

Patrick Loera

Professor Warner

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### Romance in Sports and Literature

In sports, as in life, there is a beginning and an end to every game, but what happens in between will determine the outcome. Through this semester, I have read a few novels where sports have been a theme. In part, there have been moments of romance in the act of the sport or away from the sport, but all have had romance in one form or another. For example, in the novel *We Were Here* by Matt de la Peña there was a moment in the book where Miguel, Rondell, and Mong played basketball. The romance in that game was how Rondell, even not very intelligent off the court, was able to move harmoniously through defenders with the intelligence of an NBA player as if it were his second nature. In another novel, *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher, the protagonist, The Tao Jones, was able to move through the water effortlessly as if he were a fish. Even more so, the romance in this novel occurs when another main character, Chris Coughlin, who is ridiculed by the antagonist in the story, progresses as a swimmer and eventually defeats the antagonist in a swim meet. What this shows is how romance, apart from the traditional meaning, can be a part of sports in general and sports novels. For the centerpiece of my annotated bibliography, I decided to analyze a novel by Todd Walton titled *Ruby & Spear*. According to Walton who explained in an email to me, this novel was meant for adults and young adults alike. After reading this novel, I was inspired to go to the park and play basketball for hours on end, to come home and write about my time

playing basketball, and the inspiration carried over to my education as it has shown me that it is never too late for change, unless you are dead and the game of life is over. *Ruby & Spear* resonated with me in a way that I am positive will resonate with others in my position. That position is being at my limit in life, ready to give up, throw in the towel, but love, basketball, and writing help to bring me back to life and give me a second wind to make a change in life just as the protagonist, Victory Worsley demonstrates.

Fictional sports novels give young adults and adults a possible example of how the result of a game or situation may look like in an alternate universe, a fictional, paradoxical universe. No matter the sport, every athlete has one thing in common, a competitive edge. There are several sports novels that show both sides of the game, the wins and the losses. This gives every person reading a sports novel, whether they are an athlete or not, an opportunity to experience the joy of winning or the squall of emotion in losing. More importantly, the genre of athletics in fiction and nonfiction provides every reader the opportunity to become enthralled in the action of athletes and to understand the hardships some athletes may go through over a season, away from the action, and in life. This type of literature helps to connect readers to sports by living the experience through the characters.

There are also other aspects *Ruby & Spear* shows that not only connect to literature for young adults but for literature students as well. The particular focus of this my presentation is specific the romance of writing and its similarity to the romance of basketball. Throughout the book, Walton makes poetry and basketball a focal point to help develop the plot through character experience. The romance of poetry is extremely similar to the romance of basketball in a way only a basketball player and poet can know.

Walton happens to be both, and it is apparent in this novel. Nearly every word in poetry has a significant meaning, while all punctuation in a sentence has a particular purpose and affect, and both find a way to bring out emotion from a person. Similarly, every move in basketball is just as important as every stretch, every position has a meaning, and both find similar paths to emotion that a person in the can appreciate whether they win or lose. Writing in general is an intimate action that produces and bigger result of emotions just as a person has an intimate connection with the ball while dribbling or shooting it.

Ultimately, my presentation of *Ruby & Spear* by Todd Walton will demonstrate the romance of writing, the romance of basketball, and their connection in the realm of sports novels.

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### Annotated Bibliography

Jensen, Lisa. "Book Review." Rev. of *Ruby & Spear*. *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle* 17 Mar. 1996: 8. Print.

Lisa Jensen wrote a positive review of Todd Walton's fifth novel *Ruby & Spear* in 1996, which emphasized the ambitions of the protagonist in the novel early in the review. Jensen moves through key points of the plot, while directing attention to the references Walton makes to the San Francisco bay area, just before commenting on Walton's choice of character involvement in the plot. Although Jensen's review dismisses the tragedy in the novel, it establishes one of the focuses of this sports novel, basketball in the San Francisco bay area. This review establishes authority for Walton's love of basketball and his ability to continuously utilize it as a theme.

Jensen, Lisa. "SJSU Student Looking for Assistance." Message from the author. 17 Nov. 2013. E-mail.

After searching time and cyber-space to find reviews on Todd Walton's *Ruby & Spear*, I decided to email the author of one review in the San Francisco Chronicle, Lisa Jensen. She replied with comments about the novel and a PDF of the actual article in the San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle. Jensen stated that she "enjoyed the characters and the setting" of the *Ruby & Spear*. The email from

Jensen established credibility for Walton's emphasis using San Francisco and Oakland as the settings of the novel and the roles the characters played in it.

Michaud, Charles. "Book Reviews: Fiction." Rev. of *Ruby & Spear*. *Library Journal* 121.2 (1996): 100-01. Print.

At the center of a compilation of several book reviews on fictional novels written by just as many authors, Charles Michaud reviewed Todd Walton's *Ruby & Spear* with the protagonist, Vic Worsley, in mind. The first five words of the review read "San Francisco *Chronicle* basketball writer..." which immediately gives light to the subplot of the novel. Although short in words, Michaud's review provides insight on the protagonist's credibility as the lead character by addressing Worsley's understanding of basketball. This review helps to establish understanding for the importance of the position the protagonist has in the development of the plot and climax.

Ross, Michael E. "Books in Brief: Fiction." Rev. of *Ruby & Spear*. *The New York Times* 19 May 1996: *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 01 Jan. 1997. Web. 16 Nov. 2013.

This short winded review by Michael Ross centers around the theme of basketball, and it introduces the protagonist, Vic Worsley, as obsessive about it. Although Ross mentions two other characters in connection to the plot, he keeps the attention on the protagonist and his ultimate change. This review provides a neutral view on the emotional scenes and a negative view on the involvement of the characters in the plot by calling them "oddly superimpose", while retaining the emphasis on Walton's meaning of basketball and his love for it.

Simson, Maria. "Forecasts: Trade Paperbacks." Rev. of *Ruby & Spear*. *Publishers Weekly* 18 Mar. 1996: 63-64. Print.

In the March 18, 1996 edition of *Publishers Weekly*, Maria Simson wrote a review on Todd Walton's novel *Ruby & Spear* that gave insight to the emotional and dramatic side of the novel. Simson also provides her opinion on the type of readers that would be interested in reading *Ruby & Spear*, at the same time, she reflects on the importance feminine influence on the plot. The credibility of this source is strengthened by Simson's understanding of the Walton's prior novel history and their use of basketball as a theme.

Veale, Scott, and Ruth Coughlin. "Book Review." Rev. of *Ruby & Spear*. *The New York Times* 19 May 1996, 50432nd ed., Book Review sec.: 7. 24. Print.

Ruth Coughlin and Scott Veale wrote several reviews in the "Book Review" section of *The New York Times*, which included *Ruby & Spear* by Todd Walton. After establishing Vic Worsley as the protagonist of the novel, Veale and Coughlin summarize the plot and introduce the main characters before declaring *Ruby & Spear* as a New Age novel. This source gives credibility to the humor and touching situations of the novel.

Walton, Todd. "Published Works: *Ruby & Spear* (1996)." *Under the Table Books: Featuring the Words, Arts, and Music of Todd Walton*. Under the Table Books, 01 Mar. 2001. Web. 17 Nov. 2013.

Todd Walton provides a clear insight to his intentions for the establishment of the plot in his comments on *Ruby & Spear* in the "Published Works" section of his webpage. Walton mentions the length of time between *Ruby & Spear* and other

novels before revealing his explanation on why it was pulled from print and opinions of New York publishers. The comments in this source that Walton provides do little to accurately describe the plot; however, it does establish the basis of the readership, being women, basketball fans, and non-basketball fans alike. Instead, this source has more relevance as a brief on the outcome of the book.

Walton, Todd. "Ruby & Spear." Message from the author. 17 Nov. 2013. E-mail.

As hard as it is to locate sources to analyze, it is not as difficult to obtain a response from Todd Walton as I received a reply almost immediately after sending an email asking for additional information on *Ruby & Spear*. In the email, Walton explains how the limited amount of reviews is based on the publisher's decision to print it as a paperback rather than a hardback. After exchanging emails, Walton provided a more personal explanation as to why the book was taken out of print, how he intended the book to be for everybody—men, women, adults, and young adults—and how much of his own experiences he uses in his novel. Although he says that *Ruby & Spear* did not have much of a chance to reach young adult readers, his other books were well received by young adults.

Walton, Todd. *Ruby & Spear*. New York: Bantam, 1996. Print.

As a direct source the analysis of Todd Walton's novel, *Ruby & Spear*, there is no other more reliable source to understand the characters, plot, themes, tragedies, and utopic situations than to read the novel. *Ruby & Spear* is filled with numerous poems, stylistic writing, and emotional scenes that give credit to Walton's and his protagonist, Victor Worsely's love for not only basketball but writing as well.

Walton, Todd. "Todd Walton: Creative Paradox." Web log post. *UKIAH BLOG*. Mendocino Island Journal, 02 Jan. 2012. Web. 15 Nov. 2013.

This blog style article goes over Todd Walton's numerous novels, but not all, and his experiences and setback in the creative paradox of being an artist. Through his mentioning of his experiences as a creative writing instructor, his introduction to a literary agent, and his opinion on American publishing, Walton provides a general view on the publication and depublishment of *Ruby & Spear*. Walton explains how, according to the publishers, *Ruby & Spear* lacked violence, was full of "strong complex women and atypical men," and was based in Oakland were all reasons for Bantam to stop production of the novel. The reliability of this source for a description of the plot, themes, or characters is not reliable as it focuses more on Walton's ability to retain his creativeness through the difficult business of American publishing. However, this is an ideal source to understand the creativeness of Walton and how *Ruby & Spear* was, in a way, one of his most creative pieces specific to an athletic genre.