the old baseball ground and they slip seamlessly into July 1908. Mistaken for an albino, Gideon is adopted as the Confederacy Mascot, while Stan is later invited to join the team. In this magic realm, they witness the legendary game against the Cubs, which unexpectedly becomes a titanic struggle between two equally obstinate, even obsessed, teams. None being willing to give in, the game continues day after day, lingering through over 2000 innings and weeks of play. Now that the game becomes almost surreal, visitors to the game include the President of the USA and Leonardo Da Vinci, whereas the statue of the Black Angel from the local cemetery replaces the right field player, batting 300.

Along with the game Gideon encounters a gigantic Indian figure named Drifting Away, who turns out to be a spirit wandering since the colonial period. It is later revealed that Drifting Away is manipulating the game in favor of the Confederacy for the secret purpose of bringing back to life his wife, Onmata, who was murdered by white colonists. Under the spell of the vengeful spirit, along the game the players die or disappear one after another. The mascot of the Cubs, the dwarf Little Walters, is also sacrificed by his teammates and killed by an intentional bean ball on the head by the Confederacy's pitcher. The later stages of the game are played in the constant pouring rain which keeps devastating the town. The game ends on the fortieth day with Drifting Away's home run, with the town being completely washed away along with all the traces of the whites' "civilization." Gideon and Stan return to 1978, as if waking up from a big dream, realizing that their relations have been gone or dead.

In this mythic/folkloric tall tale, the contesting teams include players with various sorts of "aberrational" bodies—dwarf, giant, (fake) albino, time traveler, specter, and animated stone

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[2] In response to an anonymous reviewer's precious suggestion, I would elaborate a little more on my association of the religious/mythic themes in *TIBC* with native American cultures, instead of indigenous Canadian ones, despite Kinsella's Canadian identity. In 1978 Kinsella earned a master of fine arts in English through the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. It is also in Iowa that he began conceiving his first baseball fiction *Shoeless Joe*, one of whose significant settings is Iowa's corn fields which implies certain transcendental sublimity. Continuing such approach of mythologizing Nature, I would argue, *TIBC* also imbues Iowan landscapes with religiosity or mythicity. Hence, the possible references to Indian Giant myths, tricksters, sacred clowns, Ghost Dances and so on in this work should be more likely to indicate an inspiration from locally-rooted, indigenous traditions grown on American soil than anywhere else. In this paper, I also highlight certain key figures' close tie with Iowan history and geography, such as the Native American warrior Drifting Away's being genius loci of Iowan hamlets (22-23).

statue—and in this article I will loosely refer to them as "freaks." Many contemporary researches into the concept of freakery, either natural or cultural, have acknowledged their intellectual debt to the groundbreaking study by Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, first published in 1978. The term "freak" has been traditionally applied to physiologically deviant humans. This conventional and rather broad term was nevertheless employed by Fiedler to address several particular types: giants, dwarfs, Siamese twins, hermaphrodites, fat ladies, and living skeletons. These are to Fiedler "the true Freaks," who are distinguished from the other category of unfortunates that includes the blind, deaf, dumb, lame, crippled, hunchbacks, harelips, amputees and other natural or man-made disasters. A key to this distinction lies in that the latter is primarily felt as objects of pity, but not of awe, while Fiedler insists that the true Freak "stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy" (24). Because of this crucial characteristic, Fiedler does not approve of using some other terms that are less tarnished and offensive to refer to them, such as oddities, malformations, abnormalities, anomalies, mutants, or monsters. These euphemisms, Fiedler proclaims, lack the resonance necessary to represent the sense of "quasi-religious awe" which we experience first and most strongly as children in face of these extra-ordinary human beings (17). True Freaks are not monsters, either. According to Fiedler, monsters are mostly "fabulous," that is, supernatural, drawn from out-and-out mythologies and fairy tales. However, a Freak is the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something "mythic and mysterious" (24). The other feature of true Freaks is that they constitute certain "category crises," as explicated Fiedler: "Only the true Freak challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth" (24). Like many religious anthropologists have also indicated, these boundaries have been reverently maintained and involve the definition of sacredness.

Though I do not necessarily follow every of Fiedler's definition of freak in this article, I adopt the same term primarily to emphasize the quasi-religious/mythic dimension of the giant and the dwarf in Kinsella's story. They arouse more of a sense of primordial wonderment rather than contempt or compassion. Furthermore, the boundary-crossing aspect also fits well this novel profuse in magical-realism which constantly sways between dream and reality.

Before launching my investigation about *TIBC*, I would first put the profusion of the whimsical, often surrealistic, bodies in Kinsella's baseball fiction in a broader context. This aspect is accountable, first, for the relative lack of limitations, at least with regard to regulation about time and space, in the baseball game itself. In an interview, Kinsella extolled the unique openness of the game and associated it directly to the mythologized characters and plots in his works:

> The other sports, football, basketball, hockey, are twice enclosed, first by time and second by rigid playing fields. There is no time limit on a baseball game. On the true baseball field the foul lines diverge forever, the field eventually encompassing a goodly portion of the world, and there is theoretically no distance that a great hitter couldn't hit the ball or a great fielder couldn't run to retrieve it. In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* I have a fielder run from Iowa to New Mexico after a fly ball. *This openness makes for larger than life characters, for mythology*. (Horvath & Palmer 188; my emphasis)

Responding to the interviewer's follow-up question "Are there inherent limitations to sports fiction as a genre?" Kinsella's categorical answer--"There are no limitations, at least to baseball fiction"--is revelatory of his "baseball *is* freedom" credo behind his untamed body fantasies (188).

The second most immediate explanation involves influence from magical realism. Peter C. Bjarkman thought that baseball novels of the twentieth century fall into five readily identifiable types: the realistic, the mythical, the nostalgic, the detective and the "magical realism" or fantasy, the last of which, he affirmed, was brought by Kinsella to full bloom in the 1980s (15-16). Kinsella was aware of such classification of his work and indeed acknowledged profound influence from magical realism. In interviews he has cited Ray Bradbury, Richard Brautigan, and especially Gabriel García Márquez as inspirations for his style (Hye 61).

The last and more profound explanation is related to Kinsella's fascination about a variety of non-White views of nature and life forms which are often revealed by their cults and mythologies. *Butterfly Winter* is a more explicit example of this characteristic; its Caribbean setting makes it convenient to bring about pagan cults, particularly Voodoo beliefs and practices, and related folklores about magical metamorphoses. More than Voodoo shamanism, Kinsella's baseball fiction has been colored by his enthusiasm about Native American cultures. Besides baseball fiction, Kinsella is acclaimed for his Native American stories, most of which are set in the First Nation reserves, especially his home town--Alberta, Canada. His first novel *Dance Me Outside* already established his distinguished style in telling intriguing, albeit eccentric Native American stories. It is in *TIBC* that his two favorite themes, baseball and Native American cultures, converge most visibly: not merely the Black Hawk warrior Drifting Away and his wife are central characters, but the epic baseball game is also an emblematic battle of wills between Drifting Away and the tribal grandfathers' spirits, with the resurrection of Onamata as trophy. The Native American views of the universe, very often centralized in animism, have contributed to their peculiar conceptions of human life, including its genesis, nature, place in the world and relation with other creatures, which are rather distinguished from European

Judeo-Christian interpretations. This is partially accountable for the unique ways in which Native American cultures envisage human bodies, especially their intimate interactions with other species or natural elements. I would argue that Kinsella's body fantasy has borrowed in a considerable part from the Native American animistic view of bodies. Some most articulate expressions of this influence could be found in Drifting Away. I will discuss later about his correlation with certain Native American mythic archetypes, especially the Giant, the Trickster, and the shapeshifting motif widespread in many tribes.

Magic Baseball Time and Mythic Sporting Bodies

Before studying the correlation between Kinsella's body fantasies and Native American mythologies, it is reasonable to first acknowledge mythic criticism as a relevant approach to Kinsella's baseball fiction. Since Deeanne Westbrook published the pioneering research *Ground Rules: Baseball and Myth*, quite a few scholars have indeed tried to connect this very modern ball game with archaic mythic traditions. Westbrook found in many American baseball novels two shared storylines that are comparable to archetypal mythic plots: the hero went on a long journey, the classic monomyth that was prevalent in Western myths of old times and "a stranger came to town," that has been called "the American monomyth" (76). Baseball's mythicity also concerns the nature of its time and space; thus claimed Westbrook: "Baseball's time, like the mythic time of its archetypes, often leads back into the distant past – to the beginnings, individual or collective. Baseball's space often represents the archetypal scene of origins –garden, home, motherland" (12).

Westbrook casts a mythic light on American baseball narratives and her idea of the mythic baseball time is helpful to appreciate Kinsella's work. Just like the progress of the runner on the base path is counterclockwise and his destination is his very beginning, the "home" base, baseball narratives are often inclined to be a journey back in time, especially back to *the mythic time*, longing for curing the damaging effects of the mechanical time. Similar backward journeys to the beginning of time are frequently taken in Kinsella's baseball fictions, where time travel is a conspicuous theme and effective narrative device. The infamous "Black Sox" banned players restored youth and even came back to life in the magical farm in *Shoeless Joe*, just like Gideon and Stan travelled through the time channel to witness that fabulous game. Gideon and Stan's lives were frozen in the mythic time in the 1908 Big Inning town, the clock stopping ticking away only for them two. Once they waded back to 1978, the baseball magic of suspended time dissolving right away, they found all of their "this-worldly" acquaintances aging or dead already.

Such mythic temporality, that is proper to the baseball neverland and runs against the regulation of modern mechanical time, I would argue, finds materialization in the *mythical bodies* of Kinsella's

baseball players. In the mythic "plot," both in the sense of space and time, that baseball creates, marvels are literally "embodied" by wondrous bodies. The mythical nature of Drifting Away and Little Walter is implied, first, by the fact that the representations of the Giant and the Dwarf date back to the most ancient mythologies, romances, folklores of yore. According to Hesiod, the *gigantes*, the children of Uranus and Gaea, were involved in a conflict with the Olympian gods. The Greeks believed that some of these first giant gods lay buried from the mythic time under the earth and that their tormented quivers still trigger earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. As for the Dwarves, they have appeared in myths of almost every culture, assuming a variety of names since the ancient times, including Troll, Goblin, Leprechaun, Pook, Gnome and Hobbit, the oldest among which, Pygmy, is as old as the literary tradition of the West.

Invoking archaic mythologies, these unusual bodies lead Kinsella's plot into the rearward trip towards the mythic time, towards the primordial stage of human existence. Since Bernard Malamud's 1952 *The Natural*, often regarded as the first American baseball fiction classic, mythical interpretation has been one of the major critical approaches to the genre. Kathleen Sullivan's *Women Characters in Baseball Literature: A Critical Study* is another valuable contribution to this methodology. Her interpretations, as well as many others', focus on the central mythic heroes or heroines, analyzing their epic exploits or tragic flaws, their love and death, sacrifice and redemption in the light of mythic archetypes. Several prominent readings of *The Natural*, for example, have penetrated into its layers of mythic allusions around the protagonist Roy Hobbs as a modern-time hero/knight, indicating its association with classical mythologies, especially of Homers, and with Arthurian legend, particularly of Percival and the Grail quest.

Putting Kinsella's work in these broader contexts only renders it all the more peculiar. One of the many reasons that single out Kinsella's mythologized characterization is that he does not try to invest these characters with a traditional heroic aura; these unusual bodies are not as much associated with the heroic bodies as with the monstrous bodies in mythic narratives. The Giants and the Dwarves never occupied the central, glorified places of mythic plots; rather, they were more often than not the shadowed, if not abhorrent or menacing figures, taking the antagonistic side against the admired heroes. The bloody legend of the Titan Kronos-Saturn portrays the Giant as a cannibalistic father; in the mythology of both the Greeks and the Hebrews, the evil father-figure is further estranged or distorted through de-humanization: Geryon is triple-headed, while the titanic brothers who assaulted Olympus--Briareus, Cottos, and Gyges--have fifty or a hundred arms. Except Brownie, Elf or Pixy, who are luckily designated as likeable little fellows in fairy tales, many mythic Dwarves are as monstrous as the Giants, such as Gnome, Kobold, Troll and Goblin. Many of them are long believed to live underground, where "they fuse into the figure of Pluto, the underworld rapist of the ancient Greeks, or

are confused with the demons of popular Christianity" (Fiedler 43). It is obvious that, instead of the heroic task of establishing or restoring order to the world, the Giant and the Dwarf assume often the opposite--subversive and destabilizing--roles, and this designation is remarkably articulated by their monstrous bodies.

Enfreakment of Sporting Bodies against American Baseball Myths

Kinsella's dissociation of baseball players from conventional heroism, implying even a certain fascination with the freakish, is all the more eccentric being considered in the American historical and cultural contexts where baseball has become the definitive American national pastime. Baseball rose to prominence in the postbellum America, more exactly in the so-called "Progressive Era," which was characterized by permeating enthusiasm about social reforms in various areas. Francis Richter, editor of *Sporting Life* magazine and a huge fan of baseball, remarked around the turn of the century that baseball was more than just a game to Americans. It was

> a great sport, representative and typical of the people who practiced it . . . one that stimulates all the faculties of the mind; keenness, invention, perception, agility, clarity of thought and action, adaptability to circumstances--in short all the qualities that go to make the American man the most highly organized, civilized being on the earth. (qt. in Evans 26)

Richter's remark is only one of the many predecessors of the passionate assertion of Bartlett Giamatti, former commissioner of major-league baseball, made almost a century later. "Baseball is part of America's plot. . . . Our national plot is to be free enough to consent to an order that will enhance and compound--as it constrains--our freedom" (qt. in Evans 13). Richter and Giamatti, among others, have reinforced the popular American baseball myth that the game reflects the character of America itself, its rules being related to the core values of American culture. Baseball has thus long been believed to be *the* national pastime because it represents, in some fashion, the spirit of America.

It is not hard to imagine in this context that American baseball heroes, both in reality and in fiction, are expected to embody those positive qualities deemed to make this nation great and unique, which legitimize American exceptionalism. Such attachment of modern athletes to idealized, exemplary personalities was even more tightened by the conception and practice of the so-called Muscular Christianity, one of the essentially Protestant reform movements that got popular exactly in baseball's heyday. By the late nineteenth century, liberal Protestant clerics saw popular amusements like baseball as a means of developing a moral character. They could impact much more meaningfully than simple distractions by embodying the virtues of "Christian recreation." The Muscular Christianity movement

was in view of that initiated and spread among many Protestant reform circles in both Great Britain and the United States at the turn of the century. Baseball was believed to contribute to the formation of physically and spiritually healthy American males. In the early-twentieth-century America, the ideal baseball hero was modeled on the image of Christy Mathewson, the New York Giants star pitcher, a representative "Christian Gentleman."

The freakish bodies rampant in Kinsella's baseball fiction are obviously a far cry from the supposedly perfect body of the spokesman of "the spirit of America" or the "Christian Gentleman." In fact, both the American nationalistic baseball myth and the Muscular Christianity movement were founded on the belief in the soul-purifying, spirit-lifting power of healthy sports. The presently acknowledged "invention" of the creation myth of American baseball itself attests also this thesis. It is by now well known that Albert Goodwilll Spalding almost singlehandedly manufactured the myth that baseball was invented in 1839 by the American Civil War hero General Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, New York. This modern myth attributes a sacred place of origin to American baseball and, importantly to our discussion, connects it to a sense of pastoral purity. Very possibly emerging from a pervasive post-industrial nostalgia for the idyllic past, Spalding's mythologized creation story pleasingly related the evolution of baseball out of the pastoral garden of Cooperstown. This implied pastoral ruralism in American baseball myth was later materialized in architectural forms by the first generation of major-league baseball's ballparks between 1909 and 1915. Appreciated as providing aesthetic beauty to growing urban centers, these earlier ballparks could be a visual token of the middle-class yearning for rural virtues to redeem the excesses of urban-industrial life.

The implication of redemptive rural purity in American baseball was associated by Christopher H. Evans with the concept of "cleanliness." He claimed that "Baseball rose to prominence in a historical era when white middle-class Americans literally believed that cleanliness was next to godliness" (29). In this time, to effectuate conscience and resolution to keep oneself *clean* not only physically but morally and spiritually was considered a respectable Christian gesture in itself. To cleanse oneself from corruption and pollution so ubiquitous in the urban, greatly commercialized life is an endeavor to be more godlike, to be pure and good. It is not hard to imagine that baseball was in these social and religious contexts bestowed with highly idealistic perfectionism. This beloved national pastime was hoped to be immune from the vile moral and social toxins, just like from viral germs or bacteria.

An understanding of these drives behind the development of the American baseball in the Progressive Era sheds a different light on Kinsella's very incongruous freakish sporting bodies. Being disease-ridden, deformed, abnormal, or hybrid by nature, Kinsella's freakish sporting bodies are apparently not conformable to the ideals of American nationalism, "Christian" recreation, rural "purity" and holy cleanliness. The emphasis on these confusing and disturbing figures in baseball fiction

constitutes what I regard as the *enfreakment* of sporting bodies, which is essentially against the American baseball myths so far outlined. Next I am going to demonstrate Kinsella's very ambivalent representation of freakery in his baseball "anti-heroes" in *TIBC*. Eventually I hope to reveal some obscured facets of these freaks, their potentially redemptive power in particular.

Re-enchantment of the Freakish Bodies in light of Native American Spirituality

I have mentioned earlier the multiple analogies between *The Natural* and classical myths; elsewhere, Allen E Hye also addressed the religious themes in American baseball fictions, pointing out the frequent comparison of baseball heroes to biblical or hagiographical figures in the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as Jesus Christ, Moses, the wandering Jews, saints, prophets and so on. We can see that when mythical/religious allusions in baseball fictions are in question, European cultural mainstreams or institutionalized religions have been the critical focus, while influences from relatively minor beliefs and unorthodox cults were mostly downplayed. What singles out Kinsella's mythologized baseball fictions are exactly his unconventional sources of inspiration. He is probably unique in this field in drawing profusely on Native American mythologies and later on Caribbean Voodoo shamanism; in some other stories, he even lightly touches upon New Agey alternative spirituality movements, the cult of extraterrestrial intelligence for instance.[3]

Christine Urban MacDonald also noticed the body fantasy in Kinsella's baseball fiction and its association with Native American spirituality, but her study was focused only on *Shoeless Joe*. An interesting point in her analysis is about the deceased ex-White-Sox players' seamless emergence from and dissolution into corn beyond the baseball field, as if humans and plants were interchangeable. Every time the spectral players appear from the corn to play the games and at last vanish into it; it seems that "the spirits and the corn merge as one" and the corn represents a sacred place "where the spiritual and material worlds connect" (113, 112). MacDonald indicated this as demonstrating a crucial Native American motif: "the communion with nature--the interrelationship Native Americans have with all aspects of the world" (111).

Native American spirituality and mythologies from different tribes leave remarkable imprints in *TIBC* as well. Drifting Away, characterized by his colossal stature, for instance, could be drawn from Native American Giant myths. As disembodied spirit, Drifting Away is nevertheless striking for his corporal characteristics: his unusual, if not improbable, stature, for instance. Gideon referred to him as a "three-hundred-year-old Indian about fifteen feet high" (218); elsewhere, he was spotted even more

[3] In "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated," for instance, Kinsella spins an offbeat tale of how a bird-like alien coming from outer space becomes the mascot of the Seattle Mariners.

gigantic:

> Far behind the outfield, on the green, rain-swollen hill, stands Drifting Away, large as a colossus. Except for his Indian headdress he might be Sagittarius the Archer, landed from the sky. He looks forty feet tall, bow poised, loaded with another flaming arrow. (267)

Drifting Away's colossal size puts on a mythic hue that evokes the image of the Giants in Native American folklores. Many Native American tribes have myths about giants: some malevolent, some protective, while some others, amazingly, have direct associations with the flood. They have usually been described as being 40-60 feet tall and in a few cases as being even more immense, being the size of the tallest pine trees, up to 150-200 feet, and are said to catch whales the way humans catch fish.

Before his first physical appearance in the novel, Drifting Away was part of the secret knowledge Gideon's father passed on to him. In Matthew Clarke's unpublished thesis, *A Short History of the Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, Drifting Away was depicted as a lone spirit who bore witness to the entire colonial-period American history and has carried along that living memory since the genocidal massacres:

> Drifting Away remembers. He remembers the gentle, rolling Iowa landscape in days when buffalo still grazed idly, the only sounds the grumble of their own bones. The creak of the wheel was only a prophecy, the oxcart a vision, the crack of the whip and the crack of the rifle known only to those who made their eyes white as moonlight in order to stare down the tunnel of the future. (41-42)

Drifting Away, as archetypal Native American Giant, who witnessed History and remembered everything, straddles across the boundary between past and present and also life and death. Even at the end of the novel, Drifting Away would not put an end to his roaming and haunting of several hundred years; he simply took another human form like changing attire and lived on. Gideon thus recounted their last encounter: "The man is shorter than I am; he wears a red-and-black-checkered shirt and baggy trousers. He has a red bandanna tied around his head to keep his long hair in place . . . His voice is soft, the accent local, from the nearby Sac-Fox Reservation. But he can't hide eyes; they are the same [as Drifting Away's]" (309). Possessing an all-encompassing memory of the history of the land and an infinite, ubiquitous existence, Drifting Away's is a larger-than-life mythic character, who in some way resembles a Native American *genius loci* of Big Inning. Like deities in ancient myths, he had a strong bonding with Nature; his emotions, for example, could evoke fierce and paranormal responses from natural elements:

> After Onamata's burial, Drifting Way continued to grieve with a ferocity even his grandfathers had not anticipated. His extravagant mourning poured out in such fury that the gentle Iowa River, which until then had stretched like a ribbon of jade across the plains, now changing its course, slithering snakelike through the buffalo grass to escape Drifting Away's wrath. (186-87)

Native Americans have held rather different imaginations about mythic Giants from many other Western traditions, including the Greek, the Hebrew, and the Norse, which all "represent human culture as beginning after a tribe of monstrous, patriarchal Giants has been killed off" (Fielder 93). On the contrary, the Native American lores tell about gigantic but kindly protectors of men: Lenape Indians have a legend about a clan of giants who taught people a lesson about respecting animals; Ojibway Indians' Giant is also friendly, giving the first dog to people. Howard Norman cited a description of Glooskap as a huge giant who, as the great supernatural being of the Abnaki (the coastal tribes of New England and eastern Canada), represents the good in man. The mostly positive representation of Giants in Native American mythologies helps to illuminate Kinsella's appropriation and reinvention of mythic monstrous bodies.

The often benign and caring Native American Giants find nevertheless a contradictory variation in Caddo mythology. A Caddo lore has it that a chief's wife gave birth to four little monsters that grew huge and started to kill and eat people. A prophet heard a voice that predicted a flood after torrential rain for days. The voice sent Turtle to destroy the monstrous giants by undermining them. The evil giants were in the end wiped off from the surface of the new world. The association of the flood of annihilation with the Giants bears a strong correlation with Drifting Away and the lethal downpour he caused. The most significant difference lies in that what is eventually flushed away in Kinsella's story is the whites' town Big Inning with all its representative institutions of civilization including the town hall and the church; by striking contrast, what remains tenaciously is Drifting Away the Giant and, surprisingly and meaningfully, the American baseball.

Drifting Away, as the last man standing after the apocalyptic Flood, demonstrates his perseverance as a *survivor*, which is one of the vital traits of the Trickster, who knows best how to adapt to circumstances and outwit his enemies with flexibility and changeability. Among the many forms the Native American Tricksters have taken, the favorites are animals who are exceptionally curious, resourceful and adaptable, in others words, innate *survivors*, such as spider, raven, rabbit, coyote and so forth. The Native American Tricksters are envisioned as particular animals which are chosen by different Native American cultures to embody their respective imagination about the Trickster as survivor. The fact that almost all Tricksters are animal characters also underscores the Native Americans' close identification with nature. These aspects of the Trickster appear to me contributing to

Drifting Away's characterization. His first appearance was described by Gideon in a telling way, comparing him to a curious but cautious little animal: "I saw you all day long, skulking around the edge of the crowd, peering around the corner of the church, peeking through the branches of the tree by the river" (176). His first physical contact with Gideon left him with strong sensations pertaining to Nature: "He rolls on me, crushing my face into his chest. He smells of campfires, leather, sweet grass" (176). Later Gideon depicted Drifting Away with a more articulate animal simile: "Above me, hunched like a monstrous spider, is Drifting Away" (206). Here Drifting Away's magical shapeshifting ability is again hinted and an animal imagery is clearly cast upon him, imagery I believe evokes particularly a well-known Native American trickster figure--Iktomi, the spider spirit in Lakota mythology, who has been a culture hero for the Lakota people.

Comparing Drifting Away to the Trickster is not farfetched as it might seem. Kinsella's first collection of "Indian Stories," *Dance Me Outside*, featured already "Brother" Frank Fencepost, deemed by some critics as the Trickster incarnate, who accompanied Silas Ermineskin, the Cree narrator of the story, in his adventurous journey and delighted the readers by outwitting invariably white authorities. In Gideon's first encounter with Drifting Away, he also immediately flashed on the Trickster figure, wondering "How much of the Trickster is there in Drifting Away? The Trickster, mischievous primitive from assorted folklores, a being given to deceptive acts, sly deceits, terrible violence, often sexually outrageous acts" (177). Drifting Away indirectly acknowledged these Trickster qualities in him by admitting the sly deceits he played with the Iowan people, that he "tampers with the reality of Johnson County, Iowa," imposing a gargantuan illusion upon everyone, making it his own "private puppet theater" (177). Sometimes the Trickster's rogueries bring "terrible violence" to his opponents and so did Drifting Away: "I am the reality of Johnson County. I can take life or I can give it" (177). The traditional Trickster is often a cultural hero, being often the creator, inventor or namer of things, just like Drifting Away is also potent and dominating to a comparable degree. He is nevertheless distinguished from most of other sanctified figures by being "capricious as a bad-tempered child" (177), exactly like the archetypal Trickster characterized by playfulness and mischievousness.

The representation of Drifting Away the Giant as a Trickster figure could play very trickily with the tradition of freak discourse. Rosemarie Garland Thomson traced the development in the Western history of "enfreakment," that is, the cultural construction of freaks, investigating its mechanisms. Certain unusual bodily conditions, such as joined twins, dwarfs and gigantism, used to be regarded as worldly wonders or human curiosities, something to marvel at, and interpreted as portents conveying divine will. For example, in Gaspar Schott's *Physica Curiosa* published in 1662, they were categorized as *mirabilia hominum*, that is, "human marvels" (Fiedler 47). However, since the emergence of the scientific discipline known as teratology in the nineteenth century propelled by Etienne and Isidore Geoffroy

Saint-Hilaire, these physiological particularities have been reduced to undesirable aberrances or deformity from the perspectives of pathology, eugenics or bioengineering. The previous aura of mystery and blessedness faded away, the once awe-inspiring bodies soon degrading to exploitative exhibits in freak shows. Thomson puts it shrewdly, "modernity moved the freak from the embodiment of wonder to the embodiment of error" (13).

It is in such context that Kinsella's rendering of Drifting Away is all the more paradoxical. Being associated with revered Native American mythologies, this physical oversize somehow "defreaks" himself and possibly recovers the lost mythic aura, becoming again "the embodiment of wonder." The standing of Drifting Away as cultural hero is affirmed by becoming a visual icon for authentic American culture. Matthew's thesis contained a footnote indicating Drifting Away's having made his way into American history, via the everyday material culture: "The only known likeness of Drifting Away appears on the American $5.00 'Indian Head' gold piece, personally commissioned by President Theodore Roosevelt" (242). During Gideon's time travel, he met the President himself and learned that Drifting Away did encounter and inspire him, who made him the model for the new American coin. Roosevelt claimed it to be "an American coin of definitive American design, something to rival the artistic beauty of ancient Greek coinage" (243). To inspire, to boost creativity and cultural development and to leave the progeny with symbols of indigenous cultural identity is exactly what a cultural hero is expected to fulfill in mythologies of yore. Drifting Away takes upon such glorified mythic role in the modern era.

Being cast into an American coin and getting his silhouette spread out, exchanged and passed down through daily usage, Drifting Away becomes part of American daily life and collective memory. Symbolically he attains immortality, which is a theme that is associated with both mythic heroes as demigods and the American baseball myth. The player's counterclockwise movement around the diamond figuratively undoes time; also, baseball time is similar to an eternal present, for according to baseball rules, any inning, any game, can theoretically last to infinity. The game implies immortality furthermore through recordkeeping. Its rules require exact recordkeeping of all significant action of every regular game played; the record book eternalizes in words and figures each game played, even long after the flesh of the participants dissolves into nothingness.

Besides the notion of immortality, we can still find numerous connections between Drifting Away and the American baseball myth. Baseball first came to Drifting Away as his "power vision" when he was fifteen, that is, long before the white men really brought the game to his homeland. Following the Native American tradition of pursuing enlightening "power vision," he went into the wilderness and contemplated in his chosen "dreaming place." The "power vision" came to him as a prophetic dream: "But the land above the river, above the holy tree, was staked out with sacred markings, and men were

stationed about like ants," a scene he could identify only decades later as a baseball game watched high from sky (180). He interpreted what he saw in his vision as a "ritual of the white men"; the interpretation is "naive" perhaps, but none the less revelatory and insightful. The ritualistic, sacred dimension of the American baseball is later reinforced by Drifting Away's unique perception of the game emphasizing its spatial or geometric characteristics. He urged Gideon to "think of the circles instead of the lines" when appreciating a baseball game, paying attention to the roundness of "the ball, the circumference of the bat, the outfield running to the circle of the horizon, the batter running around the bases" (177). He even professed that "Baseball is as close to the circle of perfection as white men are allowed to approach" (177-78). This association of baseball game with circularity is especially relevant when being comprehended in the context of Native American spirituality, according to which "Power lies in the circle," as Drifting Away indicated (47). Opposing the white men's re-patterning the world into straight lines and squares for utilitarian ends, Drifting Away ruminated on the Native American natural philosophy celebrating natural curves and circles:

> Everything in nature tries to be round--the world is round, the sun, the moon, the stars; life is circular; the birds build round nests, lay circular eggs; flowers are round. Indians knew. Tepees, round, set in circles, a nest amid many nests. Drifting Away remembers the undulating trails, smooth and easy, long as rivers, bent as snakes. (47-48)

Because of the above-mentioned features, the two favorite subjects of Kinsella's fiction--Native American cultures and baseball--are intricately connected in *TIBC* and converge above all in Drifting Away. Drifting Away and American baseball are more profoundly tied by a shared eccentricity, or, *freakishness*. Through the lens of Kinsella's magic realism, baseball, especially when it was played in the old pastoral America, is a game defined by unlimited freedom, an unbound wildness. Matthew Clarke once preached frantically to his son: "And the [baseball] field runs to infinity . . . There is no limit to how far a man might possibly hit a ball, and there's no limit to how far a fleet outfielder might run to retrieve it . . . Hell, there's no place in the *world* that's not part of a baseball field" (44). He believed that such quasi-mythic infinity of the baseball space sets it apart from any other sports, rendering it unique: "Every sport is held in by boundaries, some of absolute set size, some not: football, hockey, tennis, basketball, golf. But there's no limit to the size of a baseball filed" (45). Elsewhere Matthew linked baseball to alternative cults and preternatural phenomena, all on the fringe of mainstream culture: "Name me a game with more possibilities for magic, wizardry, voodoo, hoodoo, enchantment, obsession, possession . . . I bet there isn't a magician anywhere who does not love baseball" (44). We can discern that, in Kinsella's view, it is this one-of-a-kind peculiarity that American

individualism has long pursued and that now defines their national pastime. This subtler character of baseball, its eccentricity, makes its appearance more sensible in the "power vision" of Drifting Away--a Native American *Freak*.

Further, the kind of eccentricity embodied by baseball and Drifting Away finds its ideal haven in the rustic America and the small-town life. The Iowa Baseball Confederacy was composed of six teams, not from Major League big cities like nowadays, but from twelve "towns, hamlets, and various rural districts", many of which were only loose geographical areas without even a post office (72). Stan felt nostalgia for the good old days of baseball in an idyllic America like such: "Now, 1908 was when baseball really meant something. It really *was* America. Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and weekday games starting at six P.M. in order to get through by dark . . ." (251). Gideon and Stan's preference for the pastoral America does not concern simply its more genuine passion for baseball, but for its relative tolerance of eccentricity, instead of conformism to dominant values dictated by the highly competitive industrialized, capitalist modern America. Even when talking about the Clarks who had been hopelessly obsessed with the Confederacy fancy that nobody believed, people in Onamata were collected and sympathetic: "That Gideon Clarke is a right odd fellow . . . but he comes by it honestly" (15). With relief and gratitude, Gideon thus observed this rural community: "Luckily, eccentricities are tolerated, even encouraged, in small Iowa towns" (15).

In some sense, the entire novel of *TIBC* attempts to portray "*freaking out*" as a chosen way of life through its multifaceted depiction of eccentricity: the Clarkes; the women of this family, who are called "travelling women," running away one after another from safety of settled life; the haunted/possessed baseball game; the small town tolerating all these oddities and of course the baseball freaks including Drifting Away and Little Walter. This explains why Kinsella's baseball story does not foreground the conventional, glorified heroic bodies, characterized by athletic excellence and physical perfection, but atypical, freakish bodies of various sorts. Drifting Away--alternately a colossus, a monstrous spider, or an apparition roaming across the unbound Nature--embodies the true spirit of baseball according to Kinsella: an eccentric game for the spiritual freaks. The freakish body of Drifting Away is nevertheless endowed with mythic and sacred magnitudes. By connecting the game with Drifting Away the Giant/Trickster and thorough him with Native American spirituality, Kinsella achieves paradoxically both enfreakment and consecration of American baseball. This will also hold true, though in distinct manners, for my following discussion about Little Walter.

Little Walter as Archetypal Dwarf and Sacred Clown

Drifting Away as a Native American Giant figure is probably unique in North American baseball fiction; however, there have been several literary baseball dwarfs, to whom Westbrook even dedicated a

separate chapter in her book. She discussed the dwarf characters in these novels and short stories: James Thurber's "You Could Look It Up," Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*, Jerome Charyn's *The Seventh Babe*, John Sayles' *Pride of the Bimbos*, and most relevantly, Kinsella's *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. Incorporating mythic criticism and psychoanalysis, Westbrook likened the baseball dwarfs to the Lacanian shade of the sporting hero:

> Rather, [the dwarf] comes as a figure from the past, both personal and collective. His appearance is an invitation from the uncanny, the lost, the repressed, the primordial, the origin. First, he is a disguised image of the baseball protagonist, a Lacanian other from early childhood; a distorted form arising from the unconscious, rendered grotesque, the more misshapen as the more denied. (267)

To exorcise the abhorred shade from the hero, the baseball dwarf is turned into a figure plotted against, not unlike the monsters in ancient myths, becoming "an object of narrative exclusion, violence, and death" (267). Westbrook attempted to explain away the common fate of the baseball dwarves who suffered violence within the confines of the field and park. Fiedler also pondered over the seemingly doomed misfortune of the dwarf, but he did this on a grander scale, for the dwarves suffered not only symbolic violence in baseball fictions, but the real violence against the Freaks: "Looking back over their five thousand years of recorded history, it seems to me that the Dwarfs are, in a real sense, the Jews of the Freaks: the most favored, the most successful, the most conspicuous and articulate; but by the same token, the most feared and reviled"(90).

On the surface, many passages of *TIBC* do portray Little Walter as "the Jews of the Freaks," the most reviled underclass. When he first appeared in the story, he was suffering mistreatment from his teammates: "He is trying to drag a canvas bag full of bats out of the wagon, laboring like a horse. The Cub players ignore him" (148). Like numerous of his dwarf compatriots, his human right seemed to be reduced in proportion to his diminished size, his social standing being unable to rise up to a respectable height like a full-grown or even a *human being*. Fiedler pointed out that in Western paintings, dwarfs were often portrayed side by side with monkeys and dogs, for apes have long been associated with, and sometimes confused with, Pygmies. These pejorative pictorial representations implied a popular superstitious prejudice that the dwarfs are "beast/human hybrids, produced when men coupled with the 'lower animals' in defiance of God's law" (72). Little Walter was indeed associated with such animal similes: "Little Walter marches at the rear, running to keep up, yipping like a sheep dog" (238); before he was killed, the opposing pitcher insulted him thus: "You're nothing but a monkey. Frank Chance knows it. A monkey ain't human, ain't no loss. Same as sending a dog up to bat--" (272-73).

These animal analogies debase Little Walter to lowly creatures, amplifying his freakishness;

however, his mystic or mythic nature is implied by some subtler descriptions. The ambivalent attitude often aroused by the Dwarf indicated by Fiedler is a helpful reference with which to elucidate my point. Fiedler pointed out that people tend to think of the Dwarf in "archetypal" terms, identifying them either with the very old or the very young--either "monstrous parents," who do not die but shrink sometimes creepily, or "angelic children," fixed forever somewhere just short of puberty (43). "Little" Walter is only "a little over three feet tall," that is, about the size of a child of two to four years, and has a head "no bigger than a doll's" (148). Proportionate to his diminished size, he was regarded by the big and stout Cub players as a perpetual child and was often described as such: "Little Walter jumps about like a spoiled child" (266). However, after he was murdered, for the first time Gideon discovered the long-obscured old age of Little Walter: "Walter's body is limp, his neck bent back. I suddenly realize that Walter is not a young man at all, but is possibly the oldest person present" (274).

This contradictory and enigmatic dual nature, being the very young and the very old at once within one single body, reminds me of the intriguing statement of the protagonist of Pär Lagerkvist's *The Dwarf* about himself: "The wrinkles make me look very old. I am not, but I have heard that we dwarfs are descended from a race older than that which now populates the world, and therefore we are old as soon as we are born. I do not know if this is true, but in that case we must be the original beings" (6). We might say that one of the most enchanting images of the archetypal Dwarf is not simply a perpetual child, but more mysteriously, an *archaic child*, a baby born old, whose true age is unfathomable and whose (pre)history is shrouded in obscurity.

The archetypal Dwarf as archaic child makes himself/herself incongruous in modern settings. It makes sense for Westbrook to think that the literary dwarves are more likely to be "of other times, other places, carrying with them into the modern texts some ancient meaning" (2). In *TIBC*, this "ancient meaning," I reason, is a certain *mythicity* that is carried by Little Walter into the modern game and fits just perfectly Kinsella's mythic storyland which abounds with Native American spirituality, Christian eschatological imageries and mythic creatures like the Giant and the Trickster. It is this mythic quality of "the original being" that elevates Little Walter from the rank of loathsome freaks. He is not a deformed oddity, nor a beast-human bastard, but rather belongs to a more ancient and higher species than mankind. Regarded from this "archetypal" perspective, he is otherworldly and even to some extent sanctified, just like disguised deities in ancient myths who veiled their identities to test human morality. To restore Little Walter's tarnished holiness, it is illuminating to recall that in ancient Egypt, gods like Ptah and Bes were portrayed exactly in the form of dwarfs and that the High King would mime their characteristics on solemn occasions by "dancing the god." These lead to the observation that, just like in the case of Drifting Away the Giant, Little Walter's freakish body is eventually redeemed by secreted mythic magnitudes.

To further attend to the dimension of mythicity in Little Walter, I would discuss his possible correlation with the Native American Sacred Clowns. The two are in the first place both characterized by an essential comical nature. Many of Native American tribes, especially in the southwest, had their religious clowns. The Keresan Pueblos had the performers called the *koshare* and *kwerana*; the Oglala and Lakota called them Heyoka, meaning "crazy," and the Arapaho called them Ha Hawkan, meaning "holy idiot." These seemingly insane or ridiculous figures were nevertheless considered religious specialists; the Hopis, for example, traditionally incorporated the sacred clowns into the Katchina ("Cloud Spirit") ceremonies. The Sacred Clowns took part in religious rites in unconventional and subversive manners by disrupting and mocking the solemnity of ceremonies, often in bawdy or, we could say, Rabelaisian ways.

As for the dwarfs, since the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, they have long become buffoons and court pets." The seventeenth-century Queen Henrietta Maria of England, for example, was famously portrayed by Van Dyke with her dwarf, Jeffery Hudson, alongside a monkey, usually symbolic of an advisor to fools, such as court dwarves. Hudson was a typical dwarf joker, remembered most dearly for his jests and burlesque. The comic dwarves have evolved in modern times into entertainers in diverse milieus--from the circus clown to the comic actor in cinema--but retain their essential comical character.

The portrayal of Little Walter is evidently imbued with buffoonery. As the mascot of the Cubs, he frequently assumed the role of entertainer, a modern version of court clown among these contemporary knights/royalties: "Little Walter . . . a too large baseball cap covering his head, jumps up and down like a jester, splashing water with his tiny feet" (198). As shown here, Little Walter's body performance incarnates a childish playfulness or a foolish indecency, often violating, innocently, the behavioral codes that an adult or a sensible, civilized individual gets accustomed to. His comical bent earned him a living, but also deprived him of respectability. He was never taken seriously of by his teammates; most of time, he was treated by Frank Chance, the Cubs' star first baseman, as his private pet, probably a puppy: "[Chance] rubs the head and the hump of Little Walter, who has been clinging to his legs, and strides to the plate" (164). Little Walter was never admitted to this pro-virility elite circle; despite the hearty pleasure he brought to the club, he remained a Freak, an abject and excluded outsider to the normal society.

Social prejudice and human cruelty led to the ultimate tragedy of the dwarf clown, which is a rather ironical contrast to his assigned comical role. The Cubs sent Little Walter up to bat in the hope of tricking a walk out of the opposing pitcher O'Reilly because of his diminished, irregular size. The ruse irritated O'Reilly who threatened to kill Little Walter with a deliberate bean ball on the head. Despite the menace, Chance was willing to risk the dwarf's life so as to score the go-ahead run, whereas O'Reilly

also cares so much for the game that he commits the murder. The dwarf was finally sacrificed, not unlike a scapegoat, for the sake of both teams' enflaming desire to win, a heroism driven to absurdity, at the cost of rationality and humane compassion. With an articulate tone of mercy and condemnation, Gideon recounted the undignified death of the dwarf clown: "There is a split second of silence before the ugly, thwacking sound of ball upon flesh. Another instant passes before the bat and the midget splash into the shallow water and lie as still as death" (274). Little Walter's brutal slaughter like a beast, just like the "horse," "sheep dog," or "monkey" which he was compared to, was nevertheless redeemed by his solemn attitude in face of human cruelty. He stood up to the batter's box, like a true hero, fearlessly dedicating his life to the club's victory. The succeeding scene of his last Rites further enhances the ritual-like holiness of his death, elevating him to a haloed position like a martyr, only that he is dedicated to the American religion of baseball. Gideon recounted, with reverence, that Father Rafferty came in the dead of night, in the height of rain, holding a lantern to administer the dwarf's last Rites. Gideon playing the trumpet, the congregation of the Twelve-Hour Church singing hymns, the ceremony somehow mimicked the ascension of a Catholic saint toward Heaven, here probably the Paradise of Baseball.

Little Walter as archetypical Dwarf is abject and clownish, but none the less sacred. John Fire Lame Deer, a Sioux holy man, perfectly captured this intriguing coexistence of the comical and the holy, manifest especially in sacred clowns: "Coyote, Iktomi, and all their kind are sacred. A people that have so much to weep about as we Indians also need their laughter to survive" (qtd. in Erdoes and Ortiz xx). It is this extraordinary mingling of contradictory elements that endows Little Walter with the true spirit of a sacred clown. After all, the sacred is essentially extra-ordinary, in the sense of being out of the ordinary and incomprehensible, just like the true Freaks.

Baseball and Resurrection-through-Death Ceremonies

The last but not least point that I want to discuss regarding the mythic and sacred dimensions of Drifting Away and Little Water is their involvement in rituals of resurrection through death. At the outset, Drifting Away and Little Walter appear to be a pair of black angels of Death. Little Walter was murdered mercilessly, turning to be the first person who died on the baseball field and kicking off a chain of mysterious suicides of players ever since. Drifting Away was the direct cause of the apocalyptic Flood which destroyed every living creature in the town. Their freakish bodies seem to dance the world into annihilation and tears, instead of creation and laughter. However, just like Black Elk called attention to it, Truth has two faces: the saddened face and the laughing face are indeed one and the same (Kidwell, Noley and Tinker 92). Little Walter's sacrifice made the match go on, exactly in the spirit of baseball game where once a batter is walked, the next person due won't lose the chance to hit and is

likely to score anytime and win the game. Likewise, although Drifting Away's flood washed away Big Inning, another town called Onamata emerged and prospered afterwards in the same location, just like the earth thoroughly rejuvenating itself in springtime after a long winter's deadly cheerlessness.

A similar cycle of resurrection-through-death happened to Onamata, Drifting Away's murdered wife. Through mysterious and obscure mechanism that Kinsella does not elucidate completely in the novel, Onamata's spirit was split into pieces and scattered to the four corners of the world, "the four quadrants" (222). Hundreds of years later, they became part of the spiritual compositions of the four most important women in Gideon's life: his mother Maudie, his sister Enola Gay, his wife Sunny and his lover Sarah. Toward the end of the novel, these women died one after another due to various bizarre accidents: "They have been pulled from the safety of their lives, drawn out into a hostile world by a mysterious force they do not understand" (264). Intuitively Gideon realized that these were all part of Drifting Away's ritual of revitalization. The deaths of Gideon's beloved women eventually completed the puzzles that are required to bring Onamata back to life: "they've been inching together until now they're ready to reunite" (222). It is revealed later that even the enchanted unstoppable game was involved in this extravagant plan. As the game pushed forwards to an improbable length, Drifting Away and Onamata (magically transformed to the Black Angle statue) were undergoing supernatural physical changes. It became increasingly perceptible that they were returning from the realm of formless specters to the world of breathing lives. At first, the Black Angel statue began to move at its will, leaving the cemetery for the baseball field. As days went by, "The Black Angel is growing smaller day by day, smaller but more beautiful," while Drifting Away's wandering spirit also gradually possessed a substantial appearance, being "visible to us all now, a bedraggled Indian lurking in the corn alongside right field" (280).

In these last aspects Drifting Away and Little Walter manifest the holy nature of the Tricksters and sacred clowns: they are sacred because they are boundary crossers, being endowed to reverse the mechanical time and repair the damage of death. This wondrous endowment brings them back to the concept of "mythic time" which I have addressed in the beginning. The baseball game, just like any "game," can always resume after it is over and set the score back to zero. Comparably, the long American Major League baseball season ends in October, but never fails to promise a recommencement next year in spring time when the world regains vitality. This is exactly why numerous anthropologists of sports like to interpret the time of game/play with the idea of mythic temporality, characterized by a non-linear, cyclical and repetitive nature.

Paying attention to the mythic temporality of the epic baseball game in *TIBC*, we could further observe a parallel between the game's quasi-religious significance and Native American ceremonies. Kidwell interpreted the majority of Native American ceremonies as a sacred institute to reassure the

renewal of nature. Comparably, the mythic baseball game meant to wash away the White evils by thorough annihilation and through this to re-create Big Inning/Onamata, and most pressingly to Drifting Away, to resurrect his wife to life. The implied ceremonial significations of this baseball game remind me of the Ghost Dance of 1890, a Native American religious movement that took place not too long before the setting of *TIBC*, 1908. The basis of the Ghost Dance, the circle dance, is a traditional form that has been passed down since prehistoric times. The circle dance, which symbolizes the sun's heavenly course across the sky, was nevertheless endowed with very different, stronger political and somewhat eschatological meanings by Wovoka (renamed Jack Wilson), a Northern Paiute spiritual leader in the 1890s. According to Wovoka, proper practice of the dance would reunite the living with spirits of the dead, bring the latter to fight on their behalf, and drive the white colonists away. He preached that if the five-day dance was performed in the proper intervals, the performers would secure their happiness and hasten the reunion of the living and the deceased. Based on preaching like such, Ghost Dancers believed that their ceremonies would cause the world to be renewed, with the return of dead ancestors, and for some tribes, the complete destruction of white people.

Kinsella did not make it explicit the connection between the Ghost Dance and his conception of the mythic baseball game; however, the ceremonial meanings of this game can be illuminated by the considerable parallel between the aspirations behind the Native American ceremony and Kinsella's baseball mythology. They include the homecoming of the dead ancestors (the "Indian grandfathers"), the reunion of the living with the departed (Onamata), the demolition of White forces, and the renewal of the universe that is reflected on the rejuvenation of Drifting Away and Onamata and the reconstruction of Big Inning town.

Conclusion

In the end, I would like to point out that the peculiarity of Kinsella's representation of unusual bodies in sports narratives can be further elucidated when comparing it with Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*, one of the classic twentieth-century American baseball novels. Roth fantasized an outlandish baseball team composed of all kinds of freaks: An one-legged catcher, an one-armed fielder, a near-deaf elder, a myopic spectacled neurotic kid, a maniac suspected to be coprolaliac as well as dwarfs. Roth's usage of the freakish bodies is bluntly meant to satirize, to express a bitter sense of frustration and disillusion about the American Dreams, which were felt to be betrayed by politicians split over ideologies, dogmatic and dangerously fanatical religious leaders, greedy corporations and vulgarized entertainment businesses. Roth's freakish bodies are either victims or mirror-images of the disconcerting international and domestic social ailments during the Cold-War era. Such work could be regarded as one of the cultural products of the post-World War II era, which was haunted with various

imagination about Freaks. As Fiedler indicated, it is an era that was "losing faith in Renaissance definitions of the human and of standards of normality" (329).

In a very distinguished manner, Kinsella's rendering of the Giant and the Dwarf demonstrates his attempt to recover mythicity and holiness in these unusual bodies, which have been long disenchanted by overriding scientific/medical discourses. It is this intriguing (mis)placement of quasi-mythic, otherworldly bodies into the mundane playground that creates unique charm for Kinsella's baseball fiction. Both Roth and Kinsella have been acclaimed for extravagant body fantasies, but the former aimed to project the grotesque 1970s America onto the misshapen bodies, while the latter was attempting to restore a certain pre-modern wonder to these human marvels. Both try to communicate with their times through their baseball stories, but their messages and methods of delivery are very different. In a time when baseball has been unavoidably assimilated into global consumerism economy and the athletic bodies have been treated as corporate asset--an item of investment that requires utilitarian evaluation and management--Kinsella's archetypal, mythic bodies carry with them so atypical, archaic meanings to the contemporary baseball scene. One of his messages, I believe, is that the latent propensity for religiosity and sacredness in the ancient form of play/game could redeem the overly secularized and hallowed modern world. It is the expression or lack of faith in the game, I reason, that fundamentally distinguishes Kinsella's baseball freaks story from Roth's. *The Great American Novel* is no more than one of the series of freak tales that Roth produced in the 1970s, like "The Breast," where a literature professor finds himself become a breast. The baseball game for Roth is primarily a representative American cultural institute that reflects the distortion of crucial national values, while for the most typical protagonists of Kinsella's stories, baseball is far above just a game: it is a dream, a mission, a religion. We cannot deny that dreams and fantasies may help to sell books, especially in the 1980s when magical-realism and fantasy literatures made hits. But the fact that the baseball magic could be a selling point itself just attests a profound human need and desire, that is, people want some kind of passion and faith that is bigger than themselves and is capable of sustaining them, possibly in place of shattering orthodox religious beliefs. Kinsella's baseball stories answer that need and desire, and very possibly also betray the author's own need and desire. Until the very last novel before his death, *Butterfly Winter*, another baseball freak story that features Caribbean telepathic twins and Voodoo shaman, Kinsella never relinquishes the baseball magic.

Last but not least, I would like to highlight the point that the senses of religiosity and sacredness that Kinsella is dedicated to recovering are not exclusively based on the spiritual heritages of the white European Judeo-Christians, as most of American baseball fictions with religious themes have been. His religious imageries and mythical imagination derive from heterogeneous sources of inspiration, such as Native American spirituality, Caribbean voodoo shamanism, New Agey spirituality movements and so

on. Such culturally inclusive approach reflects in part the crucial tendencies of the reinvention of American religions in the late twentieth century, including preference for flexibility and tolerance, inclination towards syncretism, rejection of dogmatism and institutionalization and so forth.[4] The colorful Native American myths of Giants, Tricksters and Sacred Clowns, among others, which convey alternative world views and existential philosophies, contribute to Kinsella's diversified imaginations about freakish bodies. Human bodies take on fanciful forms and experience magical transformations in Kinsella's baseball diamond, composing memorable literary landscapes and making him one of the most inventive authors of North American baseball literature in our time.

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[4] George Barna, in *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*, characterizes religion in the 1990sAmerica as "a personalized, customized form of faith views which meet personal needs, minimize rules and absolutes, and which bear little resemblance to the pure form of any of the world's major religions" (130). Syncretism, relativism and individualism are considered by Barna to best reflect the central ways Americans have been reinventing their religion since the1990s.

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