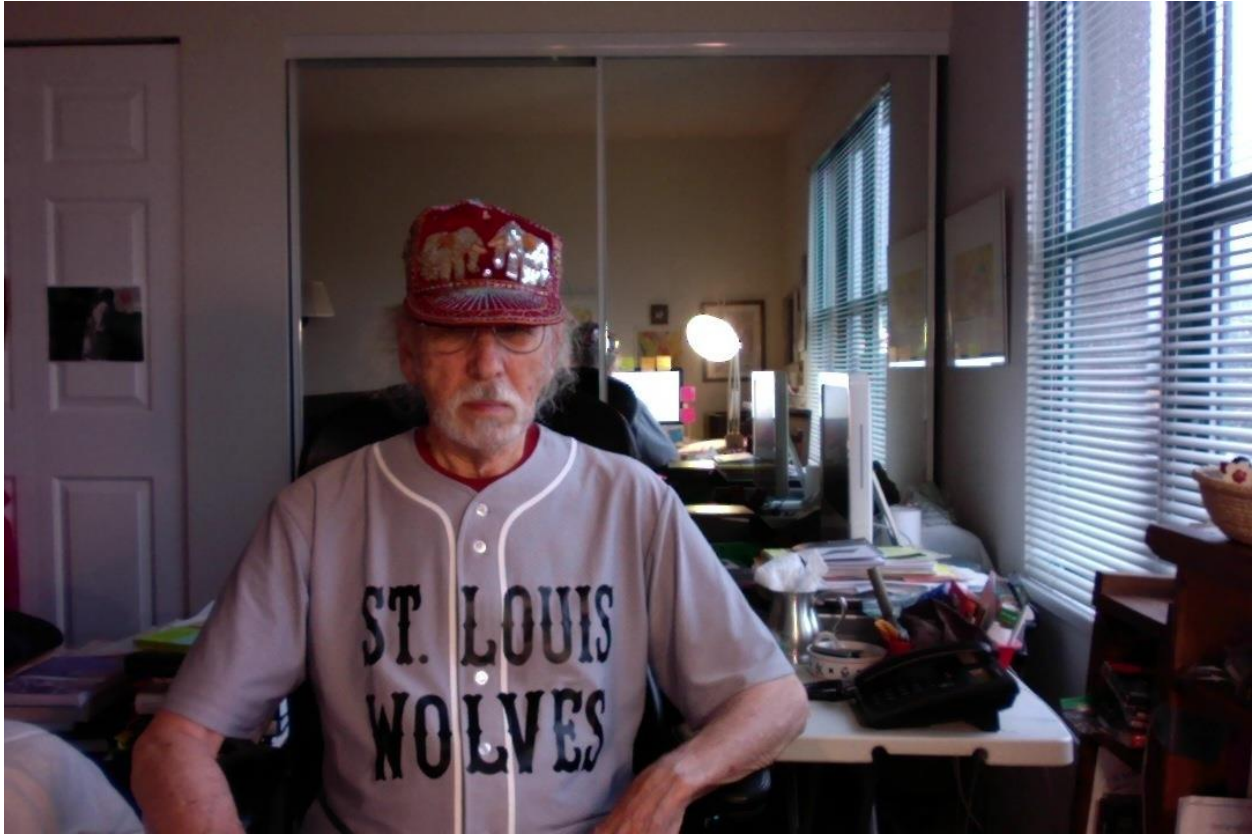


Jerry Being Jerry

Ken Seigneurie



Jerry being Jerry in his homage to Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First" routine. Yes, those are sequined elephants on his cap! (Photo courtesy of author.)

Here's what Jerry said: "The author is in the whole work and is present in the totality of the work both as author of the text and is in the 'text' as listener and writer." If this is true, and I think it is, then Jerry is with us in what follows, and his words will stand as a better tribute to him than anything I can come up with.

On November 12th of 2018, he sent me a text that I call “The Jacket.” In it, he wrote:

For many years I saw a man on Lonsdale Street who wore a different Pro team warm-up jacket every day. He walked with a walker.

I looked over his shoulder many times as I passed by one of the three places where he would sit; he was always reading a sports paper, mainly stats in thick books or sometimes illustrated journals. I knew his schedule in the morning and afternoon and on which side of the street he would walk and sit.

The different warm-up jackets were mainly baseball but also football, not hockey. Once he had a Celtics jacket. On another day he was crossing a side street and I was on the corner opposite him. He had on a Cleveland Indians jacket! I decided then and there this was my chance. I waited on the corner for him to slowly cross looking down as he does and said when he came to my side of the street: “You know, I grew up with the Cleveland Indians.” He looked at me up and down. I said, “I can probably name all the players on the team around 1948.” Well, he could too! And he could name players on other teams as well. Over the months we talked more, either on the street or I would sit down with him at one of the bistros.

Mac was from Saskatchewan, raised by his grandparents, and grew up listening to baseball games on radio broadcasts from the U.S., even lower levels of play into the double-A and try-out leagues and coming from as far away as Iowa. He knew the history of baseball, the history of stadiums, even stadiums in Japan. His memory was right there. I told him I saw Pete Gray the one-armed player in the outfield for the Chattanooga Lookouts, when we lived there during the war. He knew all about Pete Gray. He also knew about League Park where the Indians played before moving to Municipal Stadium in 1946. He knew that the origin of the Baseball Digest was in White Rock.

I told him where League Park was in the middle of the then-immigrant and Black neighborhood and that when I was in university I cleaned a woman's house on Saturdays who lived nearby. Race riots between Blacks and migrant workers from the South were just beginning there, so I would leave my cleaning job before dark. The lady had a picture of Robert Taft on her wall. I would think how he had made the Taft-Hartley Act that messed up labour unions. When did I ever meet a Republican face to face before then? She paid me \$5.00 a day, enough for the Greyhound back to Akron.

Lou Boudreau was my favorite baseball player. I even wrote a letter to the editor of the Akron Beacon Journal, Jim Schlemmer, about him when I was 14 complaining about what the editor had said critical of Boudreau. Later in life when I learned German I found out that “Schlemmer” meant gluttonizing. I saw the Indians when they had the first Black players: Larry Doby, Luke Easter, Minnie Minoso and Satchel Paige. I wrote a poem about Satchel Paige. There was also the Jewish 3rd baseman Al Rosen. And Bob Feller who came back from the Army to pitch. Bill Veeck [“Veck”], the owner, was one of the first to hire Black players. Veeck also made the game into entertainment with midgets and ridiculous stunts that tried to make baseball what it wasn't.

I got up the courage one day to ask Mac about the crippling disease. It's like MS but different. Guillain-Barré syndrome. I remember it because the name is close to shortstop Ozzie Guillen's name. I learned that Mac played minor league ball with Beaumont Texas in the Yankee System. He said he could hit and played many positions. I thought that as an academic I played many positions too and as a kid tried them all out. After baseball, Mac went into construction in Alberta and B.C. before he retired here. He didn't like Vancouver and longed for the Prairies.

I asked him does he have clippings from his baseball life. His ex-wife took them and also his collection of Native artifacts from the hills of Saskatchewan. He thinks baseball players should respect the game and not wear their uniforms sloppily. He has other curmudgeonly views which I tend to agree with in the moment. His politics of course are part of his character. He has little use for other Figures of the Street who sit in their motorized wheelchairs and complain. He thinks these others resent that he wears all these jackets. One day when he was wearing the Celtics jacket, I told him it was my favorite team and I could recall most of the players. He asked me, "Who was the manager-coach of the Celtics?" I said, "Red Auerbach."

He gave me his agriculture newspaper that he gets from the Prairies. I told him that it has great information that no one knows. I also said that there is no newspaper I know of that has a regular column about education.

One day Sibylle and I were sitting at a café on the street. Mac was walking by and said he had something for me and he'd be at the other café the next day, usual time. I met him there and he had a big package on the seat of the walker. It was the Celtics warm-up jacket. He said he knew I would like it. He was not keeping some of his jackets. I protested. I could not take it. He insisted. It fit me, so he must have been my size, but he seemed larger. I wear the jacket in the house and haven't stirred up the courage yet to wear it on the street. If he'd seen me with it, I'm sure he would have been pleased.

Last time I saw Jerry at Bon Chaz across from Harbour Centre, I asked him how Mac was doing. He paused and said he hadn't seen him in a long time.... We were both quiet, and I imagined Jerry wearing the Celtics jacket, bridging the distance between him and his absent friend as he had between himself and many, many others.

Ken Seigneurie's work explores how worlds—humanistic, liberal, religious and postcolonial—accrete around literary texts. His research spans English, Arabic and French literatures in a comparative context, world literature and Eastern Mediterranean cultures. He has served as General Editor of the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Literature* (2020), translator from Arabic in *What Makes a Man? Sex Talk in Beirut and Berlin* (2015), and author of *Standing by the Ruins: Elegiac Humanism in Wartime and Postwar Lebanon* (2011). His current project is a study of the palimpsests of religious thought in cultures of liberalism east and west.