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Book Review: *Bleeding Red*

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bleeding red

Reviewed by Scott D. Peterson, University of Maine

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Bleeding Red is one of (at least) three books that contain diaries from the 2004 season of the Boston Red Sox (the other two being *Faithful* by Stephen King and Stewart O'Nan and *Now I can Die in Peace* by Bill Simmons). How, one might ask, were these authors fortunate enough to choose that particular year of the previous 86? This is more easily answered in the case of Simmons, who didn't start his diary until after the All-Star break, but does this mean we can look forward to diaries of the 2005 White Sox season, and are there scribes among the Chicago Cub faithful who are dutifully recording the current season even now in hopes that it's their turn at last? Whatever Catsam's initial motivation, his book provides an engaging treatment of the day-to-day travails of the season, as well as offering excellent insight to the mind of a die-hard fan.

Catsam's accounts brought me right back to games I listened to and watched two seasons ago, complete with details that I was both pleased and pained to remember. Although he made his entries from several different places in the country and abroad, he was always armed with the latest inside information, like the day-to-day drama of Nomar Garciaparra's balky Achilles tendon. There are some gaps (most notably the last two weeks of May, eight days in June, and here and there in the last two months of the season), so Sox fans may wish to have King and O'Nan's book in their library as well to have a complete record of that historical season. Despite the missing entries, the book immersed me once again, so much so that I was filled with malaise all over again as the Sox scuffled along as a .500 club from May through most of July. Taken as a whole, the book illustrates how the day-to-day "mini-morality" plays add up to a much bigger morality play that is uniquely American. For instance, Catsam recognizes the dust-up between Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek and A-Rod of the Yankees (who was nearly a member of the Red Sox himself-much to the chagrin of Nomar) as the turning point in the season. King and O'Nan credit A-Rod for galvanizing the Sox, when it was Varitek who woke his slumbering team by making A-Rod say hello to Mr. Rawlings, as depicted on the cover of *Faithful*.

Catsam gets the climax of that morality play right too as he describes the epic comeback by the Sox in the ALCS against-

who else?-the Yankees. As a historian, he begins by decrying historicism, thus nullifying the Curse of the Bambino and a preordained Yankee victory. Three gut-wrenching losses later, he proves his mettle: "Tomorrow I'll rationalize why they can win four in a row, despite the fact no team has ever done so in baseball" (238) and adds a Biblical level to his play the next day: "It was a test of faith, I was Job, and while I doubted, I never left the fold" (238). Describing Game 6, he gets it right again when he identifies how two key calls went against the Yankees for a change (even though that seems to be falling back on historicism). And finally, he got the response to Game 7 right as well: "Only a Red Sox fan can understand being almost violently nauseous with a seven-run lead in the bottom of the ninth inning" (247), which captures the unease felt all over Red Sox nation until Pokey Reese surrounded the last ground ball in a stiff-legged manner that was fittingly reminiscent of Billy Buckner and recorded the final out of the ALCS.

By the end of Catsam's book, we have more than the chronicle of a historical season: we are afforded a close look into the mind of a fan's fan, one who hates off days and rain delays because they break up the rhythm of game days that fans come to depend on. He is also the kind of fan that uses the first person plural when referring to his team, thus crossing into the realm of hyper-identification. At various points, he takes on issues like the Wild Card and making the All-Star game "count," and then he goes deeper by relating his own personal curse (leaving the country during the season). And he gets it right at the end of the book when he tells us, "All we wanted as Sox fans was the chance to win." (265). That's what any fan wants, of course, but on October 27, 2004, members of Red Sox Nation wanted it more- perhaps to avoid tempting fate with their own 3-0 lead.

Catsam, Derek. *Bleeding Red*. Washington D.C.: Vellum, 2005. 269 pages, \$16.00, ISBN:0-9767042-6-9.

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