

Grella: baseball unique, football takes little ability

By Jim Williams

Baseball. Critical scholar George Grella was talking baseball to about 15 members of the UNL English faculty Friday.

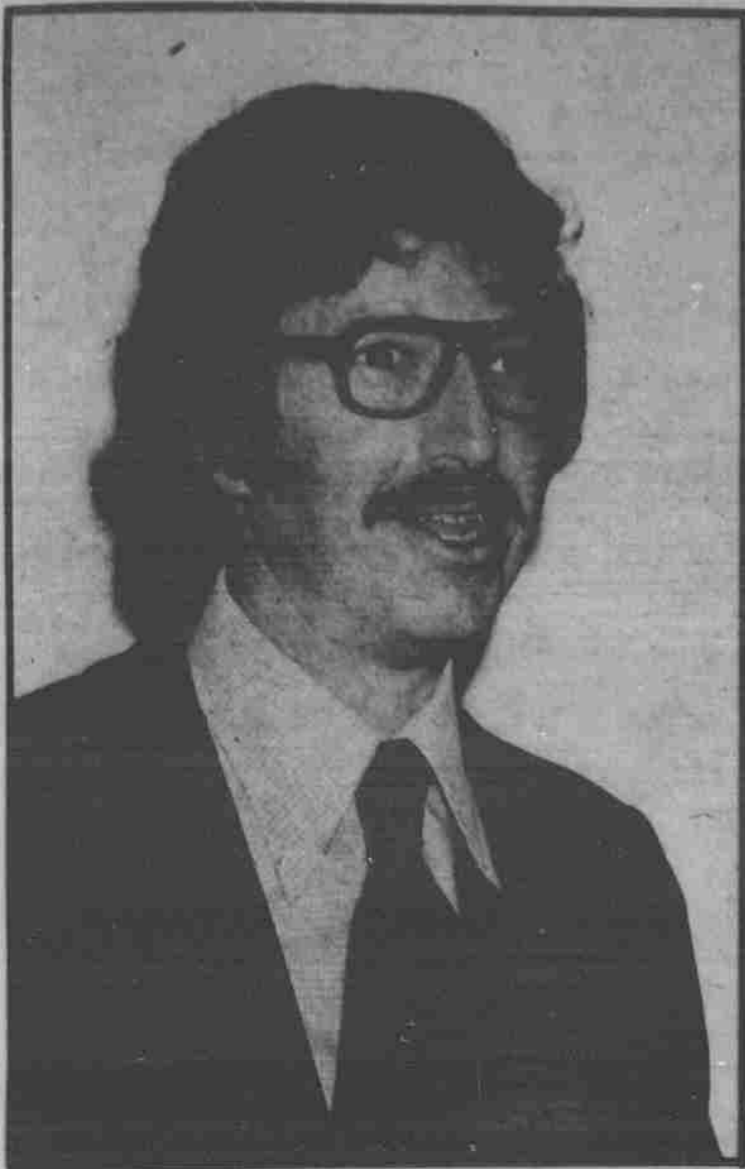


Photo by Kevin Higley

George Grella: "Football doesn't involve much athletic ability. I know if I say this in Nebraska it could be tough."

"I've done a lot of work with the aesthetics of games," the University of Rochester, Rochester, N.Y., professor said. "Baseball is a remarkable, almost unique sport. Baseball has only 2 lines. The game opens up into infinity. It's timeless, it has no clock."

"A game with a lot of lines, it seems to me, would come out of a culture that's in a state of totalitarianism. Football, of course, was most popular during the Vietnam war, when Nixon was the number-one fan."

"Football doesn't involve much athletic ability. I know if I say this in Nebraska it could be tough. But the average football player is only intended to be an obstacle. If you don't believe this, watch a pro game and watch them try to pick up a fumble."

Ford obstacle

"President Ford was the classic example of a center on a single-wing football team, which meant his job was to get rid of that ball and be an obstacle, which seems to define what his whole political career was like."

Political football may be a strange subject from an English professor probably best known for his book *Murder and the Mean Streets*, an analysis of Raymond Chandler's detective novels.

Grella is a scholar of popular culture and his submachine-gun mind emptied a full clip of ideas into the informal pre-lunch meeting.

"My interests are mostly aesthetic and literary, and if I'm doing detective fiction or baseball in American culture or whatever, it has to be the same sort of study as if I were teaching Milton or Henry James. I'm interested in the way things are alike, rather than the way they're different."

Grella read a paper on Edgar Allen Poe's detective stories, *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*, giving evidence that in both stories the actual criminal was the dective hero and that the whole

thing was one of Poe's literary hoaxes.

Psychology

He showed a video tape of baseball psychology he made for a New York public television station, with scenes such as the brooding, introspective outfielder reading *Ulysses* while being pelted by fly balls.

Grella analyzed present trends in literature. "Because we're approaching the year 2000, I think we're starting to repeat what people were thinking about in the 1900's. In those days people stopped building permanent structures because they thought the world was going to end. What we do is all write books about it."

"I don't like pimping for despair," Grella said. His own writings are about subjects such as murder mysteries or sports, and he said this has made it harder to get other scholars to take him seriously.

"I think I've had my problems with that, quite frankly," Grella said. "I think there are still people in my department who think I probably do these things because I'm dumb."

Sheldon to show 'King Lear,' 'Xala'

King Lear, a 1970 version of Shakespeare's play directed by Grigori Kozintsev, will be presented this week at the Sheldon Film Theatre. Screenings will be Wednesday through Saturday at 7 and 9:30 p.m. with Friday and Saturday matinees at 3 p.m. Admission is \$2.

Xala, a 1974 release from Senegal is this week's Foreign Film. Admission is by series ticket only. Screenings are tonight and Tuesday at 7 and 9 p.m.

Director Werner Herzog's 1968 film *Even Dwarves Started Small* will be shown for the film studies classes this week. Screenings will be 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. tomorrow and Wednesday. There is no admission charge.

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