The hermeneutic of the miniworld of **BASEBALL** -------- Elliott #2107

"There is no joy in Boston" (reads the main headline in our CAPE COD TIMES this morning, 28 Oct 86): mighty Casey the Red Sox struck out last night, losing what's immodestly called, here in the USA, the "World" Series. Can't remember when, if ever, I watched a TV game of any kind all the way through. I'm no Geo. Will, that master of sports poop as well as acid commentator from the political right and self-appointed occupant of the moral highground. But I've a few observations from my own angles of competence....

1. One should never forget, nor cease profiting from, one's parents enthusiasms. Though my mother was sports-allergic (except for joyful mastering of the unicycle as a girl), my father was a baseball ecstatic who was disappointed that he never managed to raise me to his pitch of frenzy. Generally uncontroled in self-referencing, he nevertheless never told me that he'd been offered a major-league contract: I learned this while processing his effects long after the funeral....He took me to Cleveland to see Bobby Feller's Indians win the World Series (was it 1933? I should check my diary). Never shy, he dragged me into the Indians dugout to get Bobby & the whole team to sign a ball, which I still have. Recently a baseball maven saw the ball and said "Man, that's money!" Not for me. For me it's memory, which at my age is better than money....So when Bobby played his last World Series, which was in Cleveland (where my family then lived), I took my sons to see him play. The ends meet and the ancestors are honored.

2. Baseball's win/lose emotional range is a metaphor of life, and the diamond is a miniworld of freedom::order and of opportunities::limits. Last night, seeing the Sox in tears, I thought of the catharsis theme that ran through sports and drama in the golden age of Athens. Mainly because of specs and bodysize, the sports I got good at were individual rather than team; so I've undermediated on team sports (except in connection with my 1962 "Toward a Theology of Leisure").

3. Religion is the body of which spirituality is the soul, and for many of our citizenry team sports--esp. football & baseball--are both. Humans need adventure, deliverance from routine, emotional highs, non-work association with others who share their personal enthusiasms, and partisan involvement. No mean list of spectator-sports' values. Religious leaders have given more attention to the other end of this dynamic--the ritual, the habitual, the regular, the repetitive;and to the upper end of the dynamic that cuts down (cross-forming) across the habit/adventure continuum: the heavenly ("spiritual") in contrast to what team spectator sports has lots of, viz earthiness.

4. For reasons I need not list, negative hermeneutics (explaining why things went WRONG) is better developed than positive hermeneutics (...RIGHT). Millions turned out in NYC today to celebrate the Mets' victory over the Sox, but Boston was sil ent except for the typewriters & wordprocessors of sportswriters interpreting what happened to the Sox. On the box, a Harv. prof. of classics trotted out Sisyphus and those heroic defeated Trojans: S. says don't quit and the Ts say be noble when you lose. Haven't seen any use made of biblical analogies: do the Am. people now (since the public-school obliteration of Scripture) know the ancient Greeks better than the ancient Jews & Christians? Remember the old cig ad "Reach for a Camel!"? Well, what do folks reach for when they need to make sense of tragedy mini or maxi in private or public life? One's analogies reveal the content of one's inner life as surely as airport radar reveals the content of the sky--and both in what I might call a blippy way. So "the Curse of Babe Ruth" or something explains why the Sox frequently come close but haven't won since he was traded the year I was born, 1918.