



Beyond A Boundary

C.L.R. James

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C L R James, one of the foremost thinkers of the twentieth century, was devoted to the game of cricket. In this classic summation of half a lifetime spent playing, watching and writing about the sport, he recounts the story of his overriding passion and tells us of the players whom he knew and loved, exploring the game's psychology and aesthetics, and the issues of class, race and politics that surround it.

Part memoir of a West Indian boyhood, part passionate celebration and defence of cricket as an art form, part indictment of colonialism, *Beyond a Boundary* addresses not just a sport but a whole culture and asks the question, 'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?

Beyond A Boundary Details

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From Reader Review Beyond A Boundary for online ebook

Richard Donne says

Brilliant - what a writer! Each chapter moves from ideas on cricket to post-colonialism and leftist thought with an incredible clarity of expression and thought.

Peter says

This is probably now my favorite book about sports, because it views sports as an expression of social and political passions. With a determination to avoid high/low art distinctions, and the class prejudice they imply, James also looks at cricket through the lens of aesthetic theories of art and movement.

The politics of cricket he sees in two ways. One perhaps is more predictable: he sees the games often as an arena in which larger social conflicts are played out relatively safely (this is particularly the case in the West Indies in the period he describes, when cricket clubs there were very much divided along class and racial lines--and also in international matches in the immediately pre-independence period). The other, less obviously, is to see a discipline and set of values in cricket that are inculcated in the players, which although he explains its conservative purpose in origin, he also sees as having provided a sense of teamwork and discipline that helped make an anti-colonialist movement possible.

In James's account, it was cricket that led him to politics.

To be honest, there were parts of this that dragged for me; I didn't much relish the account of batting and bowling techniques of players I may or may not have heard of. But the book is never simply about that. The great section on WG Grace, for example--a kind of Babe Ruth of cricket--discusses how he was very much a part and product of the Victorian age, but also provided something of a pre-industrial, bucolic, unregulated Britain that people in places like Manchester felt missing.

James argues that historians who ignored WG Grace in writing the history of Victorian England had thereby rendered their work inadequate. It's basically an argument for "bottom-up" social history--along with cultural criticism that feels surprisingly contemporary (the book was published in 1962). And it's a brilliant, wonderfully eloquent argument at that.

Avnish says

O

Jay Green says

Really excellent, apart from all the cricket.

Gerald Sinstadt says

This has long been required reading - and not just for cricket lovers. It is much more than a book about cricket, though that is its dominant theme.

The problems of growing up in the Caribbean, journalism, Greek mytholofy, sculpture, politics all claim attention. Karl Marx is present but is overshadowed by W G Grace and Don Bradman. Learie Constantine and George Headley are recurring figures as the author seeks to embrace both art ad philosophy.

The in the long, key 16th chapter, the author seeks to lift cricket out of context and place it on a level with any artistic activity. Beyond a Boundary is not an easy read. It wasn't intend to be.

Umesh Kesavan says

"What do men live by?" and "What is art?" are my favorite chapters from this classic book which poses the question "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?". Yet,one has to accept that only those who know cricket can read this book.

Sumukh Shankar Pande says

I struggled through the first half of the book, having little to do with cricket. In the second half, I encountered possibly the most beautiful sports writing I've ever read. Here is a shining example.

"Cricket is first and foremost a dramatic spectacle. It belongs with the theatre, ballet, opera and the dance ... It is so organized that at all times it is compelled to reproduce the central action which characterizes all good drama from the days of the Greeks to our own; two individuals are pitted against each other in a conflict that is strictly personal but no less strictly representative of a social group. One individual batsman faces one individual bowler. But each represents his side. For that moment, to all intents and purposes, he is the side. This fundamental relation of the One and the Many, Individual and Social, Individual and Universal, leader and followers, representative and ranks, the part and the whole, is structurally imposed on the players of cricket. Thus the game is founded upon a dramatic, a human, relation which is universally recognized as the most objectively pervasive and psychologically stimulating in life and therefore in that artificial representation of it which is drama."

This is possibly the pinnacle of sports writing. DFW doesn't come close.

Matthew Gaughan says

Not just the greatest book about sport ever written, but also one of the best about Marxism, postcolonialism, the Caribbean, the north of England, and cultural history. It's a masterpiece.

Lisa says

So this book was difficult for me not because it wasn't beautifully written or analytical (it was both) but because I don't understand the sport of cricket. That was part of why I chose to read this book - I wanted to see how a sport I didn't know anything about, played in countries I know very little about - played out in terms of race, politics, and class. James's writing style is lyrical perfection - it is flawless without being pedantic, pretentious, or precious. He writes about a sport that he was passionate about and deeply involved in - not just as a writer and a fan but as a political actor. He was instrumental in the installation of the first Black captain on the West Indies team, and understood the potential of the sport to be a vehicle for West Indian independence and Black ascendancy. Early in the book, James describes his relationship to the sport as a boy growing up - the segregated clubs, the injustices visited upon Black and Brown cricketers - and later on, he delves into the psychology of the sport and its inherently political nature. The recurring theme of the book is "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" Which is a meditation on the colonial relationship of the colonized not only to the colonizer, but to themselves. In our society we tend to depoliticize sport, but professional sport especially serves as a vehicle to uphold and glorify the status quo. This book, and the film *Fire in Babylon*, are powerful reminders that sport has other functions - a challenge to the status quo, an avenue for cultural and personal expression and aspirations, not only of the players but of peoples or nations. Sport was one of the first venues in which oppressed people could demonstrate equality and even dominance. However, this was inevitably reinterpreted through a racist and eugenically based lens - physical superiority was interpreted as a racial characteristic. Sadly, racism is mutable and creative, and thus our responses to it must also be.

Peter says

God help me, I do not understand cricket. People have explained the rules to me numerous times and they just don't seem to stick in my brain. It sounds like a combination of bowling and that baseball training game "pickle" (which honestly is a lot more fun than baseball itself, especially played with a larger bouncy ball) with some extras... but the devil, as they say, is in the details.

Why then, you may be forgiven for asking, did I read a whole book about cricket? Because it turned up on a library free pile and was written by one of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century: the Trinidadian historian, novelist, and radical C.L.R. James. James had one of those crazy twentieth century lives that just seemed to be everywhere and do everything, even though he wasn't especially long-lived. Migrating between Britain, the US, and the West Indies, he was one of the intellectual godfathers of post-Garvey pan-africanism, started and led one of the major Trotskyite tendencies in the US, and was a major figure in the Trinidadian independence struggle. He launched the historiographical reappraisal of the Haitian Revolution. He wrote one of the definitive interpretations of *Moby-Dick* while sitting in a detention center within sight of the Statue of Liberty, waiting to be deported from the US. He was the first black Caribbean novelist published in the UK.

He was also a fan of and writer about cricket. "Beyond a Boundary," one of James's last books and published posthumously, is partially a memoir of his own experience with the game and partially an informal history of the game in the West Indies. It's one of those books that could be called "belle lettres," i.e. respectable but unclassifiable literary productions. We hear about James's struggles between the

aspirations put on him by his status-conscious lower-middle-class family in Trinidad and the young Cyril's desire to play cricket and read novels rather than bother with placement exams. Trinidad being small and at the same time one of the great producers of cricket talent, James (and seemingly any interested Trinidadian) could get to know some of the great cricketers of the world.

And that's a problem, because I do not know the name of any cricket players other than Tendulkar, a contemporary Indian cricketer who is at least half-seriously regarded by some Hindus as a worthy addition to their pantheon, and C.L.R. James, who played fairly seriously at the amateur level. James is enough of a great writer to get me to care about these people who are just new names to me. But he also assumes the reader knows who they are, who are the points of comparison in terms of cricketers past, and most of all, cricket terms. Even to the extent I understand the rules, I don't know the terms for the plays and techniques etc, and naturally, in a finely-grained discussion of the game, that's going to come up a lot. It was pretty confusing even as I could tell James was writing about it masterfully.

Of course, being a political figure and a radical, James tied cricket back into politics, and I somewhat got that. Cricket was the game of the imperialists, still mostly played in the old Empire. Even when imperial possessions — first white dominions like Australia, then out and out colonies like India and the West Indies — started beating England, it was still beating them at literally their own game.

The game brought with it a value system — roughly, the variant on stoic sportsmanship common in English public schools at the time — that James feels serious ambivalence towards. On the one hand, as a radical he rebukes England, the empire, the bourgeoisie, the racial politics that warped the West Indian cricket world for some time. On the other, James can't lose — doesn't want to — his attachment to aspects of the code that came with a space of conflict that is as hard-fought as the tooth and nail of class struggle but without rancor, granting honor to the other side and respecting adjudication from referees. The struggles he lived for — the overthrow of capitalism, black liberation — couldn't be that way. But there's something beyond escape to another, nicer plane that the code has to offer. I just wish I could parse more of his cricket examples so I could tell what he thinks they are. ****

<https://toomuchberard.wordpress.com/2...>

Supriya says

For a great philosopher and keen memoirist, it is amazing how much style CLR James has. Reading this book, almost more than his wonderful inquiry into West Indies cricket and what it meant for race, class and masculinity, I was left admiring his writing, a fine balance between High Victorian and mid-20th century journalism, and knowing that I was in the presence of a master.

Vedant says

What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?

Widely acknowledged as the greatest book on cricket ever written, 'Beyond the Boundary' is CLR James' cogent argument that cricket goes beyond the boundary; and plays a great role in not just shaping men, but also a national identity. It is a book on cricket, but more than that. Part memoir, part history, part social text.

Above all, it is a book about a man deeply in love with a game of cricket.

If you love the game in its purest, simplest form, then this is the book.

Aloke says

Tyler Cowen writes: "Many people consider this the best book on cricket ever written. I cannot judge that, but it is a stellar sports book, colonialism book, and most of all a Caribbean Bildungsroman (Trinidad), definitely recommended to anyone with interests in those areas. Beautifully written..."
<http://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2009/03/03/the-best-book-on-cricket-ever-written.html>...

Oliver Bateman says

What can one learn from this book, when one knows nothing of cricket? In my case, a hell of a lot. James presumes that the reader knows a lot about cricket; various legends such as Bradman, Grace, Worrell, Headley, et al. are referred to by surname only. But such lacunae can be filled swiftly by means of Wikipedia.

What really matters here are the larger claims James makes regarding the cultural significance of Trinidad's most popular sport. Every few pages, I'd stumble upon a paragraph that made the case for studying sports/"pop culture" far better than anything I'd ever seen before. The technical discussions of cricket would drag a bit, but even those were noteworthy, given James' background as a cricketer of above average skill--there simply weren't any books on sports in the early 60s, not even Liebling's stylish essays on boxing, in which it is clear the author understands the practice of the sport as well as James understands cricket.

And then you get to this passage, the highlight of the book and a sentiment that I share:

"All art, science, philosophy, are modes of apprehending the world, history, and society. as one of these, cricket in the West Indies could hold its own. A professor of political science publicly bewailed that a man of my known political interests should believe that cricket had ethical and social values. I had no wish to answer. I was just sorry for the guy."

Also, read this: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/mar/03/roger-ballen-cricket>

Of the nonfiction books I've reviewed on here since 2009, this is the best. Ten or fifteen paragraphs can't do it justice. A masterpiece in every sense. The US has yet to produce a book on sports of this caliber, though I'm sure all of you have high hopes for my pro wrestling monograph.

Sarah Sammis says

I'm too far removed from the author to fully appreciate this book. This memoir is written with the assumption that the reader is familiar with his articles on cricket, is as avid fan of the game of cricket and an avid reader. Well, I have the third qualification for this book except that I haven't read his favorite book: *Vanity Fair*. To someone who follows cricket will come away with much more from reading this book.

