

Fan and Fandom: A Study on Eric Greenberg's *The Celebrant*

Christeena T Jose

Assistant Professor, Department Of English
St Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Kerala

According to Santayana, "Athletic sports are not children's game; they are public spectacles... Spectators are indispensable, since without them the victory, which should only be the reward, would lose half its power" (McNamee: 49). In sports, it implies that glory and honour are reliant on the presence of spectators. Sports can pique the interest of spectators for a variety of reasons. One could consider spectatorship from both a subjective and objective standpoint. The first could take into account the spectator's own personal experience, as well as psychological feelings such as delight and excitement that motivate them to watch sports. The latter examines what role spectators play in sports in general, how they contribute to the sport's practise, and how their behaviour affects our sports experience. Through a subjective viewpoint, this paper describes and analyses a fictional fan personality. We can describe a fan as the most common sports spectator who may or may not bet on the outcome of a game. Fans come in a variety of manifestations. Some fans have a strong attachment to a certain sport and, in some circumstances, a specific team. Supporting football clubs like Manchester United or Barcelona is strongly established in European culture. Such supporters are typically involved in the culture of fandom from a young age and have a strong attachment to a certain team. This type of spectator is frequently associated with team sports. Individual sports fans, such as those who follow tennis, are another type of supporter. They may build allegiances to certain players based on nationality, but they can also form allegiances based on skill, flair, or personality. They all share a tremendous desire to see their team or player succeed.

The notion of fan has received a lot of philosophical attention in literature. There have been distinctions made between partisan and purist fan types. The partisan is a die-hard supporter of a team with whom she may have a personal relationship or who she has learned to like through casual acquaintance. The purist, on the other hand, cheers for the team that he believes best represents the game's highest values, yet his allegiance is shaky. "In our day", according to Wiley Lee Umphlett, "the fictional and folkloric approach to interpreting sport...has become an increasingly meaningful vehicle for dramatizing the vicissitudes of human relationship". (28) Sports fiction, like sport itself, has the capacity to reveal truths about human nature. The main purpose of this paper is to examine what such novels have to say about the value of sports and, in particular, the sports fan's character. The protagonist of *The Celebrant* (1983) under discussion recognises baseball's significance in the evolution of contemporary America. In *The Celebrant*, Jackie Kapp is captivated with Christy Mathewson, the all-time favourite base baller, and "the game was all" for him. (15).

The subject of this paper is an enthusiastic sports fan's encounter with baseball devotion. The goal of this research is to discover why people identify with sports and engage in fandom. Though characterising a perfect fan is practically impossible, the goal of this inquiry is to critically examine him in order to discover the factors that lead individuals to accept sport as a part of their identity. It is understandable that sports fans, especially those who sit in the seats on a regular basis, can become so enamoured of their team or idol that it becomes a part of their identity and has an affect on their health. It's also a well-known truth that enthusiasts hold the team/idol in high regard as an extension of themselves. We meet Jackie, a baseball fan who is engaged in the game and uses it to find joy and self-satisfaction on a personal level. Jackie feels disillusioned and despondent towards the end of the story. Baseball has taken its toll on him as much as it has benefited him. The plot of *The Celebrant* is delightfully simple. Jackie Kapp, a Jewish immigrant jeweller, is a fantastic jewellery designer and a family man, but he's also a big baseball fan who adores Christy Mathewson. Greenberg defines a celebrant as part fan, half artistic enthusiast of a performer, and part residual believer in some religious event. Before the story begins, Greenberg includes a "Historical Note" that details Christy Mathewson's life and career. The story's focus on "these demigods we make and worship" stands in stark contrast to this plain compilation of "the facts" about the baseball legend's victories and tragedies. Furthermore, *The Celebrant* is a fan's story. "The true tellers of the baseball story are those for whom it is played....it is a tale finally told by the audience," writes A. Bartlett Giamatti. So Jackie is the only one left to tell his baseball story.

Jackie has the potential to be a pitcher. He is forced to decline a contract with the Altoona professional baseball team due to a sore elbow, and his family believes baseball is a dubious business. Jackie sticks to his double Mathewson while his brother Eli becomes entangled in the more darker aspects of gaming. In appreciation of Mathewson's no-hitter, Jackie designs an incredible ruby ring to commemorate his achievement. This gift kicks off a two-decade friendship between the two gentlemen. From the outset of the story, Jackie decides to respect and revere Mathewson from afar. He believes that fans should not be unfit to be on the same field as professional athletes. He only sees Mathewson three times in the story. Jackie creates a fictitious equal, Mathewson, who is college-educated and extremely clever. He detects young Mathewson's ability a year or two before the rest of the class. Jackie and Mathewson merge into one in Mathewson's fantasy. Mathewson's every move and gesture is scrutinised by him. Mathewson, he says, is more composed, intelligent, and gifted than the other players. After abandoning his own professional baseball career, Jackie appreciates Mathewson's games vicariously. Jackie admires Mathewson's physique and musculature. Mathewson, he believes, has been bestowed by God with godlike, loftier physical traits that represent his interior attributes of ethics and intellect. Despite Greenberg's insistence on both men's heterosexuality, his over-identification with Mathewson has romantic overtones. Jackie Kapp

understands baseball's inner workings and empathises with the hero. - "This was Mathewson's place and moment; my whole being was with him" (26). Over-identification shifts Jackie's viewpoint into Christy Mathewson's mind and body. "I waste a pitch high, ball one...I turn, I bend. I look for Warner's sign."

While he does wait outside after games in "vigil" to watch the player's ruby ring, he believes that fans should maintain a respectful distance from their heroes. Baseball and his deified Mathewson serve as assimilation aids as well as a substitute for *shul* and *shtetl*. Jackie understands that his admiration for the pitcher stems in part from his experience as a bystander and a failed athlete. "He was everything I was not...I had nothing to offer him" (29) Jackie's passionate devotion contrasts with Eli's bumptious entitlement towards Mathewson. Eli feels entitled to wander through the clubhouse and interact with the baseball players, despite the fact that he is never needed by the team. Eli makes him make rings for players who hit four home runs or drive in the game-winning run. Eli's desire to commercialise the rings in order to detract from Mathewson's remarkable achievement by associating it with more mundane adventures is revealed. Eli plans to create one-of-a-kind commemorative rings for the entire squad after the Giants win the pennant and claim to be world champions. McGrow refuses to play the Boston Americans, therefore they aren't world champs. McGrow is angry with American League President Ban Johnson and intends to slander him by refusing to play the Boston Americans. Jackie believes that if a large number of rings are produced, the meaning and exclusivity of the ring is compromised. Eli, on the other hand, sees baseball as a marketing and pioneering instrument, a combination of sports and business that Jackie considers unhealthy.

Jackie is hesitant to accept Mathewson as a mortal, partly because of his commitment to fair play. A celebrant like him puts Mathewson under even more strain. Sportswriter Hugh Fullerton tells Jackie that from the superstar's standpoint, celebrants "expect the superhuman from you, and finally they'll expect nothing less....The world makes you a god and hates you for being human....Heroes are never forgiven their success, still less their failure....[Celebrants are] the worms that eat at the bodies of the great"(196). These concepts have aided Mathewson's achievements. Mathewson is also seen complimenting Jackie for attending his games and applauding his remarkable achievements. Mathewson acknowledges it when he says:

"You've no idea what that first ring meant to me. It restored the moment, gave it an enduring character....After my last turn of the season, when I'd won and it hardly mattered that I'd won....out of nowhere came this marvellous piece of work. It made the moment real again, and I'd never wear it but that I feel it anew."(89)

This remark highlights how audience familiarity and affection can influence an athlete's success. "You have always been with me when my fate has uncoiled," Mathewson says in their last meeting. (263). Even superstar athletes, we begin to realise, require drive. According to Greenberg, the game's spirit and the novel's larger perspective are the relationship between fan and player. Jackie has always admired the game's purity and has always been a huge fan. He is not going to sully it with gaming. After their Collegiate Jewellery prospers thanks to Mathewson's sponsorships, Eli begs his customers to wager with him. Mathewson is used by their company for commercial purposes, undermining both Jackie's baseball art (the rings) and Mathewson's athletic skill. Furthermore, the religious aspect of the narrative is weakened by economic factors. Eli's wild gambling habits end up ruining the company's reputation and financial links to Major League Baseball. Greenberg expands on Eli's attitude in order to emphasise Jackie's love for baseball. Eli (gambler) takes precedence over the game, negating Jackie's (fan) appreciation and attention.

By the 1900s, baseball had become a shady sport with questionable players. People began reminiscing about baseball's once-pure state. It was no longer a gentleman's game, where only honourable men like Alexander Cartwright took part. At the time, the majority of the players were ignorant, drank frequently, and used foul language. They lacked a gentlemanly repertoire and played without sportsmanship. Jackie admires the pitcher for his honesty and integrity.

Umpires would seek his counsel if they were unsure about a call. Jackie's adoration for him rises to the point where he overlooks all of Mathewson's flaws. McGraw, Jackie believes, is responsible for Mathewson's public cursing and punching of a lemonade guy. Jackie is taken aback when he learns that Mathewson has agreed to play cards for money while they eat. It is not, he maintains, a game of chance:

"A competition for stakes is a far cry from gambling. God forbid that I should gamble; I find it atrocious, and its practitioners are the worst of men....poker is a competition for stakes, a calculation of risk."(87)

Iconolatry has blinded Jackie, and he embraces Mathewson's point of view. Because players have no idea what cards they will receive, card games are blatantly gambling. As a result, participants have a limited response to the game. The only factor that matters in card games is luck. Even when Mathewson says the stakes aren't about money, it's clear that his words are only rhetoric. The celebrant, on the other hand, protects his idol from all criticism. The game loses its charm when the stakes are raised. Gambling triumphs over skill, and the diamond becomes a haven for gamblers. The spectacle becomes an illusion when players abandon the game, and there is an antilogy between winning and losing. Mathewson had retired and taken over as manager of the Reds by this time. Eli wagers on the squad, along with Reds' player Hal Chase, putting Mathewson in risk. He admits to the crime and apologises for not intervening to prevent his teammates from tossing games. He also punishes himself by joining in the military and deliberately inhaling lethal gas. He gets a Christ complex and resolves to avenge Eli so that the field can be cleared. He devises a plan, and Jackie succumbs to his desire to rid the world of Eli. "A command that meant sacrificing his brother for the greater benefit of baseball," says Roxanne Harde of Mathewson's manipulation. (169) Eli will become bankrupt as a result of their strategy. He responds by crashing his automobile into the Polo Grounds and murdering himself. The Polo Grounds survived Eli's death, implying that no one is more powerful than baseball, and that even a compulsive gambler cannot wreck it.

By the end of the novel, Jackie has lost all faith in baseball. There is a deficiency in faith. Jackie is the only one left to tell his baseball story, as Amos Rusie, an elderly brilliant pitcher, becomes a ticket taker; a disgruntled Mathewson commits symbolic suicide and fades away from his World War I gas wounds; and a disgruntled Mathewson commits symbolic suicide and fades away

from his World War I gas wounds; and a disgruntled Mathewson commits symbolic suicide and fades away from his World War I gas Mathewson becomes insane as a result of his inability to bear the burden of perfection and purity. Baseball is utilised to celebrate and criticise the quality of American social discourse in the novel. The narrative has shifted from one of hope and victory to one of fear and defeat. According to Eric Solomon, the transition from a narrative of hope and victory to one of fear and despair matches the evolution of baseball writing itself: early juveniles focus on winning strategies, while later serious novels focus on measures of loss. Greenberg brings Jackie's devotion to the game's purity and the ever-darkening corporate ethic together.

The Celebrant deals with the loss of innocence during the story's progression from Jackie's early appreciation of baseball's valour to his ultimate conflicting misgivings of the game's commercialisation and developing corruption. The fact that baseball is not a child's game is established right away as a catcher runs into Jackie and exclaims, "Well, shit- the first words ever spoken to me on a baseball field." (11). At a sports dinner, Jackie receives a silver cup from popular Giants player Jack Warner, sowing seeds of harmless mistrust. Before heading to the organisers for his compensation, Warner speaks eloquently about dedication and clean living. Jackie Kapp, on the other hand, is a sluggish learner who clings to his baseball hero fantasy. Similarly, Mathewson maintains his opinion that baseball is preferable to everyday life. "Baseball is all crisp lines and unambiguous decisions...oh, for a life like that, when there is a clear winner and an equally clear loser every day," he laments (86) Readers, on the other hand, would mock him for his naiveté, saying that baseball has lost its pastoral innocence and has degraded into a city brawl. Jackie slowly becomes a baseball realist when he says: "Now I knew that the field of play was not exempt from life's injustices- a lesson nowhere heard in after-dinner speeches" (150)

Jackie is forced to forego his baseball commitment in favour of other sources of education and recreation. "I sought out the city's attractions that I'd previously overlooked in favour of a sport," he adds (175). This transformation signifies a true fan's violation, foreshadowing loss, the season's end, and the losing of innocence. Baseball is a sport with a human side to it. Mathewson's sacrifice and Kapp's hero-worshipping jubilation are both intimate and fascinating. They're emotional and bodily responses to the human predicament in a harsh conventional culture. Jackie uses baseball as a harmless diversion from the mundane aspects of life in order to postpone adulthood and its rejection of dreams for as long as feasible. "To be a pitcher! I thought. A pitcher standing at the axis of events, or a catcher with the God-view of the play all before him; to be a shortstop, lord of the infield....And to live in a world without grays, where all decisions are final" (128). In these lines, all of the novel's themes are amplified: loss of innocence, Jewish pietism, and reflexivity. Of course, the celebrant is naive and mistaken; as we've seen, neither baseball nor life are black-and-white, nor ambiguity reigns supreme. Hugh Fullerton, a sportswriter, explains this concept of fandom. Jackie just has a foggy comprehension of his Mathewson affection, he realises. He claims: "I suspect that your work is infused with the wish that you were he. You're not alone. Inside every sportswriter there's a frustrated athlete....The same thing is inside every fan, or anyone who ever picked up a bat and ball" (97). But it is easier to be fan, who can evade suffering even when "called to witness" (230).

The tale comes to a close with a tone of withering zealotry. Jackie ages along with game and the country: "I prefer the memory... Everything was easier back then" (230). In the memento mori section, Jackie laments the deaths of numerous ballplayers, including minor leaguers, saying that "their fragile celebrity passes," and that they become "shadows, wandering ghosts, figures to trigger a memory of days past.... They ended as statistics....mere measurements against today and tomorrow, gravestones." (234) The study of this fan figure prompts us to assume that the best way to comprehend the value of watching/participating in sports is to approach it from an aesthetic standpoint. Too much admiration for the victor, whether for political reasons or because we sympathise with her, can lead to vice, which can degrade both the individual and the profession. Sports are known to bring out the best and worst in people, and remembering Aristotle's 'golden mean' can help us avoid the vices of excess and insufficiency.

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