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**Myth, Masculinity, and Moral Failure in Sport Literature:  
Re-reading *The Natural***

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**Abstract:** In many cases, Sport literature has been presented as a form of writing that celebrates victory, dedication, and the representation of masculine heroism; however, in the case of *The Natural* by Bernard Malamud, this view has been reversed by offering the story of a sportsman who has remarkable athletic talents that are rendered ineffective due to his moral flaws and mental issues. Thus, the following paper will attempt to prove that the novel subverts the myth of a natural athlete by showing inconsistencies in the ideology of hegemonic masculinity and emphasizing the role of failure. To prove the thesis stated above, the paper will consider Foucault's works and discuss *The Natural* in the context of masculinity studies and mythology.

**Keywords:** *Sports Literature, Masculinity, Failure, Body Politics, Identity Construction*

## Introduction

Literature of sport is an important, though often neglected, part of literary criticism and cultural studies, as it plays a key role in the construction of the body narrative and in issues of power and identity construction. Despite being considered by many as entertainment and performance, sport literature is a fascinating area where culture and ideological issues are examined in greater detail than in other spheres. In particular, sport literature can be useful when discussing the issues of identity construction because of the specificity of sport practice – it is the sphere where identity is constructed, demonstrated, and even tested under the conditions of extreme visibility. Indeed, as Messner writes, sport is an arena in which masculinity is constructed and validated. It means that the study of literature devoted to sport is extremely relevant to our times since it raises important questions concerning identity, gender, and politics.

It is precisely against this backdrop that Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* emerges as a classic text that problematizes the established myths of sportsmanship and heroism. Written in 1952, *The Natural* begins like any typical story of an athletic hero in pursuit of his ambitions through his innate talent and drive to succeed. The initial expression of Roy Hobbs' aspiration to "be the best there ever was" (Malamud 23) positions him as a self-made man, an ideal associated with the culture of success and self-reliance. Yet, the author immediately problematizes this myth by revealing its moral and psychological constraints. Far from being a story of success through natural talent and ambition, *The Natural* becomes a fragmented narration that questions not only the limits but also the very notion of ambition itself.

Therefore, the importance of *The Natural* is in the way in which it changes the role of sports into a platform for criticism. This book brings out the conflict in the relationship between talent and integrity, between ambitions and responsibilities and thereby makes one question the ideological foundations of sports as well as its culture. According to Pierre Bourdieu, sporting activities are socially constructed activities whose main purpose is to reproduce the system of power and distinction in society. In this regard, Roy Hobbs' rise to fame can be understood beyond the personal context as an expression of the social influences that define the world of sports and athleticism. Therefore, in addition to his physical strengths, Roy needs to conform to certain social expectations in order to be successful in his career.

Similarly, there are issues related to masculinity in *The Natural* as well. In most cases, athletes have been presented as masculine beings because they are characterized by qualities like strength, dominance, self-control among others. However, according to R. W. Connell, these ideals are not static and therefore function as contradictions, which together form a "configuration of practice" (Connell

77). This idea of a precarious and fragile construction is best demonstrated by Roy Hobbs, whose performance of a masculine identity becomes compromised due to his lack of ethical self-reflection and self-control. It is reflected in Roy's continuous inability to make appropriate conclusions from his previous experience, as is seen in his statement: "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189). Consequently, the novel presents a challenge to the stereotype according to which male athletes' success proves their moral superiority, demonstrating masculinity as a problematic construction.

Nevertheless, in spite of the profound nature of the aforementioned themes, the academic discourse on *The Natural* often focuses exclusively on its mythical elements, with very little attention paid to the importance of failure as a key factor. As a matter of fact, Roy Hobbs' failure may be understood not as an unfortunate ending but as a means of subverting prevailing cultural ideologies. However, even though there exists a rich tradition of literary sport fiction, the problem of masculinity and ethical failure in sport has hardly ever been addressed.

In an effort to fill in these lacunae, this paper attempts to provide a sustained literary interpretation of the work with an emphasis on failure as a driving element within the text and beyond. By using a range of methodologies associated with masculinity studies, Foucault's ideas, and the myth approach to literary criticism, this study focuses on the representation of the natural athlete as constructed and deconstructed by Malamud in order to demonstrate how he challenges the traditional definitions of success within the context of sport. This paper aims to present *The Natural* not just as a work about sport but also as a means of critiquing and reshaping its meanings through the lenses of ethics. Thus, *The Natural* becomes an integral contribution to the growing body of literary research within the area of sports literature.

## Literature Review

The critical analyses of *The Natural* have been conducted from various directions, including myth criticism, cultural studies, and studies of masculinity, each contributing to different perspectives on the novel written by Bernard Malamud. The early analyses of *The Natural* have predominantly centered on mythical and archetypal perspectives, such as those introduced by Northrop Frye with his concept of narrative archetypes. According to Frye's approach, the image of Roy Hobbs is seen as a variation of the traditional mythic tragic hero. In this regard, the symbolic significance of such concepts as the name Wonderboy, the lightning-stricken tree, and cycles of rise and fall has been underlined by critics who find Roy similar to mythic heroes predestined to tragedy through forces that are uncontrolled. Although myth criticism has played an important role in positioning the novel in the context of

American literature, it may sometimes lead to oversimplification of the text by emphasizing the symbolic perspective over the sociocultural one.

In this regard, contemporary critical theories have tried to transcend the limitations of purely mythical interpretations of *The Natural* by locating the novel within the larger framework of the cultural ideologies of America. Following Bourdieu's insights on the field of sports as a sphere of social hierarchy where the success of an individual in the sport serves as cultural capital (Bourdieu 6), critics have focused on the idea that Roy Hobbs' story reflects not an individual but systemic pressure exerted on him. In addition, Foucauldian criticism emphasizes the way in which the athlete is subjected to disciplining practices in the field of athletics and sees Roy's persona constructed in terms of external pressures and regimes of surveillance rather than individual ambitions. According to Foucault, the modern subject is created by disciplinary power as such, turning the body into the site of productivity and subjection.

However, masculinity studies in the last few decades have shown a great amount of success in examining the literary world of sports, in which the importance of athleticism in the development of one's masculinity is revealed. In this context, the theory of hegemonic masculinity developed by R. W. Connell stands out as a useful methodological tool that allows defining what masculinity means and how it is formed through the emphasis on the strength, superiority, and competitiveness of men. Furthermore, in such conditions, it becomes clear why the culture of sports is so important for maintaining the masculine identity. This issue is discussed by Michael A. Messner, who notes that sports can be seen as a mechanism for reinforcing the established hierarchical relations between men and women based on the domination of one type of masculinity.

Unfortunately, in relation to the issues of masculinity in the sports culture, little attention has been paid to the works that are devoted to the problem of gender roles, such as *The Natural*. The hero of the story, Roy Hobbs, is an interesting example of how unstable hegemonic masculinity can be.

In the wake of more recent developments in the fields of literary and cultural studies, the topics of failure, affect, and vulnerability have been brought into discussion, posing challenges to the prevailing idea of success, which has long occupied a central position both in sports culture and its literature. Influenced by such concepts as affect theory and critical failure studies, scholars have come to realize that, as a concept, failure may be useful for exposing the flaws and contradictions inherent in a particular ideology. In such terms, *The Natural* may be considered one of the first attempts at dealing with the topic of failure. In this light, the statement by Roy that "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189) takes on a completely new meaning.

Nevertheless, regardless of their differences, each of these critical approaches fails to offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing *The Natural*. Myths tend to ignore the social and political dimensions of sports, while cultural and sociological approaches might disregard the textual elements that constitute the complex world of the novel. Furthermore, although the study of masculinities has contributed to uncovering the gender aspects of the world of sports, it has not paid enough attention to the element of ethical failure as a key factor for the destabilization of masculinity.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology is chosen for this paper and is based on close reading and theoretical approaches derived from the masculinity studies, Foucauldian discourse and myth criticism traditions. According to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, sport as a cultural phenomenon is responsible for the production and legitimization of certain dominant ideas about male gender. Roy Hobbs' personage fits into the pattern created since he appears to be the embodiment of strength, willpower and authority but, as time goes by, fails to maintain such a role. Furthermore, the concept of discipline, offered by Foucault, explains the way in which the body of the athlete is used to produce control over it and manipulate its performance (Foucault 136). In such a case, the body is described as a docile one and, in particular, Roy's body is subject to institutional manipulation.

Northrop Frye's theory of myths provides another perspective to look at the issue of Roy's character as he appears to become a classical hero turned into tragedy due to the imperfections of his narrative. Thus, by combining all the above-mentioned theoretical perspectives, the paper will be able to examine how Malamud portrays a natural athlete figure and manipulates his features.

### **Myth, Symbolism, and the Collapse of Heroism**

The idea of Roy Hobbs being constructed as a natural in *The Natural* comes with its mythic imagery, which associates him with certain heroes from the very beginning, but the author, Bernard Malamud, subverts this idea to make clear how fragile the mythic narrative is. Indeed, Roy Hobbs represents a character who possesses outstanding skills, and everything he does seems innate to him and even divine. Thus, the image of the self-made man whose excellence and success are predetermined by birth and innate ability plays into this mythic culture of the American society of those times. His desire to "be the best there ever was" (Malamud 23) fits the typical heroic trajectory that can be described following the definition by Northrop Frye. According to his classification, the hero of a myth starts his journey, seeking fulfilment and gaining recognition. However, unlike a classical hero, Roy experiences interruptions along his way to success, illusion, and even failure.

At the core of this construction lies the symbolic value attributed to Roy's bat, Wonderboy, which serves both as an extension of Roy's power and a reflection of his own conviction that he is born with superior talents. Having been cut out of a tree that was hit by a bolt of lightning, Wonderboy symbolizes the very concept of destiny and a gift from nature, thus implying that Roy is destined to be talented. Hence, Wonderboy appears to serve as an equivalent to the mythical weapons carried by heroes of mythology. Nevertheless, Roy's dependence on the bat turns out to limit the meaning conveyed, suggesting that Roy sees his identity only through Wonderboy without developing personally as an individual and learning to use his gifts responsibly and skillfully.

Malamud adds an extra layer of complexity to the mythic structure by adding elements of self-reflection that destroy Roy's mythic heroic image. When he declares that "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189), he reveals another important element of the novel. According to Frye, the mythic hero grows and evolves as a result of the trials and tribulations that he faces in his adventure. It would appear that the same thing happens to Roy as he goes through various challenges that he must face in his pursuit of success. The truth is that Roy's journey does not bring any significant changes to his personality because he fails to gain self-awareness, which results in his eventual failure. The mythic structure does not allow him to become a more conscious person because it focuses on achieving external success, thus, it is unable to explain the complexities of human nature.

The breakdown of Roy's heroism occurs symbolically through the shattering of Wonderboy, a process that not only acts as a turning point in the book but also has an important literary function. As the bat breaks during a significant point in the game, it symbolizes the erosion of the myth, which has been sustaining Roy throughout, and the conclusion of his invincible image. This scene can also be regarded as a reversal of the typical myth pattern, where the hero's weapon becomes an empowering tool, but in this case, it emphasizes the fragility of the hero's strength. Ultimately, the shattering of Wonderboy can be seen as a critique of culture's elevation of sportsmen into heroes.

Moreover, Roy's final failure, culminating in his public exposure and rejection by the crowd, reinforces the collapse of the heroic ideal by stripping him of the recognition that defines his identity. The crowd's shift from admiration to condemnation highlights the performative nature of heroism, suggesting that it is contingent upon external validation rather than intrinsic worth. In this sense, Roy's downfall reflects not only his personal shortcomings but also the broader cultural dynamics that shape the construction of the sporting hero. His inability to fulfil the expectations imposed upon him reveals the limitations of a system that equates success with moral virtue and failure with personal deficiency.

Through its use of myth and symbolism, *The Natural* ultimately transforms the figure of the hero into a site of critique, challenging the assumptions that underpin traditional narratives of greatness. By exposing the gap between appearance and reality, Malamud destabilizes the myth of the natural athlete and redefines heroism as a construct that is inherently unstable and subject to collapse. Roy Hobbs' journey, far from affirming the ideals of sport culture, reveals their contradictions, demonstrating that the pursuit of greatness, when divorced from ethical responsibility and self-awareness, leads not to fulfillment but to disillusionment. In doing so, the novel not only subverts the conventions of sport literature but also offers a broader commentary on the human condition, emphasizing the limits of ambition and the inevitability of failure within systems that prioritize performance over integrity.

### **Masculinity and Ethical Instability**

The construction of masculinity in *The Natural* is deeply intertwined with the cultural expectations of strength, dominance, and success that define the institution of sport however, Bernard Malamud complicates these expectations by exposing their inherent instability and ethical limitations. Roy Hobbs initially appears to embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, presenting himself as confident, ambitious, and physically superior, qualities that align with what R. W. Connell identifies as the dominant configuration of masculinity within modern social structures. As Connell argues, masculinity is not an inherent essence but a configuration of practice that is continually performed and reinforced through social institutions. In this context, sport functions as a key site for the production and validation of masculine identity, a point further emphasized by Michael A. Messner, who observes that athletic culture serves to naturalize ideals of male power and authority. Roy's early confidence and determination, exemplified in his desire "to be the best there ever was" (Malamud 23), situate him firmly within this framework, suggesting that his identity is constructed through the pursuit of dominance and recognition.

However, Malamud's narrative gradually dismantles this construction by revealing the ethical fragility that underlies Roy's performance of masculinity. Despite his physical prowess, Roy consistently fails to demonstrate the moral discipline and self-awareness necessary to sustain his identity. His inability to learn from past experiences, articulated in his admission that "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189), exposes a critical gap between his outward appearance and his internal reality. This lack of self-reflection undermines the stability of his masculine identity, suggesting that strength and ambition alone are insufficient to produce a coherent sense of self. Rather than embodying the ideal of the disciplined athlete, Roy becomes a figure of contradiction, whose actions reveal the limits of a masculinity grounded solely in performance and external validation.

The instability of Roy's masculinity is further highlighted through his susceptibility to temptation and external influence, particularly in his decision to accept money in exchange for throwing the game. This moment represents a profound ethical failure, one that exposes the tension between personal ambition and moral responsibility. Roy's willingness to compromise his integrity for financial gain reveals the extent to which his identity is shaped by desire rather than principle, undermining the cultural association between athletic success and moral virtue. As Messner argues, sport often reinforces the illusion that physical excellence is indicative of ethical superiority however, Roy's actions demonstrate that this connection is neither natural nor inevitable. Instead, masculinity emerges as a fragile construct that is vulnerable to collapse when confronted with ethical challenges.

Moreover, Roy's relationships with other characters further illuminate the performative nature of his masculinity, particularly in his interactions with figures who represent alternative models of identity. His inability to form meaningful connections or to engage in genuine self-reflection underscores the isolation that results from his reliance on external validation. This dynamic reflects the broader cultural pressures that shape masculine identity within sport, where success is measured not by personal fulfillment but by public recognition and approval. As Connell notes, hegemonic masculinity is sustained through systems of power that privilege certain forms of behavior while marginalizing others, creating a hierarchy in which vulnerability and ethical reflection are often suppressed. Roy's failure to navigate these pressures ultimately leads to his downfall, revealing the limitations of a system that prioritizes performance over integrity.

The collapse of Roy's masculinity is most evident in the final stages of the novel, where his public failure exposes the fragility of the identity he has constructed. The crowd's reaction, shifting from admiration to condemnation, highlights the extent to which his sense of self is dependent on external validation, reinforcing the idea that masculinity in sport is not a stable or autonomous identity but a contingent and performative one. In this moment, Roy is stripped of the recognition that has sustained his identity, forcing him to confront the emptiness of a masculinity built on illusion rather than substance. His downfall thus serves as a powerful critique of the cultural norms that define male identity within sport, revealing the contradictions and vulnerabilities that lie beneath the surface.

Through its exploration of masculinity and ethical instability, *The Natural* challenges the ideological foundations of sport culture by demonstrating that the qualities traditionally associated with athletic success strength, ambition, and competitiveness are insufficient to sustain a coherent and meaningful identity. By exposing the gap between performance and integrity, Malamud redefines masculinity as a contested and precarious construct, one that is shaped by both individual choices and broader social forces. Roy Hobbs' failure, far from being an isolated incident, becomes emblematic of

the broader tensions that characterize modern sport, offering a critical perspective on how identity is constructed, performed, and ultimately destabilized within this highly visible and regulated domain

### **Failure as Narrative and Cultural Critique**

One of the most significant ways in which *The Natural* departs from conventional sport narratives is through its deliberate foregrounding of failure as both a narrative endpoint and a critical lens for examining the ideological structures of sport culture. While popular sports discourse typically culminates in triumph, redemption, or moral victory, Bernard Malamud resists this expectation by constructing a narrative in which failure is not an aberration but an inevitable and meaningful outcome. Roy Hobbs' journey, which begins with the promise of exceptional success, ultimately collapses under the weight of ethical compromise and personal limitation, revealing the inadequacy of the success-oriented framework that dominates both sport and its literary representations. His early ambition "to be the best there ever was" (Malamud 23) sets up a trajectory that appears to align with the myth of meritocratic achievement however, the narrative systematically dismantles this trajectory by demonstrating that talent and desire are insufficient to guarantee success in the absence of ethical integrity.

Roy's failure is not merely a personal shortcoming but a reflection of the broader cultural forces that shape athletic identity, particularly the emphasis on performance, recognition, and economic gain. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, sport operates as a field in which various forms of capital, physical, social, and economic, intersect, influencing both opportunity and outcome. In this context, Roy's decision to accept money in exchange for throwing the game can be understood as a response to the pressures of this system, in which success is commodified and ethical considerations are subordinated to material gain. His internal conflict, though briefly acknowledged, ultimately gives way to a choice that prioritizes immediate reward over long-term integrity, illustrating the extent to which individual agency is shaped by structural constraints.

The narrative's emphasis on failure is further reinforced through Roy's lack of self-awareness, which prevents him from recognizing the consequences of his actions until it is too late. His admission that "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189) encapsulates this failure of reflection, highlighting the absence of the moral development that is typically associated with both literary and athletic success. Unlike traditional heroes, who grow through adversity and emerge with a deeper understanding of themselves and their world, Roy remains trapped in a cycle of repetition, unable to translate experience into insight. This stagnation not only contributes to his downfall but also challenges the assumption that failure necessarily leads to growth, suggesting instead that it can reinforce existing patterns of behavior.

The public nature of Roy's failure plays a crucial role in its significance, as it exposes the extent to which athletic identity is constructed through external validation. The crowd, which initially celebrates Roy as a hero, quickly turns against him once his failure becomes apparent, demonstrating the conditional and performative nature of sporting recognition. This shift underscores the idea that success in sport is not an inherent quality but a socially mediated phenomenon, dependent on the approval of spectators and the narratives constructed around performance. As Michel Foucault suggests, modern systems of power operate through visibility and surveillance, shaping behavior by subjecting individuals to constant observation. Roy's experience reflects this dynamic, as his identity is defined not by his internal sense of self but by the external gaze that evaluates and judges his actions.

Moreover, the novel's refusal to provide redemption or closure further distinguishes it from conventional sport narratives, reinforcing its critique of the ideology of meritocracy. In many sports stories, failure is depicted as a temporary setback that ultimately leads to greater success however, Malamud denies Roy this possibility, presenting his downfall as final and irreversible. This narrative choice challenges the belief that perseverance and talent will inevitably be rewarded, exposing the limitations of a system that equates effort with outcome. By refusing to resolve Roy's story in a positive manner, the novel invites readers to confront the discomfort of unresolved failure and to question the cultural narratives that seek to obscure it.

Failure in *The Natural* thus functions as a form of narrative resistance, disrupting the expectations of both the reader and the genre. By centering failure as the defining feature of Roy's journey, Malamud shifts the focus from achievement to consequence, from glory to accountability. This shift has significant implications for the interpretation of sport literature, suggesting that its value lies not in its ability to inspire or entertain but in its capacity to critique and interrogate the structures that shape human experience. Roy's downfall, far from being an isolated event, becomes emblematic of the broader contradictions within sport culture, revealing the tensions between individual ambition and collective expectation, between ethical responsibility and material success.

*The Natural* redefines failure not as a sign of weakness but as a critical tool for understanding the complexities of identity and power within sport. By exposing the gap between aspiration and reality, Malamud challenges the idealized narratives that dominate popular discourse and offers a more nuanced and realistic portrayal of athletic experience. In doing so, the novel contributes to a broader rethinking of sport literature as a field that engages with issues of ethics, identity, and social structure, demonstrating that failure, rather than success, may provide the most meaningful insights into the human condition.

## Conclusion

Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* ultimately emerges as a profound reconfiguration of sport literature, challenging the foundational assumptions that have traditionally governed the genre. Rather than presenting sport as a domain of triumph, discipline, and moral clarity, the novel exposes the instability of these ideals by foregrounding the ethical, psychological, and cultural contradictions that shape athletic identity. Through the character of Roy Hobbs, Malamud dismantles the myth of the natural athlete, revealing that talent, when divorced from self-awareness and moral responsibility, becomes not a source of fulfilment but a catalyst for failure. Roy's trajectory from promise to collapse serves as a powerful critique of the ideology of meritocracy, demonstrating that success in sport is neither purely individual nor inherently virtuous, but rather contingent upon a complex interplay of personal choices and structural forces.

The novel's engagement with masculinity further deepens this critique by exposing the fragility of identities constructed through performance and external validation. Roy's initial embodiment of strength and confidence aligns him with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity however, his ethical failures and inability to reflect upon his experiences ultimately destabilize this identity, revealing its dependence on illusion rather than substance. In this sense, *The Natural* challenges the cultural tendency to equate athletic success with moral superiority, suggesting instead that such associations obscure the ethical complexities that underlie both sport and human behavior. The collapse of Roy's masculinity, marked by his public failure and loss of recognition, underscores the precariousness of identities that are rooted in achievement rather than integrity.

Equally significant is the novel's treatment of failure as a central narrative and analytical category. By refusing to conform to the conventional success-oriented structure of sport narratives, Malamud transforms failure into a site of critical reflection, one that exposes the limitations of dominant cultural ideologies. Roy's inability to learn from his past, encapsulated in his admission that "I never did learn anything out of my past life" (Malamud 189), highlights the absence of the moral growth typically associated with both literary and athletic success. This absence not only contributes to his downfall but also challenges the assumption that failure necessarily leads to redemption, suggesting instead that it can reinforce patterns of behaviour when not accompanied by self-awareness. In this way, *The Natural* redefines failure as a meaningful and revealing aspect of human experience, one that offers deeper insight into the dynamics of identity, power, and ethics.

The implications of this study extend beyond the analysis of a single text, pointing toward the broader significance of sport literature as a field of critical inquiry. By integrating perspectives from masculinity studies, cultural theory, and myth criticism, this paper has demonstrated that sport

narratives are not merely reflections of social values but active sites of ideological negotiation, where concepts such as success, identity, and morality are continuously constructed and contested. In this regard, *The Natural* serves as a foundational text that invites a reconsideration of the role of sport in both literature and culture, highlighting its potential to engage with complex questions of human experience.

The scope for future research in this area is extensive and multifaceted. One important direction involves the comparative analysis of *The Natural* with contemporary sport narratives, particularly those that address issues such as commercialization, media influence, and the global circulation of athletic identities. Such studies could explore how the themes of failure, ethics, and masculinity are reconfigured in response to changing cultural and economic conditions. Additionally, there is significant potential for interdisciplinary research that brings together literary analysis with insights from sociology, psychology, and media studies, thereby expanding the methodological frameworks through which sport literature is examined.

Future research may also benefit from incorporating intersectional perspectives, examining how factors such as race, class, gender, and nationality intersect with athletic identity to produce diverse and often conflicting experiences. While *The Natural* primarily focuses on a singular model of masculinity, contemporary sport narratives offer opportunities to explore more complex and inclusive representations, challenging the dominance of traditional frameworks. Furthermore, scholars might investigate autobiographical and biographical sport writings, which provide valuable insights into the lived realities of athletes and the ways in which personal narratives intersect with broader cultural discourses.

Another promising avenue lies in the study of failure itself as a critical concept within sport literature. By drawing on emerging fields such as failure studies and affect theory, researchers can further explore how narratives of defeat, vulnerability, and limitation contribute to a more nuanced understanding of human experience. In this context, *The Natural* can be seen as a precursor to contemporary explorations of failure, offering a model for how literary texts can challenge dominant ideologies and open up new possibilities for interpretation.

This study affirms that sport literature should no longer be relegated to the margins of literary scholarship or dismissed as a genre concerned solely with entertainment. Instead, it must be recognized as a vital and dynamic field that engages with some of the most pressing questions of modern life, including the construction of identity, the operation of power, and the ethical dimensions of human aspiration. By foregrounding failure, instability, and contradiction, *The Natural* not only redefines the

conventions of sport narrative but also offers a powerful framework for understanding the complexities of human existence.

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