

# The New York Times

# Book Review

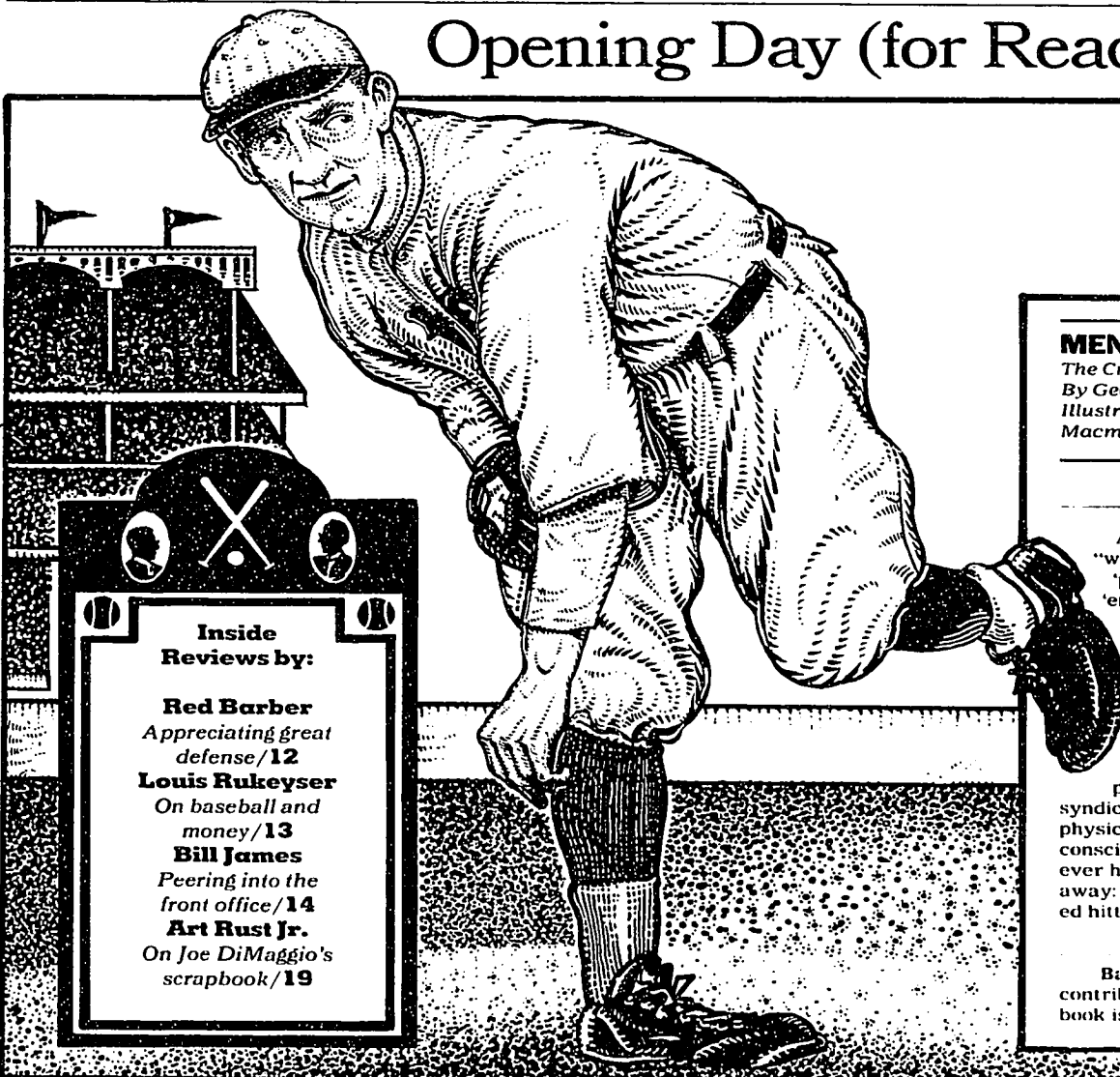
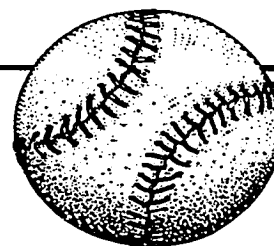
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Judith Crist reviews a life of Ben Hecht. Page 21.

## Opening Day (for Reading)



### MEN AT WORK

*The Craft of Baseball.*

By George F. Will.

Illustrated. 353 pp. New York:

Macmillan Publishing Company. \$19.95.

By Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

A. Bartlett Giamatti, George F. Will reminds us, "was fond of noting . . . that the root of the word 'paradise' is an ancient Persian word meaning 'enclosed park or green.' Ballparks exist, he said, because there is in humanity 'a vestigial memory of an enclosed green space as a place of freedom or play.'" That's a wonderful sentence. The late baseball commissioner's words helped me to understand why I love cloisters (perfect freedom within set boundaries) and why I love baseball (a perfect fusion of work and play), and how these two passions are related. It led me to believe that the syndicated political columnist would take a metaphysical approach to baseball — which he almost self-consciously does not. With very few exceptions, whenever he comes close to being fancy, Mr. Will skitters away: "I have tried to think through the DH [designated hitter] controversy in the light of political philosophy." *Continued on page 17*

Barbara Grizzuti Harrison is an essayist and a contributing editor of Life magazine. Her most recent book is "Italian Days."

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## Good Books About Being Sick

By Anatole Broyard

**I** WAS reading Shirley Hazzard's novel "The Transit of Venus." Though I had admired her other books, I'd always resisted this one. It struck me as too pure somehow, too heroic, larger or finer than life and therefore unreal. But now I read it with an almost indescribable pleasure. There were sentences that brought tears of gratification to my eyes and raised the hairs on the nape of my neck.

Anatole Broyard is a former editor of The Book Review. He teaches fiction writing in Cambridge, Mass.

I was in a Boston hospital, propped up in bed with an intravenous feeding tube in my arm and a catheter in my urethral canal after undergoing surgery for prostate cancer. It was a double room and my roommate, a kind of thug who growled when he spoke because he had both a broken jaw and a drug habit, was spraying the air for the fourth or fifth time that day with a cloying deodorizer. He had a television set and a radio going at the same time.

The catheter hurt and the diagnosis of my case was ambiguous. When I asked the oncologist the usual question — How much time have I got? — he hesitated before answering. "I would say," he said,

"that you have in the neighborhood of years."

I burrowed into the book. I was not escaping into it but identifying with it, as fervently as I have ever identified with any novel. The life Shirley Hazzard described was the kind I wanted for my neighborhood of years. Her book was the prescription that I needed and that no doctor would give me. I needed a dose of the sublime. From where I sat in my cranked-up bed, the sublime seemed to be all there was left.

I paused in my reading because I was out of shape and the beauty of the book had winded me. In

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