

## LP<sup>2</sup> STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

### “THE HEART AND MIND OF AMERICA” – BASEBALL IN LITERATURE

**Coordinators:** Ed Brill and Mary Connelly

It has been said that whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball. Baseball is sewn into the fabric of America and is one of the building blocks of this country’s identity, including “the American Dream.” For American writers, baseball transcends its public role as a mere “sport.” This study group explores the use of baseball in literature and one film as a complex symbol of American culture. Whether you are new to the game or whether you cherish memories of days at the ballpark, trying to catch a ball with a beat-up glove and chowing down on hotdogs with your family, this study group offers a perspective on “America’s Pastime.”

**Ed Brill** is a retired lawyer with a passion for baseball (and the New York Mets). Reflecting another of his passions, for dance, he previously coordinated a study group on the life and work of director and choreographer Jerome Robbins. **Mary Connelly** has had a life-long interest in baseball. She co-coordinated a study group on non-fiction books about sports last fall and has also co-coordinated study groups on documentary film, narrative nonfiction and politics.

**Type of Study Group:** Reading and presentation, followed by discussion

#### **Readings and other Materials/Online Services:**

*If I Never Get Back*, novel by Darryl Brock, (Amazon \$14.69, Kindle \$12.99 and used);

*The Natural*, novel by Bernard Malamud, (Amazon \$9.89, Kindle \$10.99 and used);

*The Natural*, film directed by Barry Levinson, (Amazon for rent; also VUDU);

*The Art of Fielding*, novel by Chad Harbach, (Amazon \$10.00, Kindle \$9.99 and used);

Other significant writings about baseball to be provided.

\*\*\*\*\* **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** \*\*\*\*\*

#### **WEEK 1**

**TOPIC:** *If I Never Get Back*

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A novel about the nation's first pro baseball team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, observed by a modern-day San Francisco newspaper reporter who is mysteriously transported back to the summer of 1869.

### **READING:**

Prologue through Chapter 8

### **QUESTIONS:**

The author Darryl Brock is a history teacher. How does this background add details to the book that help the implausible become plausible? What are the differences that Sam Fowler observes about baseball in 1869 compared to the way it was played in his day? How does the use of the first-person narrator affect the reader's engagement by the story?

## **WEEK 2**

**TOPIC:** *If I Never Get Back*

### **READING:**

Chapter 8 to Chapter 15

### **QUESTIONS:**

How does the introduction of a love interest help to balance the narrative? How does Fowler's interest in and meeting with Mark Twain round out his character? How does Fowler's experience as a crime reporter influence his observations about the Red Stockings team members?

## **WEEK 3**

**TOPIC:** *If I Never Get Back*

### **READING:**

Chapter 15 to Part Three

### **QUESTIONS:**

How effective is the use of ghost images to develop the narrative? How does

Fowler's effort to open concessions and introduce baseball staples such as hot dogs and hamburgers add to the narrative? There are a series of showdowns between Fowler and his sworn enemy LeCaron. Are these near-misses believable?

## **WEEK 4**

**TOPIC:** *If I Never Get Back*

### **READING:**

Part Three to Conclusion

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### **WEEKS 5 and 6:**

**TOPIC:** *The Natural* – Novel

Considered the first serious novel about baseball, Malamud contrives an elaborate allegory about a naturally gifted but personally flawed player on an epic quest.

### **WEEK 7**

**TOPIC:** *The Natural* – Film

This film highlights a gifted athlete's trial in the big leagues and the very human inability to live up to one's conception of oneself. Discussion will feature a comparison to the novel.

### **WEEKS 8 to 11**

**TOPIC:** *The Art of Fielding*

A novel about a college student in the Midwest who seems destined for a big-league baseball career. But when a routine throw goes disastrously off course, the fates of five people are upended in this widely acclaimed 2011 book about life, love and baseball.

### **WEEK 12:** Selected readings on baseball