

Verses in Motion: exploring sport in Polish and American poetry

Michał Mazurkiewicz

Jan Kochanowski University, Faculty of Humanities
Institute of Literary Studies and Linguistics, Department of Cultural Research
Uniwersytecka St 17, 25-406 Kielce, Poland
Email: michal.mazurkiewicz@ujk.edu.pl
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9078-6622>
Research interests: Sport, Literature, Culture

Abstract. Sport has long been a subject of interest for writers from all over the world. As early as ancient Greek society, athletes who excelled in different sports disciplines were celebrated, a practice that also manifested in written form. This also concerns poets, inspired by the glories and shadows of sporting rivalry, noting its beauty and deep symbolism. The objective of this article was to examine (through historical examples and literary analysis) the phenomenon of sports poetry, a subject that has received scant attention from the research community thus far. The **exploration** focused on the literature of two countries – Poland and the United States, with a particular emphasis on the works of poets who perceive significant potential in sporting competition, such as – among others – Kazimierz Wierzyński, Krzysztof Zuchora, William Carlos Williams or William Heyen. The research methodology encompassed an examination of numerous volumes of poetry, perusal of publications (books and articles) dedicated to the presence of sport in literature, and an extensive review of the history of sport and literature. The findings show that sports poetry is still alive and remains an important – though academically neglected – segment of literature, embedding sport in the cultural sphere.

Keywords: sport; sports poetry; literature; Polish poetry; American poetry.

Introduction

People have loved competition for centuries. Nowadays, sport is permeating our lives to an ever-increasing extent. It is a phenomenon that holds a public space in most countries and has an expansive nature; as such it boldly transcends the terrain of sporting arenas, “radiating ... far beyond its boundaries, bestowing its values on anyone who is willing and in demand” (Lipiec, 2018, p. 57). It is manifest in various spheres of life, including politics, the economy, tourism, the media, religion and also the arts, offering a constant source of inspiration, including literary inspiration.

According to the definition formulated by Wojciech Lipoński (1987, p. 174), sports literature is: “a variety of literature in whose works sport determines their artistic or social functions, most often both together”. The love of sport has had a notable presence in literary works across a range of historical periods (Mazurkiewicz, 2020; Lipoński, 1987). This pertains to any genres of literature, including but not limited to novels, short stories, works of poetry, drama and non-fiction. The renowned definition provided by the progenitor of British Romanticism, William Wordsworth (orig. 1798), talks of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (quoted after Brett, Jones, 2005, p. 237). In view of the fact that sport in its various forms is one of the most important carriers of feelings and emotions, the existence of sports-themed poetry makes perfect sense. A specially interesting phenomenon is sports poetry, which exalts sport, underlines its beauty and highlights the humanistic values of physical culture by describing almost mystical experiences, glorifying the champions, the drama of the agon that arises from the memories and experiences of the observer/fan. It is exemplified by the famous poetic volume *Laur olimpijski* [*Olympic Laurel*] by Kazimierz Wierzyński, who will soon be discussed.

Although the presence of sport in culture has been strong for centuries, it has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive academic study, although some publications have appeared (see Tadić et al., 2016; Johnson, 2004). This is certainly true of sports poetry, a phenomenon that is complex and extremely interesting in many respects. The objective of this article is to conduct a thorough and detailed analysis of the multifaceted relationship between sport and literature; it focuses on examining the role of sport in poetry through the example of selected authors from Poland and the United States. Taking a comparative approach to the subject has made it possible to present a broader perspective. This may increase our appreciation of the importance of sport as a universal source of inspiration, all the more so because there is a large group of artists from different countries, including those specialising in poetry, who were (are) passionate about sport. In many cases, it also meant being active sportsmen in real life. Wierzyński, Poe, Byron, or numerous contemporary poets are excellent exemplifications of this phenomenon (Mazurkiewicz, 2023).

Research methods included the analysis of selected sports-themed literary works (fragments of poems), historical sources in which sport occupies a prominent place, and a review of numerous monographs and articles on topics related to cultural history in the broadest sense. The subject of sports poetry – as mentioned before – is still a research gap, so this article has the potential to make an important contribution to the broader discourse on sports literature. This is particularly relevant, taking into account that the analysis encompasses the literature of two countries, Poland and the United States, thus offering a more comprehensive research perspective.

Sport and poetry – an intriguing combination

There are some interesting similarities between sport and poetry, as poets themselves have noted. The link between the two realms was recognised by one of the most admired American poets, Robert Frost, who remarked: “Poets are like baseball pitchers. Both have

their moments. The intervals are the tough things” (Stahl, 2007). Baseball, therefore, like creative work, consists largely of failures (Ibid.). Another poet, Lillian Morrison (1965, p. vii), states unequivocally: “There is an affinity between sports and poetry. Each is a form of play; each is a form of ritual. Each has the power to take us out of ourselves and, at times, to lift us above ourselves. They go together naturally wherever there is zest for life”. In certain instances, sport and poetry coalesce intriguingly, resulting in the creation of works in which sporting themes play a key role. Sport then often becomes a starting point for reflection, where thoughts on the human condition are outlined (Mazurkiewicz, 2023).

Sports rivalry invariably fascinates people, attracting a wide range of dedicated fans from various professional backgrounds (also artists and creators). Sporting events are known to draw large audiences due to the dramatic nature of the events, which stimulate the senses and evoke strong emotions. However, appearances can be deceptive; there is a more profound level to the stadium’s ordinariness. As Józef Lipiec (2011, p. 19) rightly points out, it is important to consider the ideological aspects of sport, which require a deeper understanding of the subject. These aspects include the more subtle layers of meaning, ideas and symbols that are not immediately apparent. As he states,

sport conceived in this way is an excellent source of poetic, musical or artistic inspiration. Art and philosophy are capable of discovering in sporting events their dramatic content, transcending the properties of eyewitness images. They are also capable of revealing the beauty of the artistry of champions, generally overlooked by ordinary consumers of fan engagement (Ibid).

This is how sport is often perceived by poets – as a mysterious field, full of multiple meanings, where the practical dimension of life is combined with profound symbolism. It makes sports-themed poetry a fascinating phenomenon, the existence of which dedicated agon aficionados are not always aware of. Its defining characteristics are emphasis on emotion and nostalgic retrospection. (Johnson, 2004, p. 22). And while some of the works do not shy away from showing the dark sides of sport (which definitely exist as well), there is often an expectation filled with hope for a better world. This is a great reminder that sport can lead to positive changes of different kinds.

The history of the relationship between poetry and sport is long, though not necessarily sufficiently researched. Sports historians repeatedly recall the presence of athletic competition in the works of the towering figure of Greek literature, Homer, as well as in the Greek Olympic odes (epinikions), extolling the winners. The greatest creators of this genre were undoubtedly lyric poets Simonides, Bacchylides and Pindar. This kind of ancient poetry sought to elevate the athlete to a divine or heroic status. Usually recited in public and accompanied by music during a variety of ceremonies, it fulfilled several functions, including historical, political and religious ones (establishing a link between victory and the will of providence).

The emergence of modern sports poetry was concomitant with the gradual rise of professional sport, the development of mass media and growing individualism. Consequently, its appeal has evolved. The religious dimension has diminished or become

less prominent, although spirituality is still present in certain instances. The poems frequently concentrate on the athlete's or fan's inner life; they also incorporate social commentaries, provide a broader cultural context for athletic events, and evince a tendency towards nostalgia, while referring to historical events. Numerous penmen appreciated the charm and significance of sport in recent centuries. Let us recall just a few poets who incorporated sporting themes into their work: Henri de Montherlant from France, Bertolt Brecht from Germany and the British poets A. E. Housman, Francis Thompson and John Betjeman (Tearle, 2018; Duffy, 2010), Takis Doxas from Greece, Tudor George from Romania, the Chinese, such as Lin Mang, Italians – Raniero Nicolai, Ermanno Eandi, and Enrico Mario Lazarin – and many more (Lipoński, 2012, p. 584; Mazurkiewicz, 2023). It is also not difficult to find sports poets coming from Poland or the United States. Overall, sports poetry, serving to preserve and glorify human physical achievement, has a long and interesting history.

Sport excites and arouses passions, as we can see from the biographies of various writers, active athletes. As often recalled, the famous Lord Byron indulged in the charms of swimming and boxing, A great devotee of the cult of physical fitness (in particular, an excellent swimmer) was the American master of horror stories and poet Edgar Allan Poe, which was evident both in his private life and in some of his works (Mazurkiewicz, 2017, pp. 199–206). Similar examples could be multiplied. In Poland, a noteworthy example is the aforementioned Kazimierz Wierzyński, who pursued a career in football during his youth, playing as a right midfielder and goalkeeper for the eastern borderland club Pogoń Stryj. A notable exemplar of a contemporary writer-athlete is Zbigniew Masternak, the captain of the National Football Team of Polish Writers (Mazurkiewicz, 2022, pp. 248–255).

Polish sports poetry

Sport (or broadly understood play) has clearly left its mark on Polish literature. As the aforementioned sports historian Lipoński rightly notes (1970, p. 11),

It is difficult to find a writer in the history of Polish literature who has not shaken some sporting trifle from his pen. Sometimes it is a larger or smaller stand-alone piece, sometimes a few loose remarks or descriptions in a larger work – but always it is a testimony to an interest in the problems of sport; ancient or contemporary.

This assertion is corroborated by the great number of eminent literary figures, including poets, whom this Polish scholar recalls. These individuals do notice sporting achievement and evince a profound interest in, or even fascination with, athletics. Notable exemplars are: Jan Kochanowski, Adam Mickiewicz, Felicjan Faleński, Bolesław Prus, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Bolesław Leśmian, Hanna Malewska, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, and many more. The works of those writers, as well as by Wierzyński, Tadeusz Peiper, Kazimierz Wyka, Stanisław Dygat, Ryszard Kapuściński, Jerzy Pilch or – specialising in youth

literature – Adam Bahdaj (the famous novel *Do przerwy 0:1* [*Until the Break 0:1*], Jacek Podsiadło or Edmund Niziurski, contain interesting sports themes. The above list is only a modest representation of the Polish literary community drawing inspiration, to a greater or lesser extent, from the world of sport. Let us analyse now some selected cases.

Kazimierz Wierzyński (1894–1969) undoubtedly has an impressive track record in Polish literature. This fan of sport and a former football player achieved fame with his renowned poetry collection, which won the gold medal in the literary category at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam – *Olympic Laurel* (1927) – in its German translation. This work remains a testament to the author's extensive sporting knowledge. It is a remarkably accurate compilation of sporting highlights from 1925–1927, featuring famous pre-war sporting champions such as the Finnish long-distance runner Paavo Nurmi, the Spanish goalkeeper Ricardo Zamora and the American sprinter Charles Paddock, among others.

Wierzyński notices a surge in popularity of certain disciplines, notably football, as exemplified in the poem *The Football (Soccer) Match*:

Here is the greatest Coliseum in the world,
Here beats the heart of all life and desire;
Here an enigma unites, enthusiasm makes kinsmen
Of one million people spread through the arena.

...

Now show me where, in what theatres could explode
With such a great shout the voice of a million (Davie et al., 1958, pp. 16–17, transl. Harriet Broday).

Wierzyński's prediction that football would become a global phenomenon proved to be accurate. The first world championship was soon organized – in Uruguay in 1930 – which triggered a wave of enthusiasm for the sport that grew ever stronger in the decades that followed.

In the poem *At the Start*, Wierzyński highlights the increasingly visible presence of women in the sporting arenas. He seems to view this phenomenon as a really exciting one:

Carolling bells and clamorous trumpets proudly announce us,
Fleet-footed daughters of Sparta, maids of the Amazon college:
We move with arms raised to their praising, in slenderness leaping,
As slim as hinds we circle before the ranked faces, the watchers
Breathbound; spellbound (Davie et al., 1958, pp. 16–17, transl. Eve McFall).

Thus, Wierzyński is a perceptive observer who recognises the growing popularity of women's sport and regards it as a breath of fresh air. The 1920s and 30s saw significant progress in this area. Women entered new sports disciplines with courage and determination, and over time, they began to participate in the Olympic Games. A notable example of such a pioneer is Halina Konopacka, who won the first Olympic gold for Poland in 1928.

As Michał Sprusiński (1979, p. 10) rightly emphasised, “the enchantment with youth, physical beauty, and the harmony of the act has here acquired a new symbolism”. However, sport, as we see in the pages of the volume, is not only about aesthetic qualities. Extremely valuable, according to Wierzyński, is learning to fight fair, to respect the opponent, to accept the other as a brother, to overcome obstacles, to achieve the goals set by transcending the limits of humanity, and finally to try to reach the fullness of life and even to enter the dimension of infinity in order to become human to an even greater extent. As his successor, Krzysztof Zuchora (2008, p. 10), aptly puts it, “the originality and artistry of this poetry make the spirit of metaphysics shine through the reality of sport. *Laurel* is the apotheosis of a victorious man, showing the world new paths of development”. The volume, recognised by the awarding of an extremely valuable Olympic prize, elevated Wierzyński to global renown.

The influence of Wierzyński soon made itself felt in the literary output of other writers. In the following decades of the twentieth century, many Polish poets tried to match him in the realm of sports poetry. The group included such artists as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Aleksander Rymkiewicz, Roman Sadowski, Marian Grześczak (also a sports journalist, just like Wierzyński) and others. Sports-related works, usually scattered in various literary magazines and sometimes collected in poetic volumes, showed that sports poetry still has a small but active following in Poland. The anthology *Wieniec ze słów (A Wreath Made of Words)*, containing works by these and other authors, is worth mentioning here (Zuchora, 2019). Some artists have consistently stuck to their chosen path, regularly publishing works that maintain a spirit of fascination with sport.

A particularly significant example of such a writer is Krzysztof Zuchora, born in 1940 and still (as of 2025) an active poet. He is an academic, lecturer on physical culture, former editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kultura Fizyczna*, great promoter of sports values and the Olympic idea. His work has two facets. On the one hand, there are publications focusing on various aspects of physical culture, and on the other, poetry, largely inspired by sport, but also by nature. Sport is perceived by Zuchora as a cultural phenomenon in the broadest sense of the term, with great potential to lead man towards things of beauty. The author emphasises various aspects of sporting reality. Present, therefore, is the sincere love expressed towards a special place with its own spirit – the stadium, to which sports fans get accustomed and which they usually treat with tenderness. This is a short fragment of the poem *The Stadium*:

I know this place
warm
and tender
like the hollow of one's hand (Zuchora, 1968, p. 29, translation mine – M. M.)

Zuchora articulates the sentiments shared by many sports fans. Stadiums evoke strong emotions and create lasting memories. Consequently, they are considered to be the focal points of ritual activities for sports communities all over the world.

As for other themes, there is the fascination with the figure and the Olympic idea of Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic movement; finally, there is a visible appreciation of the heroes of the sporting arenas who are an integral part of the history of sport and history in general, such as the legless American marathon runner Bob Wieland, the Polish legendary sprinter Irena Szewińska or the intrepid mountaineers involved in the famous 2018 rescue operation to save their abandoned (left at the mercy of fate) colleagues Tomasz Mackiewicz and Elisabeth Revol on Nanga Parbat (Mazurkiewicz, 2023). In Zuchora's latest volume, entitled *Invitation to a Poem* (2023), he even paid tribute to the contemporary football star, an excellent striker, Robert Lewandowski (*A Poem for Robert Lewandowski*):

While playing, he combines visible joy with imagination
as if he's elevating the stadium to the heights of art.

...

like an ancient athlete following the voice of Pindar
a song in agonies he values more than victory (Zuchora, 2023, p. 84, translation mine – M. M.)

The poet shows one of the greatest football idols as an artist, remaining in close connection with the artistic masters of the past, including Pindar. Zuchora seems to suggest that sports fans are always seeking more from rivalry than just actions and goals. A sporting experience consistently exceeds people's expectations. There is always an elusive quality to sports heroes that defies capture in words.

The enthusiasm for sport is also noticeable in the work of successive generations of poets, as attested to by confirmed by Michał Zabłocki, Artur Tomaszewski or (*toutes proportions gardées*) the author of this article. It seems, therefore, that this sports poetry – although clearly a sideline – will remain a living part of Polish poetry. Athletes, like spectators, create and will continue to create a common space for values. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the sporting world will still provide a rich source of inspiration for those engaged in literary pursuits in the years to come.

American sports poetry

Sport (as a theme, metaphor and inspiration) has definitely marked its presence in American literature as well, enriching it over the centuries in many ways (Umphlett, 1991; Davis, 2004, p. 213). It is worth noting that numerous prominent figures in the field of literature in America have demonstrated a keen interest in sport, in its various forms. It is visible in the works of, for example, Edgar Allan Poe, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Bernard Malamud, Norman Mailer, Robert Coover, Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, Joyce Carol Oates and David Foster Wallace (Cocchiarale, Emmert, 2004; Davis, 2004).

Baseball ("the national pastime") is a sport particularly favoured by American poets (Hall, 1985, p. 57). The love of baseball was emphasised by Walt Whitman, who stated:

“I see great things in baseball. It’s our game – the American game” (Walt Whitman). They often played the game themselves. America’s first professional poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is believed to have practised an early version of baseball in his student days (Harris, 2015). As far as sports-inspired poetry is concerned, particular mention needs to be made here of the famous poem from 1888, entitled *Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888*, written by Ernest Thayer. It was first published anonymously in *The San Francisco Examiner* (*The Daily Examiner* at that time), under the pseudonym “Phin”. Containing a dramatic sports narrative, the work was later popularised in DeWolf Hopper’s vaudeville shows and is still considered baseball’s most famous poem (CASEY AT THE BAT). Consequently, it gained recognition as one of the more prominent poetic works within the broader context of American literature. However, this was not an isolated case. The following discussion will examine the presence of baseball and other sports in the works of selected American poets.

Let us start with Grantland Rice (1880–1954), an American sportswriter famous for his elegant style, fascinated with sports heroes (such as Jack Dempsey or Babe Ruth), and elevating games to the level of noble ancient rivalry. As historian Lee Congdon (2017, p. 1) states, “American sports writing, insofar as it counts as a literary pursuit, owes a lasting debt to Grantland Rice”. And indeed, thanks to him, sports writing became a respected form of literature. Rice published three volumes of poetry and many of his sports poems, such as *Game Called*, still resonate with readers. His most often quoted stanza was: “For when the one Great Scorer comes to write against your name, He marks—not that you won or lost—but how you played the game” (Henry Grantland Rice).

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), a private doctor, was a poet, novelist, essayist and playwright, perceived as an experimenter, innovator and almost revolutionary figure in American poetry. Considered a leading representative of American Imagism (alongside Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle), he based his oeuvre on quotidian experience, thereby portraying America in its various aspects. Although his career was initially overshadowed by that of other poets, he became an inspiration to the Beatnik generation in the 1950s and 1960s. In the poem *The Crowd at the Ball Game*, published in 1923, Williams noted the intriguing nature of baseball fans, their perception of the game and their impact on the game’s outcome (William Carlos Williams). He paid attention to emotions that arise spontaneously and collectively:

So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful

for this
to be warned against

saluted and defied –
It is alive, venomous

...

The Jew gets it straight – it
is deadly, terrifying –

It is the Inquisition, the
Revolution (Blaustein, 2001, pp. 224–225)

As seen in these fragments, beneath the surface of this seemingly joyful event, something lurks; Williams alludes to a more sinister aspect of group behaviour, suggesting that the same energy that brings people together in support of a game could also be readily directed towards more dangerous, even violent, ends. The crowd, thus, seems to constitute an unfathomable mystery.

The above poem by Williams draws a parallel between the game and poetry, as brilliantly demonstrated a few decades later (in 1961) by Marianne Moore in her piece *Baseball and Writing* (Mills, 2009). Baseball has also served as a source of inspiration for other twentieth-century poets, as evidenced by the works of Robert Francis, Richard Armour and Richard Jackson, just to name a few. After all, it is not without reason that baseball enjoys the status of “The National Pastime” in the United States.

It is worth noting the presence of sport in the works of a number of – also still active – American poets, such as William Heyen (born 1940). This poet, who is often compared to the eminent Walt Whitman, is one of a large number of contemporary writers who clearly appreciate the role of sport in US history and culture. He was an accomplished athlete during his student years, and this passion has persisted throughout his life. Testimony to Heyen’s sporting past and prowess, as well as his sincere love of sport, are poems about baseball, wrestling and basketball, exemplified by an elegy dedicated to basketball player Wilt “The Stilt” Chamberlain – *Elegy For Wilt The Stilt* (2003). The poem recognises the player’s significant contribution to basketball and is characterised by visible admiration. However, it also conveys a sense of inevitability regarding the loss experienced. Another example of this type of poem is one written by Dave Smith, who dedicated his work to Benny “Kid” Paret (*Blues for Benny Kid Paret*, 1976), a Cuban boxer and former professional world champion who died as a result of injuries sustained in his last fight.

Coming back to Heyen, it is evident that he also demonstrated a strong attachment to the stadium, effectively showing the distinctiveness of the sporting event that is experienced in this special place (the final stanzas of the poem *The Stadium*):

We’ve known, all our lives,
that we would gather here in the stadium
on just such a night,

that even the bravest among us
would weep softly in the dark aisles,
catching their difficult breath (Blaustein, 2001, p. 119).

Such moments are eagerly awaited by the fans. Exceptional events of this kind are rather rare; they become anchored in the collective consciousness and later undergo a process of mythologization, combined with a sense of nostalgia.

Interestingly, Heyen has not only been interested in sports. The author's profound affinity for nature, evidenced by his meticulous observation of it, is a recurring theme in his oeuvre as well. Additionally, themes related to the Second World War are hallmarks of his poetry (Mazurkiewicz, 2023).

Looking more broadly, in the group of American poets interested in sports, we find such artists as (among others): David Ignatow, James Dickey, Richard Wilbur, Sherman Alexie, Frank Higgins, Louis Jenkins or Ed Dzitko. As was the case with Wierzyński years ago, they frequently pay tribute to sports champions. To give one example, Ignatow's *The Boxing Match* is a specific combination: it serves as a commemoration of the famous boxing fight (Dempsey-Firpo, 1923) and as a reflection on the dilemmas faced by a sports fan trying to capture the essence of being one:

Am I really a sports fan, I ask myself,
listening to the Dempsey-Firpo fight
over the radio and looking
at the open mouths of my friends:
...
and I join in yelling. Firpo
is climbing back into the ring
and I am glad for him
and admire him (Blaustein, 2001, p. 136).

It therefore seems that once a passion for sport has developed, even if it has faded, it will always be revived due to special circumstances. In most cases, this feeling never ends.

A wide representation of sports poets is presented in the pages of the anthology *Motion: American Sports Poems*, edited by Noah Blaustein (Blaustein, 2001). Women are also writing about sport, as evidenced by a separate monograph dedicated only to female creators, entitled *Crossing Boundaries: An International Anthology of Women's Experiences in Sport*, edited by Susan J. Bandy and Anne S. Darden (Bandy, Darden, 1999). It features works by women writers such as Americans: Judith Wright, Lillian Morrison, Cynthia Macdonald, Anne Sexton, Laura Jensen, Diane Ackerman, Anita Skeen, and Canadian Margaret Atwood. Interestingly, among others, the famous Polish poet Wisława Szymborska (the poem *Frozen Motion*) is included, which shows that even poets who are not necessarily regarded as strictly sports writers sometimes create interesting works that touch on movement, play or fun – in other words, sport in its broadest sense.

Conclusions

The great power of attraction is a feature of sport that defies facile interpretation. It is definitely not easy to explain the magnetism that compels us, driven by an inner impulse, to attend the stadium to participate in the emotional sports ritual. We are attracted to the drama, the struggle against adversity, the test of character, the unexpected course of the competition, defeats and victories; moreover, we are moved by questions of courage, loyalty and honour. These elements of sports competition, as well as many others, not always visible to outsiders, intrigue many people of letters. Sports-themed literature is generally created as a result of a strong interest in sports, often taking the form of a kind of fascination. Sports poetry, through its diversity, escapes clear-cut evaluations. It usually releases experiences and perpetuates emotions that never pass away. The power of revelation, based on memories of feats accomplished and great matches, is present in some form in many works. Of great significance is the fact that sports poetry, like all sports literature, fulfils an extremely important role – it clearly locates sports in the sphere of culture.

The historical context of many poetic works should undoubtedly be emphasised. This is because literary works, including sports poetry, often have a historical value in relation to sports competitions and practices. We are therefore dealing there with a cultural interpretation of historical events. A classic example of this is the sporting oeuvre of Kazimierz Wierzyński, which provides a gateway to the colourful world of the history of sport, but also – or perhaps above all – of supreme values, for at the centre of sport is always the human being. The analysis of a selected fragment of his poems corroborates that. This can also be seen in the poems of the other authors discussed here. They clearly show that the memory of outstanding sporting heroes, although it sometimes fades with time, does not disappear entirely.

Culture is a living organism. Being an integral part of the cultural reality, sports will probably never cease to inspire. As Krzysztof Zuchora notes, sport “can be a task for many writers and they need not fear plagiarism. It is still a virgin land of word” (Zuchora, 2022, p. 338). It is therefore reasonable to assume that artists will continue to create works based on their sporting fascinations. Hopefully, from time to time a new Wierzyński, de Montherlant, Heyen or other artist will emerge for whom sport represents a challenge; this will be someone standing at the centre of reflection, someone who discovers new, unknown facets of sport or at least sheds original light on previously described phenomena; in other words, someone who seeks to illuminate the mystery of sport through literary creation (Mazurkiewicz, 2023). The cultural landscape will definitely be enriched by these individuals.

The considerations and analyses presented above concern only a fragment of the multi-aspect relations between sport and literature. These explorations, though selective, allow us to see the multitude of issues waiting to be uncovered and examined by scholars of different kinds. They range from the presence of particular sporting disciplines in literary works to the role of sport in the biographies of specific writers of various nationalities.

Given the universality of the sporting experience, Polish and American literatures are no exception, as demonstrated in this research paper. This study may encourage further in-depth research into the significance of sports poetry – a colourful and varied phenomenon. In a broader context, the paper may serve as a source of inspiration for cultural history scholars as well as historians of sport.

References

- Bandy, S. J., Darden, A. S., eds. 1999. *Crossing Boundaries: An International Anthology of Women's Experiences in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Blaustein, N., ed. 2001. *Motion: American Sports Poems*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Brett, R. L., Jones A. R., eds. 1971. *Wordsworth & Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads; the Text of the 1798 Edition with the Additional 1800 Poems and Prefaces*. London and New York: Routledge.
- CASEY AT THE BAT – Ernest Thayer Casey at the Bat, *Baseball Almanac*. [online] Available at: <https://www.baseball-almanac.com/poetry/po_case.shtml>. [Accessed 12 November 2024].
- Cocchiarale, M., Emmert, S. D., eds. 2004. *Upon Further Review: Sports in American Literature*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger.
- Congdon, L., 2017. *Legendary Sports Writers of the Golden Age*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Davie, D., 1958. Wierzyński in English Translation, *The Polish Review*, 3, pp. 13–36. Available at: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25776186>>. [Accessed 5 August 2025].
- Davis, J. E., 2004. Literature, Sport in. In: *Sport in American Culture: From Ali to X-Games*. Ed. J. D. Duncan. Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC-CLIO, pp. 213–215.
- Duffy, C. A., 2010. 'Play up! play up!' *The Guardian*, 10 July. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/10/sporting-poems-carol-ann-duffy>>. [Accessed 11 April 2025].
- Hall, D., 1985. *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons: Essays on Sport (Mostly Baseball)*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Harris, R. L., 2015. Longfellow, Long Balls and the Chicago Cubs. *Through the Fence Baseball*, 13 October. [online] Available at: <<https://throughthefencebaseball.com/longfellow-long-balls-and-the-chicago-cubs/>>. [Accessed 21 April 2025].
- Johnson, D., 2004. *The Sporting Muse: A Critical Study of Poetry about Athletes and Athletics*. Jefferson, N. C. and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Lipiec, J., 2018. Prestiż sportu – prestiż sportowca [The Prestige of Sport – The Prestige of the Athlete]. In: *Kultura fizyczna a prestiż społeczny [Physical Culture and Communitarianism and Liberalism]*. Eds. Z. Dziubiński, M. Lenartowicz. Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP, pp. 57–70. [In Polish].
- Lipiec, J., 2011. Sport a kultura masowa (refleksje sceptyczne) [Sport and Mass Culture (Sceptical Reflections)]. In: *Kultura fizyczna a kultura masowa [Physical Culture and Communitarianism and Liberalism]*. Eds. Z. Dziubiński, M. Lenartowicz. Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP, pp. 15–22. [In Polish].
- Lipoński, W., 1970. *Zapomniani piewcy sportu [The Forgotten Eulogists of Sport]*. Warszawa: SiT. [In Polish].
- Lipoński, W., 1987. *Humanistyczna Encyklopedia Sportu [The Humanistic Encyclopedia of Sport]*. Warszawa: SiT. [In Polish].
- Lipoński, W., 2012. *Historia sportu [The History of Sport]*. Warszawa: PWN. [In Polish].
- Mazurkiewicz, M., 2017. Edgar Allan Poe – a Question of Sport. *Literatura i Kultura Popularna*, XXIII, pp. 199–206. <https://doi.org/10.19195/0867-7441.23.9.14>. Available at: <<https://wuwr.pl/lkp/article/view/2907/2833>>. [Accessed 21 April 2025]. [In Polish].

Mazurkiewicz, M., 2020. *Sport w literaturze i kulturze. Konteksty historyczne i społeczne* [*Sport in Literature and Culture. Historical and Social Contexts*]. Kielce: Wydawnictwo Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach. [In Polish].

Mazurkiewicz, M., 2022. Sport, literatura, wspólnota – Reprezentacja Polskich Pisarzy w Piłce Nożnej [Sport, Literature, Community – The National Football Team of Polish Writers]. In: *Kultura fizyczna a komunitaryzm i liberalizm* [*Physical Culture and Communitarianism and Liberalism*]. Eds. Z. Dziubiński, W. Firek. AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP, pp. 248–255. [In Polish].

Mazurkiewicz, M., 2023. Poezja sportowa (na przykładzie literatury polskiej i amerykańskiej) [Sports Poetry (On the Example of Polish and American Literature)]. In: *Kultura Fizyczna a sztuka* [*Physical Culture and Art*]. Eds. Z. Dziubiński, A. Włodarczyk. Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP, pp. 407–416. [In Polish].

Mills, B., 2009. Poster poems: Sport, *The Guardian*, 16 January. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/jan/16/poetry-sport>>. [Accessed 20 December 2024].

Morrison, L., 1965. *Sprints and Distances*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Russell, F. Henry Grantland Rice. *Tennessee Encyclopedia*. [online] Available at: <<https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/henry-grantland-rice/>>. [Accessed 5 April 2025].

Sprusiński, M., 1979. Anioł śmiechu, lutnista ciemnego czasu. Wstęp [The Angel of Laughter, the Lutenist of a Dark Time. Introduction]. In: *Wierzyński. Wiersze wybrane* [*Wierzyński. Selected Poems*]. Selection M. Sprusiński. Warszawa: PIW, pp. 5–22. [In Polish].

Stahl, L., 2007. Baseball and Verse, from Tinker to Evers to Big Papi, *Poetry Foundation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68945/baseball-and-verse-from-tinker-to-evers-to-big-papi>> [Accessed 12 December 2022].

Tadié, A., Mangan, J. A., Chaudhuri, S., 2014. *Sport, Literature, Society*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tearle, O., 2018. Five of the Best Poems about Sport. *Interesting Literature*. [online] Available at: <<https://interestingliterature.com/2018/10/five-of-the-best-poems-about-sports/>>. [Accessed 5 May 2025].

Umphlett, W. L., ed. 1991. *The Achievement of American Sport Literature: A Critical Appraisal*. Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Walt Whitman. *Wikiquote*. [online] Available at: <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Walt_Whitman>. [Accessed 17 December 2022].

Wierzyński, K., 2008 [1927]. *Laur olimpijski* [*Olympic Laurel*]. Warszawa: Heliodor. [In Polish].

William Carlos Williams. *Poetry Foundation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams>>. [Accessed 15 December 2022].

Womack, M., 2003. *Sport as Symbol: Images of the Athlete in Art, Literature and Song*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland.

Zuchora, K., 1968. *Jasnowłosej* [*To the Fair-Haired One*]. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie. [In Polish].

Zuchora, K., 2008. Champion of poetry. In: *Krzysztof Wierzyński, Laur olimpijski* [*Krzysztof Wierzyński. Olympic Laurek*]. Ed. K. Zuchora. Warszawa: Heliodor, pp. 7–17.

Zuchora, K., 2022. Vademecum olimpijskie [The Olympic Vademecum]. In: *Kultura fizyczna a komunitaryzm i liberalizm* [*Physical Culture and Communitarianism and Liberalism*]. Eds. Z. Dziubiński, W. Firek. Warszawa: AWF w Warszawie, SALOS RP, pp. 335–346. [In Polish].

Zuchora, K., ed. 2019. *Wieniec ze słów. 100 wierszy na stulecie Polskiego Komitetu Olimpijskiego (1919–2019)* [*A Wreath Made of Words. 100 Poems for the Centenary of the Polish Olympic Committee (1919–2019)*]. Kraków – Warszawa: Polski Komitet Olimpijski, Urząd Miasta Krakowa, FALL. Available at: <https://www.apesp-csi.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/100-lecie-PKOI-Tomik-i_www.pdf>. [Accessed 21 April 2025]. [In Polish].

Zuchora, K., 2023. *Zaproszenie do wiersza* [*An Invitation to The Poem*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Stowarzyszenia Absolwentów AWF w Warszawie. [In Polish].