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Baseball and American culture: The mythology, the metaphor and the language

Elizabeth Deloris Woodworth

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BASEBALL AND AMERICAN CULTURE:  
THE MYTHOLOGY, THE METAPHOR AND THE LANGUAGE  

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino  

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition  

by  
Elizabeth Deloris Woodworth  
September 1993
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Approved by:
Edward M. White, Chair, English
E. Philip Page
Harry Hellenbrand
ABSTRACT

Baseball became an important part of American culture as early as the 1830s. It is a tradition, our game. It is also a mythology because the game’s close connection with American culture lies in the sphere of the mythological, consisting of many myths such as the hero’s journey, the cowboy myth and pastoral myths. The game, as mythology, is a metaphor for the hero’s journey, for all journeys. For the most part, the mythology operates on the unconscious level, as in the Jungian archetype. On the other hand, the ideology is the conscious appeal of the game. Promoted by baseball writers during the early part of this century, the ideology helped to popularize the game by declaring it "the" all-American sport, a national tradition.

Through the conscious influence of the ideology and the unconscious influence of the mythology, the language of the game permeated mainstream American speech. Just as the metaphor is the vital part of a mythology and an ideology, metaphor is an integral part any language, including the language of baseball. Baseball language is also learned through use of metaphor, like any other language. In fact, an in-depth look at baseball’s discourse community, those who use baseball language, illustrates this point exactly.

By way of a conscious ideology, the unconscious appeal of the mythology in the game, and the metaphors intrinsic to the game and its language, baseball found a secure place in American cultural history.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate my effort here to my mother who died at the end of baseball season, October 1992. She loved baseball from the first time she saw the game. Some of that must have rubbed off on me. Thanks, Mom.

I haven't always been the baseball fan I am now, but once I saw the mythology in my life, in the game of baseball, I couldn't let it go. Perhaps because the love of the game, the love of mythology and language, was always inside of me, I had only to embark upon a journey inward to discover what really mattered to me.

There are three people I must thank for my baseball awakening, although the chances of any of them seeing the results of this awakening are as good as batting a thousand. Thank you: Jim Bouton, Gary Carter and John F.M. Cox.

After I was bitten by the baseball-is-a-metaphor-for-life-and-therefore-must-be-a-mythology bug, I could have just left it at that. But Dr. Phil Page just had to say what fun it would be to do a thesis on baseball. Of course, we both agreed it couldn't be done because no one would take it seriously, even if we did. Thank you, Phil, for making me think about it and keep thinking about it.

When I mentioned this baseball idea to Dr. Edward White, he didn't wince at all, but gave me source after source, reference upon reference. He could see what I wanted to do and was kind enough to let me try. An annotated bibliography for his research class got me started.
in the right direction. Thank you, Dr. White, for believing in me, for taking me seriously. And especially, thank you, for always encouraging me to continue my education.

As I stumbled along in this strange new world of baseball games, history, records, players, literature and language, my friend, Kellie Rayburn, helped me formulate some of my key ideas, and encouraged me to reach beyond what I thought I could do. She served as my example of how to really think about what I was doing and then do it. Thank you, Kellie, you have done far more than you realize to assist me in my journey.

In the fall of 1991, when my life seemed ready to explode at any moment, Dr. Wendy Smith allowed me to pursue my sociolinguistic leanings in a decidedly non-sociolinguistic course, and the result was my exploration of the language and community of baseball. Baseballspeak was born to me, and it has become one of the best things I have ever done, a kind of baseball gift to myself. Thank you, Wendy, for giving me the chance to do what I had to do instead of what I was supposed to do.

When I couldn’t stand to think or write about baseball anymore, when I couldn’t do anything anymore, Donna J. Boyd forced me to go to the beach. How quiet all the turbulence of my life seemed next to the music of the waves. Thank you, Donna.

Toward what I thought was the end of my writing, Dr. Harry Hellenbrand, graciously stepped in to give wonderful
and concise advice on how to make the whole thing "a better rap." Thank you, Harry, for seeing what I couldn’t see and taking the time to share your vision with me.

And to Julie Eastman, for making my life so easy at work—I thank you one thousand times. Your support made everything possible. If I hadn’t believed that you believed in me, I wouldn’t be half as strong as you think I am. And I’m just as proud of you. Thank you for helping me. Now get out.

And a special thank you to Rory Scott Rogers, who died in September 1991. He always told me to be great because he thought I was. Wherever you are, Rory, I know there are stars, and I know you fly among them at night.

Thank you to my special friends, Randy Mason, Dean Tromburg and Gary Brennan for always believing in me, for taking care of me and always having the best of intentions. Thank you for a wonderful part of my life. I’ll never forget the love you gave me and still give.

These next acknowledgements will always seem somewhat inadequate to me. Perhaps one can never be grateful enough for some people.

Thank you, Carol, for always saying I was brilliant, even when you didn’t know for sure. And thank you for being witty with me for all these years. Thank you for always letting me make you laugh and for thinking that I’m a great cook, too. And more than anything else, thank you for always listening to me, always, always, always.
Thank you, Brian, for picking me, for making me laugh, for giving me Elvis and The Colonel, for sharing your home and your life with me. Thank you for playing catch with me, for trying to teach me how to throw a curve, for being so kind and gentle; and thank you for knowing that I could do this and then some. Your belief in me is my greatest asset. You are my coach, the best coach, and you always will be. And thank you for thinking I am your gift.

Thank you, Dad. You have given me life and the will to do it all. I have learned from you some of the really important things in life, but the most important is to never, never take my eye off the ball. Thank you for everything.
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AN INTRODUCTION TO

BASEBALL AS AMERICAN TRADITION AND BEYOND

Baseball certainly is one of our national games, evolving to its present forms on these shores, deeply a part of the heritage of our people.

Tristram Potter Coffin in The Old Ball Game: Baseball in Folklore and Fiction

More than just one of our national games, baseball may be the definitive American sporting tradition. Certainly baseball’s place in American history seems secure. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the game has been referred to as our national pastime (Seymour 35). And besides being an early and long lasting American tradition, baseball serves as a societal mirror, a metaphor for life in the United States. As metaphor, baseball reflects the growth and change, both economic and social, that America has experienced since the game’s inception.

Even today, when many sports have apparently eclipsed baseball’s reign as the American pastime, the game still holds a nostalgic power to evoke feelings of Americanism. This connection between what is quintessentially American and baseball began early in baseball’s history.

In the 1840s, baseball became the game we might recognize today. Alexander Joy Cartwright shaped and molded the game along with other young men and formed the New York Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. From the charter of this club, most of the basic baseball rules spring. The origins of the
game, though, can be traced back to rounders or town ball, games inherited from England.

Despite cries from baseball clubs around the country for baseball to be declared "our" national game, it wasn't until 1907 that a group of baseball luminaries and businessmen formed the Mills Commission to decide the "official" origins of baseball and, in effect, codify its ideology (Honig 3). The popular fiction touted by the commission, that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown, N.Y. in the late 1830s, was further bolstered by the journalists of the early twentieth century who saw to it that baseball stories appeared everywhere in print. Perhaps what drew fans to the ballpark, and influenced even non-fans, was the ideology of the game. Baseball was America's game: purifying, good for the lungs, pastoral despite its largely urban beginnings, evocative of the rugged individuals of the frontier. Football, on the other hand, was a brutal, warlike sport through which the audience could be vicariously violent—a Manifest Destiny on the grid iron. The persistence of baseball as the national pastime perhaps points to the image of ourselves we wished to hold. In "Football Red and Baseball Green," Murray Ross says football mirrored the technological, "machine as hero," mentality of modern times as opposed to the "unfettered rural vision of ourselves that baseball so beautifully mirrored" (339).

All sports have their own ideology, their own social agenda. What they lack are the physical elements that connect
baseball with classic mythology, like the hero's journey. Baseball is a circular game that begins and ends at home. Baseball is timeless and allows the audience the leisure to focus on the individual. Baseball is an amalgam of action and inaction. Other American sports are linear by nature, very action-oriented, and the audience is rarely allowed to focus on the individual player for long periods. The key connection linking the ideology and mythology of baseball is the metaphor. Baseball reduces the complex rhythms of American life to a pastoral image, an idyll. In turn, the actors and actions in this idyll recall the protagonists and quest of classic mythology. And because of the long history of baseball and its inherent myths, rituals and archetypes, these forces behind the game, its social and mythological appeal, the language of the game, much more so than that of other sports, continually influenced American speech until many phrases and words are now part of the mainstream. The language, too, is connected to the ideology and mythology by the metaphor. These issues of myth and metaphor as well as language and metaphor will be the focus of this thesis.

A brief history of baseball will help illuminate the cultural importance of the game and will lead directly into the importance of the mythology of and in the game. As well, this base of historical/cultural significance and mythological analysis will illustrate some of the reasons behind the overwhelming influence of baseball language on mainstream American speech.
This introduction will consist of three parts. The beginning will be a brief history of the game of baseball. The second section will impart background information for the upcoming mythological analyses in Chapters I and II. The third part will briefly introduce the topics of Chapter III, an exploration of the influence of baseball language on American speech and an analysis of the American baseball discourse community.

A Brief History of Baseball

The beginning of baseball dates back to 1762 when the first how-to books were imported from England detailing a ball and base game. Throughout the nineteenth century, baseball developed from rounders and cricket and grew from an amateur participatory sport to a spectator sport played by professionals and into the uniquely American game it is now (Seymour vii). By the beginning of the 1900s, baseball was fairly entrenched as a social institution as well as the reigning spectator sport. In the 1920s, football, basketball, boxing and horse racing began to move onto the sporting scene, but all these other sports lacked the historical devotion of the American citizenry and the powerful pull of tradition (Reiss 4). They also lacked the backing of the journalists and, therefore, received little attention compared to baseball.

At the beginning of this century, the writers of baseball journalism and literature began to influence the public's
opinion regarding the game. The game was already popular on all levels of society, received good press coverage, was well attended by prominent citizens and had its share of homegrown heroes. Partly to perpetuate their positions, but partly because they believed in a baseball ideology (and the owners helped convince them), writers further developed and promoted the baseball ideology advanced by the Mills Commission’s findings (Reiss 5). The progressive media perceived a dire need for a more comprehensive ideology as society underwent tremendous change and experienced strain: immigration, industrialization, bureaucratization, urbanization and a general decline in American values like individualism and self-reliance. In his essay, "Ideology as a Cultural System," Clifford Geertz says:

...ideology is a response to strain...including cultural as well as social and psychological strain. It is a loss or orientation that most directly gives rise to ideological activity, an inability, for lack of usable models, to comprehend the universe...in which one finds oneself located. (219)

The journalists also saw a need to promote new heroes with broader appeal who were more accessible to youth. After the plethora of heroes from the previous century, heroes produced from the rigors of a nationwide social, geographical and emotional expansion, the hero market looked bleak in the early part of the twentieth century. Baseball, however, had at the ready, heroes for the making.

David Honig, in Baseball America, says of the baseball ideology and hero making, "Bingo: instant mythology" (3). But
he means a mythology which is a lie, a fiction, meant to
soothe, rather than the mythology of a Joseph Campbell, a
mythology filled with metaphor meant to educate and fulfill.
But Honig's feeling that, "bingo," everything seemed to happen
at once does aptly describe the birth of the baseball
ideology. Within what seemed like just a few years, but was
really decades, baseball became the undisputed king of sports
in an ever-changing American society. The ideology on the
surface, and the mythology below the surface of the game,
helped baseball to keep its dominant place for years. The
main themes behind the ideology advanced by the media were
these two key functions of baseball: to teach children
traditional American values and to assimilate immigrants into
the dominant white, Anglo-Saxon culture through participation
in baseball (Reiss 6). In "God's Country and Mine," Jacques
Barzun writes, "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of
America had better learn baseball" (Plaut 5). More so than
other sports or social entities, baseball was the great social
equalizer.

As well, journalists promoted baseball as a "pure" sport,
a sport with rural connotations for a predominantly urban
audience. All players were heroes whose clean living
exemplified the American way. Even though the not so clean
truth was frequently known inside as well as outside the game,
many spectators believed what they read in the papers, or,
rather, they believed in the baseball ideology. After the
1919 Black Sox Scandal, which exposed the corruption within
baseball, it took some time for baseball to recover its spotless reputation. But the determination of then commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, and the press minimized damage, and baseball's popularity regained momentum and its reign remained virtually intact until the 1960s.

By the 1960s, baseball had already begun to change. Teams, which had primarily been located in the East, had migrated all over the country, such as the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants who had both moved West to California at the end of the 1950s. And for the first time expansion clubs fielded teams, such as the New York Mets in 1962. While the surface of baseball had changed, the geography, the game itself remained essentially the same traditional American pastime. But still, other sports, such as football and basketball, began to gain in popularity. More and more sporting events were covered on television, and baseball found healthy rivals for the first time in its history (Guttmann 67).

Even now, despite competition from endless sources, baseball still remains popular. More people attend baseball games each year than vote (Rayburn, September 1991). While it has lost some of its original innocence and luster, it is still the oldest traditional American game, even though it is no longer the only American game.
The tradition of baseball is the power behind the appeal of the game. Traditions are important in every culture, especially traditions of playing. Johan Huizinga, author of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, sees play as "older than culture" (1). As American society began to develop distinguishable features, so baseball became more and more distinctly American and a reflection of the culture in which it grew. Huizinga says play of any kind comes from the imagination, the realm of myth and ritual. He claims that the "great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin...in the primaeval soil of play" (Huizinga 5). Tradition and ritual within the dynamic culture of the American nation are almost one. America's need to play, perhaps to distinguish that play from the play of other countries, may have begotten the tradition of baseball, but the ritual continues the tradition. The power behind the game comes when the ritual becomes the myth. When discussing tradition and ritual with Bill Moyers in *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell says, "A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth" (82).

When the traditions and rituals of baseball become myth, the game takes on a metaphorical aura. A myth is a narrative metaphor, a comparison between two apparently dissimilar
things creating an image which evokes something beyond the two things compared. The metaphoric properties of myth are the key to a mythology's wide appeal. Understanding the metaphor in myth is an important part of understanding the culture that gave birth to the myth. In "Persuasions and Performances: Of the Beast in Every Body... And the Metaphors of Everyman," James W. Fernandez claims metaphor is the fundamental element to understanding a culture:

However men may analyze their experiences within any domain, they inevitably know and understand them best by referring them to other domains for elucidation. It is in that metaphoric cross-referencing of domains, perhaps, that culture is integrated providing us with the sensation of wholeness. And perhaps the best index of cultural integration...is the degree to which men can feel the aptness of each other's metaphors. (58)

Traditionally, myths were metaphoric stories of gods which explained both natural phenomena and the structure of society. Modern myths can still explain both the natural and the social world through metaphorical interpretation. In baseball, the myths inherent in the game make up an entire mythology of baseball certainly worthy of intensive study. Paul Reiss in Touching Base, says, "the study of professional baseball's myths, realities, symbols and rituals can provide a useful approach to better understanding American mores, values and beliefs" (4).

But the myths are not the most apparent factor in the game; in fact, they exist on a mostly unconscious level. On the surface, the game of baseball is just a game. And yet it isn't just a game. Baseball in America is much like the
cockfights in Bali described by Clifford Geertz in "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Geertz states that the reason Balinese go to cockfights is not so much to see the action but to see how men react to the cockfights. He quotes Northrop Frye to clarify his point:

'You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland--you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul. When you meet such a character as Micawber in Dickens, you don't feel that there must have been a man Dickens knew who was exactly like this: you feel that there's a bit of Micawber in almost everybody you know, including yourself. Our impressions of human life are picked up one by one, and remain for most of us loose and disorganized. But we constantly find things in literature that suddenly co-ordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions, and this is what Aristotle means by the typical or universal event.' (28)

Geertz goes on to explain that this is precisely the sort of bringing together of pieces of everyone's "experiences of everyday life to focus that the cockfight" which, separated from everyday life, is labeled as "'only a game'" (28). But this same phenomena that separates the cockfight from life also accords the fight a status that is "'more than a game,' [and] accomplishes, and so creates what, better than typical or universal, could be called a paradigmatic human event--that is, one that tells us less what happens than the kind of thing that would happen..." (Geertz 28). This same universal event-making process is at work in baseball. Through the constant replaying of the game of baseball, like the cockfight, an audience member at a baseball game, like the Balinese spectator, "forms and discovers his temperament and his
society's temper at the same time" (Geertz 28). At the root of mythology is this kind of universal event, elements of play which cross borders, sexes and religions to make comment on the human condition.

The mythology, the metaphor, the comparison of the game with something else, then brings about a better understanding of baseball below the surface, indeed, of the American culture below the surface. And within the mythology, archetypes work to clarify the metaphor, the meaning. C.G. Jung's definition of archetype, a repeated image or symbol within a myth, resident in our collective psyche, helps to explain how the repetition of images and symbols works its unconscious magic on the audience to bring about a conscious understanding just as a metaphor illuminates one image in light of another. Just as tradition and ritual are closely related, the archetype and myth are closely aligned, and the archetype may come before or after the myth, but is always a part of it. The archetypes in baseball include images of the pastoral and symbols such as the bat as a magic sword or phallus. These images and symbols help to define the myth, illuminate the metaphor, and explain the need for tradition and ritual. In his book, Myths to Live By, Joseph Campbell says it is a universal power that myth yields, and through metaphorical interpretation, this power is most potent. He refers to Jung to further explain our need for tradition and ritual and our need for an understanding of myth. Campbell says of myth:
They are telling us in picture language of powers of the psyche to be recognized and integrated in our lives, powers that have been common to the human spirit forever, and which represent that wisdom of the species by which man has weathered the millenniums...the society that cherishes and keeps its myths alive will be nourished from the soundest, richest strata of the human spirit. (12)

Myth is common to all mankind, even though the mythologies may differ. Some mythologies are religiously-oriented, like the Judeo-Christian religions, Islam and Buddhism. Some mythologies are social, some are economic, and some are even sports-oriented, like baseball. But what all mythologies share, including the one of baseball, is a fundamental erudition of what it is to be human.

Baseball'speak, The American Baseball Discourse Community, Mythology, Ideology and Metaphor

Chapter III

What connects mythology with language is the metaphor. Metaphor is the key element in myth, a comparison of dissimilar things which produces a similarity, and it is the key element in learning language. In fact, our basic sense of self is wrapped up in our knowledge of language. We all have a name for ourselves, and it is by this name that we identify ourselves and are able to relate to others. In Metaphors and Symbols: Forays into Language, Roland Bartel says, "Our development as human beings began when one of our remote ancestors discovered the advantage of using symbols of some kind that eventually developed into language" (75). This
initial language is inextricably intertwined with mythologies. Myths from all over the world are elaborate metaphors passed down from one generation to the next through language. In some of the myths, "gods first create themselves by giving themselves names, and they then use special words to create the world" (Bartel 76). Bartel also claims this relationship between metaphor and myth, language and humanity, could be proven. He goes on to say:

Researchers are finding evidence that a growing vocabulary has a chemical effect on the brain, that it triggers new circuits, increases the versatility of the brain.... There is even some evidence that using metaphors may have biological effects igniting...‘a new arc of perceptive energy.’ (Bartel 81)

The language of the baseball community is like the language of any culture: it is just condensed to include a smaller group, a subset of the larger set of speakers and writers of American English. Baseball language began just as any language, to provide for self-expression and for communication; players needed language to describe their actions and to communicate for the smooth conduct of the game. Through invention of new words, through the making of metaphors, a new way to communicate evolved in baseball. Through metaphor, baseball language developed. And the connection then between the mythology of baseball and that of its language is the metaphor.

Baseball speak is what I call the language used by members of the American baseball discourse community, including both the written and spoken communities. Baseball speak as the name
for baseball language does make its own sense, just as the
language used by legal professionals is often called legalese.
Language specific to a discourse community has to do with
exclusive vocabulary, elite usage and specific means of
communication. But there's more to understanding a community
of speakers and listeners, writers and their audiences, than
just knowing how to pronounce some of the words used in their
communicative acts. Therefore, Chapter III reflects the
complexity of this issue.

Metaphor plays a crucial part in the exchange of
knowledge, through language, within the baseball community and
between the baseball community and other communities. By
creating their own metaphors to enhance understanding and the
transference of knowledge, members of the baseball community
perpetuate their discourse community, preserve their group
mythology and exert an undeniable influence on American
English as they interact with other communities.

The American baseball discourse community consists of two
sub-communities. One is the speech community in which members
communicate through oral means. The other is the written
community in which members communicate through writing and
reading. Each sub-community interacts with the other so that
written and spoken language is often similar, the main
difference being that writing exists in time and space, whereas speaking exists in time only. Accompanying tables in
Chapter III show examples of baseballspeak within the
community of baseball and help to illustrate the levels of the
American baseball discourse community and how its members influence and interact with other speech and written communities.

The Euphoric Metaphoric Power of Baseball

When looking at the game of baseball, then, we see many facets which rely on metaphor for power. The ideology of the game is powered by social metaphors, and the game itself is a metaphor for life in the United States, and is as dynamic as that life itself. The mythology of the game is dependent upon metaphor, as all mythologies are. As well, the language of baseball began with metaphor, is filled with metaphor and is perpetuated by metaphor. With so much of baseball's story dependent on the metaphor--mythology, learning, language--the conclusion to that story must be that man at play is a metaphoric creature. Huizinga concurs with this conclusion:

The great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start. Take language, for instance--that first and supreme instrument which man shapes in order to communicate, to teach, to command. Language allows him to distinguish, to establish, to state things; in short, to name them and by naming them to raise them into the domain of the spirit. In the making of speech and language the spirit is continually "sparking" between matter and mind, as it were, playing with this wondrous nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words. Thus in giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature. (4)

Understanding the role of metaphor in our games may lead to an understanding of the importance of metaphor in our lives.
Chapter I

The Hero’s Journey and Baseball

The hero of a quest first of all goes ‘away’: that is, there must be some direction for his movement. Home...is where one starts from. If the quest is successful, he normally returns home, like a baseball player....

Northrop Frye in "The Journey as Metaphor" from Myth and Metaphor

The goal of the hero is to return home according to Northrop Frye. It is also the goal of every baseball player to return home, either with a run scored during the course of a game, or a pennant, or championship won at the end of the season. Because baseball is predominantly an American sport, the game, structured much like a classic hero’s journey, is an elaborate metaphor for an American hero’s journey. Baseball is circular, like a hero’s journey: it contains a series of challenges, it begins and ends with the individual, and it begins and ends at home, and baseball is very much an American tradition. Baseball as a metaphor connects the game with both the hero’s journey myth and other myths to form a mythology that tells much more than the story or structure of baseball; it also tells the story of the American Dream—a collective and individual journey for independence, freedom, the pursuit of equality and happiness. The myths that make up the mythology are filled with universal archetypes (repeated images), images and symbols which embody this American ideal, this journey, really any journey. The mythology is then
reinforced by ritual, the observance of rites, and tradition, long established customs.

While the story of the journey for the American Dream is told somewhat covertly through the mythology as metaphor, the ideology of baseball, still relying on metaphor, is much more accessible. The difference between the mythology and the ideology is that the mythology deals in the realm of the unconscious; it is only through interpretation of the myths and archetypes, images and symbols that the message of the mythology can be made clear. The ideology, on the other hand, is a more overt compilation of American ideals—_independence, determination, freedom_—purposely applied to baseball for promotion to the masses. Both, the mythology and the ideology have at the core, though, similar messages: Baseball is a hero’s journey; Baseball is America. Metaphor, therefore, is the key player in both the ideology and the mythology.

The Power of Myth in Baseball

Northrop Frye acknowledges the connection between baseball and the hero’s journey, but doesn’t take it far enough. The same is true of Joseph Campbell’s theory of the pattern of a universal hero’s journey in mythology. Campbell may not have studied baseball, but his definition of myth and metaphor, like Frye’s, can lead to a greater understanding of baseball and its place in American culture. Frye and Campbell both believe that the quest myth, or hero’s journey, is at the root of all world mythologies and is the central concern of
humanity. Both see the individual's journey in the hero's journey, and it is this link between these two kinds of journeys that connects mythology with life; the hero is in each of us and we are in the hero. This connection between mythology and life is manifest in the relationship between baseball and its audience. As we watch the game unfold on the field and we become one with the players, we can share in the journey of the team and the individual players. The underlying, unconscious power of the hero's quest in baseball allows the audience to identify with the drama of the game even if the members of the audience don't realize the many other myths in the mythology of baseball.

Myth teaches despite awareness, not necessarily because of it, although awareness, peace or enlightenment should be the end result. Joseph Campbell says in The Power of Myth, "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life.... Myth helps you to put your mind in touch with the experience of being alive. It tells you what the experience is" (5). When the baseball audience recognizes the heroic efforts of a player or players, the members of the audience can then begin to perceive the potential of a human life. They see themselves in the same role as the players, and, even if they fail to consciously connect the players to the quest myth, they still experience being alive by vicariously participating in the ball game through their heroes, the players of the game.
In the seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell compares myths from around the world to show their similar structures. Specifically, he demonstrates the prevalence of the hero's journey in world mythologies. All heroes seem to follow a similar pattern—separation, initiation and return—and, even though the details of their journeys may vary greatly, Campbell sees the pattern as a link between cultures, ideas, mythologies and peoples (*Hero* 30). He also establishes the idea of the myth as a metaphor which can illuminate that which is beyond our physical reality. Through metaphor the message of the myth becomes apparent. In baseball, the hero's journey can be recognized through the elements of the game, but the message of the hero's journey goes beyond the physical reality of the game and the audience. The journey in baseball becomes a kind of unconscious mythology.

Understanding the hero's journey in baseball, though, must go deeper than just the three key elements mentioned of separation, initiation and return. These elements are found in most mythologies, but the variations make the individual myths unique because they represent the cultures which give them birth. Baseball has many mythical layers, just like any mythology in any culture might, and a thorough look at as many of the possible twists within a hero's journey is wise when approaching a subject as susceptible to multiple interpretations as mythology. David Adams Leeming in his
anthology, The World of Myth, states that what arises from different versions of the hero’s journey "must be seen as a universal metaphor for the human search for self-knowledge" (217). There are many variations to the hero’s journey, but no matter which name one chooses to assign it--hero’s quest, archetypal heroics, hero’s journey, quest myth--the meaning, the essence, remains the same throughout diverse world mythologies.

Outlined below are some of the factors, the details, that may make up a typical hero’s journey:

1. The hero is conceived and born under unusual circumstances, usually during a dark period, the winter solstice; metaphorically, this symbolizes a psychological reality and need. Heroes are born when they are needed.

2. The journey may contain elements of searching for or being challenged by the father. This is symbolic of the search for the Supreme Being or the Father, this Being or Father is responsible for a kind of conception that transcends biology. The father figure may also challenge the hero and place obstacles in his path indicative of a rite of passage.

3. A mother or feminine element is usually present in a journey. The Mother of us all is symbolized by the virgin who gives birth to the hero or the goddess figure who marries the hero or the old crone who assists the hero in his journey. (It is important that each journey incorporate both the female and male energies, the yin--passive, negative, lunar and the yang--active, positive, solar, or in Jungian terms, the anima--feminine component of the unconscious man and the animus--the masculine component of the unconscious woman. We are incomplete without both elements and so are the heroes of any myth.)

4. There is usually some element of danger to the journey which may or may not be avoided or overcome by the hero. As Leeming suggests, "Perhaps this is why heroes so often must separate themselves from their human families" (219) during their quest.

5. The journey itself, the quest, is the chief component of the hero myth. It is usually filled with trials and
victories. The danger is great for the hero during his journey. Metaphorically, this is the part of the journey when the hero confronts and perhaps overcomes his inner monsters as well as threats from without.

6. The evil that lurks along the journey’s path in wait for the hero is often counterbalanced by the assistance of a powerful shaman. These shamans take many forms: guardian angels, fairy godmothers, the wise old man or the old crone who offers a magic talisman to the hero for good luck.

7. Many hero’s journeys include a direct confrontation with Death. This may be embodied by a descent into a netherworld where, as Leeming says, "the hero takes us to the very depths of the unconscious world where individual destiny and human destiny lie" (220). The hero confronts and robs Death of power, and then the hero is reborn into a new existence where he may bring great boons back home. This rebirth also relies upon the birth motif to link the feminine energy to the hero again, so that he may achieve wholeness.

8. And finally the hero achieves his goals, completes his journey and returns home again with a boon. The boon, metaphorically, isn’t a material gain, but is the way to self-knowledge often represented by a captured prize like Jason’s golden fleece. Frequently heroes are deified because the boon they share with those back home is perceived by many to be the greatest gift possible or the way to everlasting salvation. (Leeming 217-21)

The above examples of the potential elements of a hero’s journey demonstrate not only the diversity of the myth but also the potential for multiple metaphorical manifestations. The multiple possibilities within the classic hero’s journey are not necessarily literally those of the hero’s journey of baseball, but a metaphorical interpretation of the former brings understanding to the latter and makes it meaningful.

Critic Northrop Frye has long recognized the prevalence and importance of myth, particularly the hero myth or quest myth. In "The Archetypes of Literature," Frye urges literary critics to adopt and adapt the inquiring methods of the...
sciences to gain a field-wide coherence. In this suggestion lies the idea that to accomplish this task a hypothesis about all of literature must be formed and the root of this hypothesis must be the repetition of various archetypes in all kinds of literature from all over the world. The central myth is, of course, the hero myth or the quest. But Frye’s ideas shouldn’t be restricted to literature. The repetition of archetypes occurs in all facets of life, even baseball.

Frye says "myth is the archetype" ("Archetypes" 429), meaning a myth is a compilation of a set of repeated images—the archetypes—like a mythology is a compilation of a set of myths. And if, as Frye also states, ritual gives birth to myth, ritual must also give birth to archetypes. If myth exists in baseball, then archetypes exist in baseball. And because the game is a part of the cycle of human lives, it makes sense that common human archetypes can be found in the game. Frye also cites the rhythms of the natural cycle—the sun and moon rising and setting, the seasons coming and going, the human life cycle—as the compelling reasons for the evolution of ritual to narrative to myth and finally to archetype and back to myth. Baseball, too, exists in a seasonal cycle; it is born in the spring and dies in the winter, only to be reborn again the next spring. The seasons of baseball form a circular relationship and follow a cyclical pattern reminiscent of the quest myth, the hero’s journey. The cycle within baseball is also a circular pattern: home to first to second to third to home. The circularity, the
seasons, the cyclical nature of the game evoke archetypal images in baseball that can be found in literature and myth as well.

Frye sees in literature the same recurrence of myth, archetype, and the pattern of a hero’s journey that Campbell sees in the mythologies of the world. This connection between the literary vision of Frye and the cosmic vision of Campbell when applied to cultural analysis can illuminate the tie between what man believes and what he believes is important enough to do, think about or write about. Because these same patterns occur in baseball, analyzing the game through mythology, the hero’s journey, can lead to an understanding of the appeal of the game beyond the game, beyond the physical reality of baseball, and such an analysis can lay the foundation for further study of connected issues such as the rhetoric of baseball and mythology.

Metaphor and Ideology

Even though the ideology of baseball isn’t technically part of mythology, it is a kind of social guide to understanding the myths and the importance of metaphor in baseball. In "Ideology as a Cultural System," a chapter in his book, *Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz, calls ideology "an applicable symbolic model under which to subsume the ‘unfamiliar something’ and so render it familiar" (215). What Geertz is saying in simple terms is that an ideology functions as a social metaphor meant to bring understanding to
members of a society, a culture. The tools he sees as necessary to this metaphoric process are what he calls "symbolic templates." These are "extrinsic sources of information in terms of which human life can be patterned.... Culture patterns [that] provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social and psychological processes..." (Geertz, Interpretation 216). He further states the importance of these templates:

The reason such symbolic templates are necessary is that...human behavior is inherently extremely plastic. Not strictly but only very broadly controlled by genetic programs or models--intrinsic sources of information--such behavior must, if it is to have any effective form at all, be controlled to a significant extent by extrinsic ones. (Geertz, Interpretation 217)

The ideology of baseball is a symbolic template by which to control, or influence and measure American behavior and culture. As soon as baseball became popular, post-Civil War fans, players and journalists all hurried to impose an ideology, a symbolic template, on the game. They called for the game to be officially recognized as the national pastime repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century. They wanted baseball to be uniquely theirs, to define their society, to make their society and their games different from England, from where, it must have seemed, everything labeled "culture" flowed (Seymour 9).

Journalists, in particular, promoted baseball as the All-American game suited to the robust nature of Americans who were also exploring new territories and settling the Wild West. The prevalence of journalists covering baseball led to
the organization of the Base Ball Reporters Association of America in 1887 (Seymour 351). Daily paper sports coverage increased sevenfold from 1878 to 1898 and weekly coverage became such that new papers were founded just to carry sporting news, such as Sporting Life and Sporting News (Seymour 350).

Fiction writers were also hopping on the ideological bandwagon of baseball. In the early 1860s, dime novels about baseball became popular reading. By 1884, the first real baseball novel (almost totally about baseball), Noah Brooks’s Our Baseball Club and How It Won the Championship, was published. Most of the early baseball fiction consisted of simple heroics much like the Western dime novels popular at the same time. But nonetheless, these baseball books helped to promote all that was good and beautiful and American about baseball.

While journalists fed Americans doses of daily baseball heroism, the dime novels stole their way into the hearts of their readers and spawned an entire genre of juvenile baseball writing. The Frank Merriwell series of juvenile books did extremely well at the beginning of this century. Ring Lardner’s book, You Know Me Al, published in 1917, was among the first baseball fiction written for adults. This keen focus on baseball did much to elevate the game in the public’s eye. The ideology of baseball became the symbolic template it did partly because of the extensive publication of baseball journalism and baseball fiction.
Working in conjunction with the ideology, was the mythology. The mythology in baseball made the game unconsiously appealing and therefore, popular, before the ideology was successfully promoted by the journalists and writers and owners and long before the Mills Commission handed down its ruling regarding baseball's "wholly" American roots. The social metaphors of baseball, accordingly, supported the mythological metaphors and vice versa. The ideology was, and still is, a kind of guide which allowed the fan and others to understand baseball's social worth and develop a sense of group belonging. Geertz states that "whatever else ideologies may be...they are, most distinctly, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience" (220). And for baseball this kind of collective conscience of the ideology worked its magic while the mythology worked on a deeper, more universal level.

Metaphor and Myth

While examining thousands of myths for The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell discovered the importance of metaphor in myth. He found that "it is as metaphor that myth is true, that myth is relevant, and that mythology is capable of the change that enables it to remain meaningful in spite of new scientific developments and changing human needs" (Lord 3). Rollo May, author of The Cry for Myth, agrees with Campbell on this point. He says, "A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world" (15). He also cites Thomas Mann
(one of Joseph Campbell's favorite authors) to reinforce the point that myth is true in the larger sense of mankind, "thus myth...is an eternal truth in contrast to an empirical truth" (27). Like May, Northrop Frye also finds a kind of eternal truth in the metaphor of the journey or the journey as metaphor. He sees a connection between the person taking the journey, the path, and the idea of the day's journey, the morning, noon and night as a beginning, middle and end. This connection functions as an extended metaphor for "the whole of life, life being thought of as a cyclical process of birth, death, renewed life" (Frye, Myth and Metaphor 212), a beginning, middle and end. This cyclicality or circularity is the essence of the journey metaphor. All metaphors in all mythologies, as well as the journey as metaphor, then, function as a way to see myth in the larger, eternal sense. Metaphor is a simple way to elicit knowledge from a comparison of two dissimilar things. The truth lies in the resultant knowledge, not with the comparison. Then, within the metaphor, because of the comparison, there exists a purpose, a function myth performs.

Joseph Campbell, in The Inner Reaches of Outer Space, delineates the four functions myth performs and explains why myth is so important to humankind. The basic functions of mythology are mystical, cosmological, sociological and psychological.

The first function, the mystical, has to do with the actual life of a mythology which "derives from the vitality of
its symbols as metaphors delivering, not simply the idea, but a sense of actual participation in such a realization of transcendence, infinity and abundance...of opening the mind and heart to the utter wonder of all being" (Campbell, Inner Reaches 7). The cosmological function of myth is rooted in the physical universe and nature. It serves to illustrate the vast differences between mythologies around the world but also explains why, at the core, such diverse beliefs extol the same fundamental ideas. The third function of mythology, the sociological, "binds the individual to his or her own group by proclaiming the rightness of the particular culture's way of doing things" (Lord 5). The psychological function of myth is the most important; it is the beginning and end of the power for the first three. Campbell calls this the pedagogical function as it shows one "how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances" (Power of Myth 31). Without the psychological function, humankind might have difficulty understanding the message of myth through the other three functions; indeed, even with myth surrounding us at all turns, some never see nor do they understand the message.

Rollo May also sees the psychological/pedagogical function of myth as the most essential element of mythology, especially of the hero's journey. Regarding the pedagogical function of myth, he says, "Myths are means of discovery. They are a progressive revealing of structure in our relation to nature and to our own existence.... In this sense myth helps us accept our past, and then we find it opens before us
our future" (May 87). He goes on to link this function with the hero’s journey we must all make, "Every individual...needs to make the journey in his or her own way" (May 87). The first three functions of myth prepare us for the final learning process of the journey. The fourth, the psychological function, assists us as we find our own way along our own journey.

The Function of Myth in Baseball

Since myth in baseball functions in much the same way as myth in any community or social group, it can be better understood through interpreting the elements of the game metaphorically. Baseball is a metaphor for a hero's journey and vice versa. Baseball is a metaphor for life; sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes you hit a homerun and sometimes you strike out looking. Baseball is one way in which people may embark upon a journey if they play the game and another way for some to journey vicariously through the players and the game. The players function as modern day heroes, the Odysseus or Aeneas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. May says, "Heroes are necessary in order to enable the citizens to find their own ideals, courage, and wisdom in society" (53). On the surface, baseball is really just a game, but within, heroes live and journeys abound. The innate mythological elements of the game enliven the experience of the game, the mythology through the metaphor. This identification the members of the audience make with the hero
of the journey and the hero of the game is directly tied to the psychological function of myth. But the mystical, cosmological and sociological functions are important as well.

The mystical function allows those influenced by baseball to understand something beyond the game; even though the understanding may be unconscious, the hero’s journey and other symbols and images exist to promote a bridge to transcendence which may be vaguely perceived by many but only crossed by a few. Many attend baseball games on a regular basis, but few audience members understand the game intimately. And because what is important to one baseball observer or fan may not be important to the next, few typically perceive the myth in baseball although they may see the same game, images and symbols. Understanding in some ways is incidental to the ritualistic nature of baseball. It’s played daily throughout most of the year and this repetition leads to ritualization which leads to archetype, to myth, to story, to understanding, back through myth to ritual. Some travel through this convoluted, circular process and achieve a greater understanding or appreciation of the finer points of the game. Some walk away from baseball with a greater understanding of the struggle of man and the endless cycle of life and some just keep going to the ballpark for the hotdogs and beer.

The cosmological function works on both a conscious and unconscious level to link the physical aspects of baseball with the hero’s journey inherent in the game and with other hero’s journeys in other mythologies. Again, like the
mystical function, conscious understanding is unnecessary. If one is influenced at all by the game and its mythology, its archetypes, then one is influenced.

The sociological function works more obviously and is tied the most closely with the ideology of the game. The game binds all fans, and those who have felt the impact of baseball on some level, through the socializing elements within the game itself. The game of baseball is a social entity; one is bound by the tradition of the game in our society, the place it holds in our culture, and the way players and fans and those merely acquainted with the game achieve communication whether to follow play, comprehend the team standings, or to use the language of the game to explain the outcome of a date the night before. The sociological function of myth also works with the ideology to form the kind of symbolic template Geertz talks about to consciously draw the observer into the game of baseball.

Without that psychological appeal, though, the other functions would be moot. And as Campbell and May have said, the psychological function prevails and supports the others. The link between baseball and American society is largely a psychological one. Few know the details of baseball’s history, and even fewer know the intricacies of the game, physical or mental, but many understand, even if unconsciously, baseball’s place in our society simply because of its long tradition.
The Team’s Journey

The elements of the game and its structure lend themselves quite readily to a mythological interpretation on at least two levels: the macrocosmic level of the team and the microcosmic level of the player.

The macrocosmic structure, the team level, follows a fairly standard pattern of the hero’s journey. All players on a baseball team must hear the call to adventure, the call to play baseball. Each spring, the team departs from home for training in a far off place. They turn their backs to what is known and depart for the unknown. They have a special destiny to fulfill. Along the way they are given assistance by coaches, trainers, managers, just as a hero would receive shaman-like assistance along his trek. Players also employ other kinds of assistance, some of it reeking of the supernatural, to make it through the trials of their journey: good luck charms or lucky pieces of clothing, equipment or a lucky locker.

Many heroes have possessed magical swords and talismans for good luck. Like these heroes, baseball players also frequently wield favorite, "lucky" bats, or take special care of their bats. Rod Carew, with 19 years in the Major Leagues, didn’t like his bats to get cold so he kept them in warm places and stored them in boxes of sawdust to make sure they were comfortable (Blake 63). "Shoeless" Joe Jackson used to sleep with his bat, and he even named it Black Betsy (Blake 89). Other players don’t necessarily revere their bats the
way Carew and Jackson did. Occasionally, if something goes wrong during the course of a game, a player may hit something with a bat three times to chase away evil spirits. And many players never step on the foul lines because they feel it will bring on bad luck.4

Players may also exhibit ritualistic behavior. Some players eat a certain kind of food preceding or following each game. Wade Boggs, formerly with the Boston Red Sox, now with the New York Yankees, eats chicken before every single game and has a twelve day rotating chicken menu during the season and recipes into the hundreds. He says there are hits in chicken (Blake 111), and he may be right with a lifetime batting average into the middle 300s, so far. Players may also chew a certain kind of tobacco or gum, or eat a specific brand of sunflower seeds. When things aren’t going well in the game, they may turn their caps inside out or wear them upside down or sideways to boost their teammates on the field or to show support for a lone batter trying to get on base and score. Even the sequence of pre- or postgame events can be ritualistic in nature. Players may get ready in a certain order, arrange their equipment in a certain fashion and at the end of the game, they may undress in a prescribed order, in special colors or leave the ballpark through the very same door every time. Some players even take wearing certain clothes to an extreme. When Mike Cuellar, with 15 years in the Major Leagues on five different teams, was scheduled to pitch, he’d "arrive at the park in his blue automobile and
come in wearing blue shoes, blue socks, blue pants, blue belt, blue shirt, blue tie...and, sometimes, a blue jacket as well" (Blake 69).

The behavior of some players and teams even has religious undertones. Occasionally, players will keep religious icons, pictures or small figurines, in their lockers or wear something around their necks for good luck, to keep the evil spirits away or as a form of some kind of worship. The 1990 Boston Red Sox, after going five for 19 in a heated pennant race, even went so far as to "perform an exorcism to rid themselves of the evil that had sapped their ability to win" (Blake 50). The exorcism proceeded after a voodoo shrine and been placed in the clubhouse. The ceremony featured "69 candles, a number 13 jersey, two black cats, assorted rubber spiders and snakes, a rooster, chanting and singing," (Blake 50) but the Red Sox still lost the next game. This kind of ritualistic, quasi-religious sacrifice isn’t out of the ordinary. Within the game itself is a play called a sacrifice which appears in several forms: the sacrifice fly, the sacrifice bunt, the sacrifice ground ball, all done for the sake of the advancement of the team.

Teams are consistently confronted with dangers during both spring training and the regular season--the front office, the press, the fans. If a player should be cut during the initial period of the season-long journey, it is a symbolic death. He may be reborn onto another team, or he may have to
wait until the next season to listen for the call and pray that he hears it.

The front office, press and fans all impose threats of varying kinds throughout the season and even into postseason play. The management may refuse to negotiate or re-negotiate a player’s contract, thereby effectively terminating his career with that team. The media may publish information regarding a player that may adversely affect his or the team’s play. Fans also impose a threat. They deify the players or denounce them depending on their level of play at a particular time. This kind of uncertainty may hamper the concentration of some players. And actual fan interference in a game has occasionally caused player consternation and/or changed the outcome of a game.

During the first stage of the journey, spring training and the first of the season, team members essentially conquer outside forces to understand and master their inner forces, their talent for the game. They may face adversaries mentioned in the above paragraph or battle with foul weather, career threatening injuries, bonus babies (rookies signed to large contracts with guarantees to play), or bodies which have deteriorated over the winter. Those who are successful in battling their enemies and meeting the challenge of their journey remain on the team and continue their group journey.

During the season, teams play 162 games, plus the potential for post-season play. Each game is another challenge, in the journey, that the team must overcome. A win
brings back a boon; a loss is symbolic death. The team must begin again the next day when they will play a whole new ball game.

The danger toward the end of the journey is that the hero may not want to integrate himself back into the society which he left. The deification process which many heroes undergo is also experienced by star baseball players. Their likenesses are printed on trading cards which are part of a monetary system measured against the player’s relative popularity or talent. Baseball players are sought for autograph sessions where many are paid per autograph. They are courted for television commercials, talk shows, guest spots in films and sitcoms. When all this attention is paid to the hero while he is undergoing his trial/initiation period, many do not want to return in the end. They begin to believe in the metaphorical trappings of the hero’s journey; they confuse the myth with the reality. If they fail to return, they have failed in their journey. And typically, after extremely successful seasons, teams are unable to repeat their heroic journeys. But in baseball, as in life, there’s always next season in which the team’s may fare better in their attempted journeys.

When the team successfully completes the season and goes on to win the pennant and the World Series, they are allowed to bring the boon home--the title of World Champions. This boon enriches the community to which they return, literally and figuratively. But this goodness, this richness, this boon is only valid until the cycle begins again the next spring,
the next season, the next time players hear and heed the call to play baseball.

The Player’s Journey

On a microcosmic level the most obvious hero is the batter, who like all heroes, begins his journey at home. The batter must first accept the challenge extended by the pitcher and the opposing team. He experiences a series of trials as he rounds the bases and then, if fate allows, returns home again, with a boon, the run scored. And like all heroes, the batter faces his challenge essentially alone. Despite the help of the shaman-like coaches, first and third base, the batter turns away from his teammates who remain in the safety of the home dugout, and he bats alone. If he isn’t successful (not every journey is) then he strikes out, flies out, grounds out--whatever--and he returns to the sanctuary of the dugout to await his next chance to begin the journey.

A hero’s journey must also incorporate both female and male energies, the yin--the lunar, the inactive and the yang--the solar, the active, the dark yin and the light yang. The male energy, the yang/challenger/father figure, in baseball’s hero’s journey is naturally the pitcher because he presents a trial to the batter. The necessary feminine energy, the yin/goddess/helper figure, is the ball. Although not as obvious a parallel as the yang/father/pitcher, the ball is nevertheless a vital part of the journey and linked in physical, numerical and religious ways to the game. And even
though the bat is also an inactive part of the game of baseball, it is a phallic symbol, and as the tool of the batter, can be no part of the feminine energy save its physical connection when the bat meets the ball.

The ball, the feminine energy, is obviously a symbol of the female breast and the womb. Both the ball and the breast are round, and the womb is also somewhat rounded in structure. Coaches frequently admonish young players who grip the ball too tightly and suggest they attempt to hold the ball gently like a female breast or an egg (Latner, May 1992). The power of the ball to give life to the game is a direct connection with the womb, all shapely similarities aside.

The ball also connects religious tradition to baseball via numbers: a baseball has 108 stitches and the Roman Catholic rosary has 108 beads. For each bead in the rosary a prayer is said, the majority of which are directed to the Virgin Mary. As well, rosaries are frequently made by women’s groups associated with The Church. One hundred eight is a significant number in the Catholic Church as well as other religions. Within the number 108 there are several factors that are significant as well, such as nine, three and four.

The significance of the number nine is that it, along with twelve, is a factor of 108. If twelve then is broken down into factors of three and four (the possible factors of two and six should be momentarily forgotten), the numbers are further linked to the game, three being the number of strikes per at bat and outs per side per inning and four the number of
balls needed to advance to first base on balls. In addition, rosaries (108 beads) are sometimes said in a series of nine over nine days, called a novena, in order to ask for a special boon. Baseball games have nine players for each team, and the nine players each participate in nine innings (and sometimes must say prayers for special boons). There are four bases all of which must be visited in order to gain the boon of a run. As well, Hinduism worships 108 goddesses—not gods, but goddesses. This ties together the stitches on the ball, the rosary beads, the novena, the Hindu goddesses, the Virgin Mary, the nine players and the nine innings, three outs, three strikes, four balls and four bases in a neat numerical bundle full of feminine energy.

In his work, Transformations of Myth Through Time, Joseph Campbell finds the number 108 to have an overall significance to humankind, "And 108 times 4 [the number of seasons] is 432, the number of years in the cycle of time. The goddess is the cycle of time. She is time. She is the womb" (151). She is also the baseball. That the energy of the ball is passive until acted upon by the pitcher and then the batter, is the essential element linking the ball with the yin and is the overriding importance of the ball as feminine energy in the game. The player experiences a bonding with the ball through his bat if a successful connection is made (foul balls would not count as successful connections in this context). The ball thrown by the pitcher/father figure extends a challenge to the player/hero making the important connection between the
female and male energies. Both the feminine/yin and masculine/yang energy are thus engaged in each pitch, and the journey begins or ends depending on the results of the at bat.

Other Mythic Images in the Hero’s Journey in Baseball

The Judge

Umpires even have a specific function in the hero’s journey of baseball. On many journeys, the hero encounters someone who renders a judgement upon the hero about whether he is right or wrong, or this judge may decide whether or not the hero may pass a certain point along his journey. The umpire is such a judge or guardian of the bridge or path. If the pitch isn’t hit, the umpire may decide the ball is a strike—a call which marks the beginning of potential symbolic death—or the umpire may call the pitch a ball, a respite. If the batter/hero amasses enough balls, he may advance upon his journey around the bases, by the gift of a base on balls. The umpire also may curtail the journey of any member of the team or coaching staff by declaring him out or by simply throwing him out of the game. The umpire is the ultimate authority within the game, the god to whom all appeals must be submitted.

The Jury

If a hero’s journey merits passing along, a recorder has always been there to tell the story again and again. Odysseus has Homer, Aeneas has Virgil and in Conrad’s Heart of
Darkness, Kurtz has Marlow. Baseball also has its share of storytellers. These recorders of baseball, journalists, announcers, fiction writers—all catalog the various events of baseball as well as commit the essence of baseball to paper or video. When the journalists or announcers, in their home ballpark, blatantly root for the home team, they are even called "homers," although this is certainly more to demonstrate their devotion to the home team rather than their resemblance to Homer. But regardless of their team preferences, the journalist/storytellers act as jurors, impartial in intent, but somewhat judgmental in action. The private or social agendas of writers may be at play in their written versions of games leading to a kind of sentencing of baseball players based on their performances. Announcers may show their bias for or against a team by the stories they tell between pitches or innings, called color commentary. These journalists, writers and announcers—the jurors—are the equivalent to the chorus in Greek drama handing over their judgments not to the other players necessarily, the umpire/judge in the case of baseball, but to the ultimate judge, the audience.

The meticulous records kept on the career of every player and each game played and on every trade or team move is further evidence that this obsession to keep track of everything shows baseball to be our answer to the epic. As well, the literary devices within the epic, like the simile or other oral devices used to insure memory of names, dates and
The Journey of the Audience

Possibly the most important journey in baseball is that of the fan, or audience, or even the journey of those merely aware of the game. Like any mythology, baseball's tells a story to those who are willing to listen, yet its influence reaches beyond even the most eager eyes and ears. Because baseball is a metaphor for the hero’s journey, it has also come to be a metaphor for anybody’s, everybody’s, journey. It is a ritual, a rite, a religion for some fans, simply spiritual for others, simply entertainment for still others, but for all, a mythology. In his article, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," Geertz clearly states the need for tradition and ritual, "In order to make up our minds we must know how we feel about things; and to know how we feel about things, we need the public images of sentiment that only ritual, myth, and art can provide" (Interpretation of Cultures 82). Baseball’s rituals and mythology provide one way for Americans to make up their minds about how they feel. When they embark upon their own journeys through the game or after the game, whether they know they’ve embarked or not, they are on their way to making up their minds about something, to learning something they didn’t know before about baseball or themselves. In the end, it matters little if the audience of
baseball, or those just remotely aware of the game, understand the metaphors, the myths in the game; they play upon the unconscious first, and if a conscious understanding results, the message of the myth is made clear, and if not, the myth is still at work.

The elements found in all hero's journeys are found in the act of batting, in the game itself, the call and separation, the trials of the journey and the return home with a boon. The functions of mythologies are the functions of the mythology in baseball. Baseball is an American mythology, an American hero's journey supported along the way by metaphor and a strong ideology.
Chapter II
Other Myths in Baseball

Baseball is a pastoral sport... baseball does what all good pastoral does--it creates an atmosphere in which everything exists in harmony.

Murray Ross in "Football Red and Baseball Green"

While the hero's journey in baseball is important, it isn't the only powerful myth at play in the game. The other myths in baseball are diverse but don't all necessarily fit into the hero's journey mold, although they broaden and deepen the overall mythology of baseball. These other myths in turn are broadened and deepened by archetypes or visions. Archetypes also exist in the ideology of baseball and further cement the connection, established by metaphor, between ideology and mythology. Indeed, archetypes are a kind of metaphor with accompanying images and symbols, a comparison between something we all have in our unconscious with something visual or understood. The metaphor of the archetype then is a precursor to learned knowledge just as the metaphor works in the mythology or the ideology.

The appeal of baseball occurs on any number of levels and in any number of ways. What the devoted fan understands of the mythology in baseball may not be apparent to the occasional observer. Many just casually acquainted with baseball, and even some fans, probably only grasp the blatant ideology of baseball, while the myths peacefully and
unconsciously pass them by. What is important to remember is that we all see with our own eyes, bring to the game our own vision, our own peculiar ways of thinking and our own individual histories. But lying beneath our individuality are the myths common to all and the archetypes as Northrop Frye and Carl Jung define them and the set of beliefs revolving around the game of baseball which evolved into the ideology. Our understanding of the myth in baseball is like a window which only needs the shade lifted or the curtain parted so that we may see through to the view, the meaning. We lift the shade and part the curtain when we study and analyze what it is that makes up the window and its view.

Within baseball's mythology, the many myths and archetypes evoke the pastoral harmony of early America, the frontier, the cowboy and the healing power of the West. These same myths and archetypes, images and symbols, are at the root of baseball ideology. The image of pastoral harmony—the shepherd in his field tending his flock where all is right with the world—and idea of the West as possessing healing faculties seem inconsistent with images of the wild, lawless frontier and the ruggedly determined cowboy. Underlying these images/ideas, though, are similarities, such as the Great Outdoors, fresh air, hard work, independence and freedom.

Where the archetypes and myths in the mythology of baseball remain part of the unconscious until sought out and interpreted, the archetypes in the ideology of baseball were acknowledged and even promulgated by the journalists and
writers of the early part of this century. Whether they knew they were exploiting "archetypes" for the sake of the ideology or not, doesn't matter. They knew they were promoting baseball and that is the important issue. Because of their exploitation at the behest of owners, baseball league presidents, and for job security, they created an ideology which incorporates some of the archetypes and some of the myths of baseball. Because humans can so easily identify with archetypes, having a prior existence in our psyches, the power of the ideology, and the mythology, too, is that much greater.

Archetypes and Visions in Baseball

Archetypes are at the root of the power of myth, myth being the manifestation of these archetypes, these repeated images. Visions, as Frye defines them, are a further manifestation of the archetypes as they exist both before, in and after the myth. It is also the archetype/myth which gives credence to ideologies; ideologies must begin somewhere and usually that beginning--caused by some kind of strain as Geertz says--is within the mind/psyche of man.

Carl G. Jung calls the place in our psyches where the archetypes come from the collective unconscious. He explains the relationship between the human psyche, the collective unconscious and archetypes this way:

The personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in
consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity...the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes. The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them "motifs"... (Jung, The Portable Jung 60)

These archetypes, motifs, visions, or whatever else one may name them are present in the images of baseball. These images of baseball may not be consciously recognized by the fan, but certainly they play a part in the appeal of the game and the strength of the ideology and mythology.

Northrop Frye in "Archetypes of Literature" describes a central pattern of comic and tragic visions in which "the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical" (432). These visions are archetypal, part of all of us and therefore present in all aspects of life, not just literature.

The comic and tragic visions as Frye sees them are intertwined with the hero's journey and help to explain the world of the hero, his world of apotheosis, but also describe visions, images or symbols (archetypes) in other myths. He claims that his view of these visions is "not only elementary, but grossly over-simplified..." (Frye, "Archetypes" 433), but such a simple view reduces the spider's web of ideas that may tangle and confuse rather than illuminate the idea behind the archetype, the myth, the vision. To see baseball through the looking glass of these visions brings another whole realm of myth to light and increases the cultural complexity of baseball.
The comic vision is essentially that of innocence, a godly cycle, a kind of heaven; while the tragic vision, constrained by the form of the cyclical quest, is a kind of hell. The comic and tragic visions each contain a different view of the world of the hero, and Frye expresses these differences through examples of each type of vision as it illuminates the archetypes of the human, animal, vegetable, mineral and unformed worlds. The mythology of baseball, the power of the archetypes of baseball, can be seen in a comparison of the game to these visions, just as the mythology of the game is also better understood through analogy to the basic pattern of the hero’s journey.

In the comic vision the human world is exemplified by a hero who may fulfill the fantasies of the reader, or in the case of baseball, the fan. The tragic vision sees the hero with his back to his followers/fans and isolated or deserted. The comic vision contains a marriage or consummation—the batter connects with the ball (feminine energy) and achieves the first part of his journey. The tragic vision contains images of "the harlot, witch and other varieties of Jung’s ‘terrible mother’" (Frye, "Archetypes" 432). In baseball this terrible feminine imagery is encountered in the strikeout, a failure to make the "good" connection with the feminine, the ball.

The animal world as seen in the comic vision is filled with domesticated animals and may contain birds. The connection here with baseball is the ball that flies, just as
a bird flies. A weak fly ball is also referred to as a "quail" or a dying "quail" as it limps its way through the air and dies on the ground or in the glove of the defense. Also in the comic vision, the archetypes are primarily pastoral. The idea of the farm is an important one in this vision and also in baseball. The minor leagues are referred to as the "farm" system. Players are planted, domesticated, grown, and harvested when the time is right. Each successful harvesting is cause for celebration, just as harvests throughout history have given rise to rituals and festivals which celebrate the chance for survival for one more year, one more season. In contrast, the animal world seen through the tragic vision contains images of the predator. The fielders who pluck flying balls from the air are the predators, the falcons of baseball. They strike down attempts of the domesticated to succeed.

Through the comic vision, the vegetable world is seen as a garden or park, a peaceful, rustic glade where green soothes and relaxes. This archetype goes a long way to explain why ballparks are frequently called green cathedrals, pastoral havens from the brutality of everyday life. This archetype may even explain why the places people play baseball have been called parks and yards. The tragic vision, though, is that of a sinister forest or wilderness. Teams that have difficulty winning games on the road may indeed feel something sinister about a ballpark that might be someone else's green cathedral.
The archetypes of the mineral world, in the comic vision, are images of geometrical forms and the 'starlit' dome. The mineral world is a building or temple all aglow. Baseball's playing fields (green cathedrals--like temples) are constructed with connecting lines and triangles and squares and rectangles, but the playing field is still essentially round, round like the earth, circular like the seasons are cyclical. Some ballparks are like the 'starlit' dome; they are domes and the lights that dot the ceilings, very like stars. And all ballparks contain the geometrical form of the "diamond." In the tragic vision, the mineral world is a desert, empty, harsh, populated with rocks and ruins. Many ballplayers may unconsciously experience this tragic vision of the mineral world while playing on a particularly rough field. Shea Stadium in New York has been referred to as "The Rockpile." For years, Angel Stadium in California had a reputation for a brutal playing surface. The overall image of the ballpark may be that of a green, peaceful garden, a pleasingly shaped dome, but down in the dirt it may be the tragic vision which prevails.

Frye's final set of comic and tragic visions define archetypes of the unformed world, which mainly consists of water. The comic vision sees the unformed world as a life-giving, life-affirming river (typically with four parts, like the four seasons). Frye asserts that this image of the river in fours is the archetype which "influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humours"
And there are always four bases on every diamond. This positive image of water ties together the archetypes of the green garden (one usually needs water to make a garden green); the pastoral images of a harvest, heaven, rebirth (baptism); and images of renewal that evoke the seasonal nature of the game of baseball. Two major league ball parks even have "river" in their names: Three Rivers Stadium and Riverfront Stadium. Despite the advent of astroturf, ballparks without water would not be as green; that all-important ingredient of water secures the archetypes of pastoral images in baseball. The unformed world in the tragic vision then must be an evil, sinister water filled with beasts and ugly things. The image of evil water in baseball would be the rainout or being sent to the "showers," both effectively ending the journey of the team and/or the players, respectively, because of the deluge, the flood, the sinister water.

Home, Home in the Ballpark

The ideology of baseball is partly based on the idea of the old West, that men should be independent, yet work for the good of the group, and embody all that is good and right in the United States, and through this physical or mental state of mind, be healed. The ideology also evolved to incorporate a sense of equality between men that was rare in the East but more common in the West. In the West, if you could pull your weight, you were generally accepted. This is, of course, an
archetypal view of the Old West, and the truth, like the truth of baseball is often quite different from that of the archetypes, myths or ideology. A comparison of two songs, one of the West and the most famous baseball song, further illuminates the point that much of the Old West is in part of the ideology and mythology of baseball.

The song, "Home, Home on the Range," characterizes the kind and giving frontier, the healing West, the comic vision. The first chorus evokes a powerful feeling that all is well in the West:

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where never is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

The peaceful, full-of-hope-and-promise feeling in this song is reminiscent of the goals of the ideology of baseball. The range could be the ballpark, where everyone can feel right at home. The animals playing would be the players, and little is so natural and peaceful as animals at play. The lack of discouraging words could be compared to the equalizing nature of the ideology; everyone is the same on the range and in the ballpark, no verbal aspersions could possibly be cast upon anyone. And the skies are not cloudy all day--as long as there isn’t a rainout.

The unofficial anthem of baseball, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," is sung at every seventh inning stretch and has been for years (since approximately 1908--about the same time...
the ideology gets into full swing). The famous chorus to this song is:

Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out to the crowd,
Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack,
I don’t care if I never get back.
Let me root, root, root for the home team,
If they don’t win, it’s a shame,
For it’s one, two, three strikes, you’re out
At the old ball game. (Mote 354)

The verses (not reproduced here) are devoted to telling the story of a baseball fan named Nelly Kelly who never wanted to leave the ballpark. Even though these verses have been lost over time and only the chorus is sung at the park, the original theme remains the same. The singer wants to go to the ball park for the game and doesn’t care about going home; therefore, the ball park substitutes for a home like that of the range in "Home, Home on the Range." The rooting for the home team, watching the home team play, is akin to the wonder of watching the deer and the antelope play. No one cares if the deer and the antelope "win," it is the beauty of watching them play that counts. The same is true in this song of watching the home team, rooting for home team—the singer doesn’t care of the team wins, the ball game is the thing. "One, two, three strikes, you’re out" are not, surprisingly, discouraging words. They are part of each and every ball game, part of what determines whether the batter will begin his journey or have to wait until the next time. To think, then, that these might be discouraging words is to miss the whole point of the game and the journey therein.
And naturally the skies are not cloudy all day. Even though ball games have been played under adverse weather conditions, the idea of playing baseball is surrounded by sunshine, blue skies and springtime. Thomas Wolfe writes of the relationship between baseball and spring:

...one of the reasons I have always loved baseball so much is that it has been not merely 'the great national game,' but really a part of the whole weather of our lives, of the thing that is our own, of the whole fabric, the million memories of America. For example, in the memory of almost every one of us, is there anything that can evoke spring--the first days of April--better than the sound of the ball smacking into the pocket of the big mitt, the sound of the bat as it hits the horsehide... almost everything I know about spring is in it--the first leaf, the jonquil, the maple tree, the smell of grass upon your hands and knees, the coming into flower of April. (Dickson, Baseball’s Greatest 479)

Baseball Cowboys on The Healing Frontier

The frontier myth, the cowboy myth, and the myth of the healing West are as much a part of the mythology of baseball as the comic and tragic visions of the world or the hero’s journey. These myths, according to Rollo May, are about "what people were getting away from as well as what they were getting to" (93). He sees these myths as crucial in understanding the American psyche. The archetypes in these myths of the West, of the frontier, are those of the loner just passing through who incidentally cleans up the town, the Texas Ranger who saves a whole regiment of men, the idea of freedom from oppression by established society, the healing power of that freedom. People fled England, moved to the
west, to make a life in the New World, to live free from the oppression at home. People fled to the American West to avoid the rules and regulations of Eastern Society. Huckleberry Finn, a quintessential American hero, even had "to light out for the territory." In the midst of urban stress, many city dwellers found solace in the ballpark, it was their territory to light out for.

Lone rangers, cowboys, relief pitchers as they are called in baseball, are frequently called upon to clean up. In the West, these characters came into town, saved the day, and then they went about their business, traveling on to the next town or village. The lone rangers of baseball, the relievers, are regularly asked to join a game in progress to "save the day." They are usually sequestered in the bullpen, away from the rest of the team and the action. When their stint in the game is over, they leave until the next time they are called or until the next town along the way.

Different kinds of relief pitchers have even developed over the years reflecting the trend for specialization in modern society. There are now closers, middle relievers, long relievers, set up and mop up men. The pinch hitter is another kind of lone hero. He is asked to bunt or hit the winning run home or to sacrifice his own record for the sake of the team. Pinch runners save the legs of a fellow teammate. All act alone, all epitomize the loner cowboy. They get in, get the job done and get out again.
The frontier myth, like the cowboy myth, has to do with individual character. According to Steven Riess in *Touching Base*, by watching or being at all touched by baseball, spectators could develop "competitiveness, honesty, patience, respect for authority, and rugged individualism" (223). He also states that "these were the characteristics that Americans were supposed to have been developing on the frontier over many generations" (Riess 224). In this way baseball became an extension of the frontier, the American learning experience. And through baseball, Americans could continue to incorporate all the right values into their lives despite the dominance of urban life.

Connected to the frontier myth is the myth of the West, a healing myth. Cowboys, settlers, adventurers inhabited the West and with their uncivilized nature contributed to the lore of the land and the time. They epitomized what couldn’t be done in the East, in civilization. They were the heroes who travelled away from what was established to make a new home, to find a different peace, to heal the wounds inflicted by the pressures of a society too closed and controlled to contain the maverick. The myth of the West then is one of healing faculties as well as one filled with loner heroes. Teddy Roosevelt went West for its healing powers as did others of his era. Likewise the game of baseball heals. Walt Whitman acknowledged the healing power of the game:

I see great things in baseball. It's our game--the American game. It will take our people out of doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical
stoaicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set. Repair these losses and be a blessing to us. (Dickson, Baseball’s Greatest 468)

In 1908, a Boston rabbi touted the benefits of baseball as if it were a cure for what ailed an industrialized and highly politicized nation:

The joy of being out of doors, breathing in oxygen and vitality, is especially worthwhile to one who is either much in the confinement of his study or breathes out air and energy on the public platform. (Reiss 17)

If for no other reason, baseball may heal because it is not literally our life, and like myth, it takes us out of our physical reality and allows us to see beyond ourselves. The base of the power of myth lies in the psychological function which is, at its core, bound to naturally healing and which, in turn, allows the myth to inform and enrich life.

An American Archetype

We see ourselves in baseball, in the players. It is our game. It is the American game, as Whitman says. It is full of myths and archetypes which appeal to us without any conscious effort on our part. Baseball exists in our society on a collectively unconscious level which goes beyond any conscious recognition of its place by diehard fans; the American citizenry, not just the fans, are the audience of baseball. The American baseball player is a recognizable entity as any other uniquely American archetype, like Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed or the cowboys of the old West. For example, the Mighty Casey from the poem by E.L. Thayer,
"Casey at the Bat," is as recognizable a baseball player as any. When the poem debuted June 3, 1888, it went mostly unnoticed. Later that year or early the next, William De Wolf Hopper, recited the poem to a group of professional ballplayers as a special part of his vaudeville act honoring the players. The recitation, greeted with much enthusiasm, prompted Hopper to continue it as part of his repertoire (Gardner 3). To the best of his knowledge, he repeated the performance of "Casey at the Bat" at least 10,000 times over forty-five years (Mote 254). Due to Hopper’s popularization of the poem and the subsequent newspaper reprintings because of Hopper’s performances, there were few Americans who hadn’t heard of Casey by the early part of the twentieth century (Gardner 8). The poem’s popularity combined with the already popular archetypes of the West and others, created an abundance of archetypes to nourish the kind of atmosphere needed to easily create a baseball ideology which has worked so well and lasted for so long.

The Mighty Casey--A Failed Hero Archetype?

Boston Red Sox or Chicago Cubs fans must often feel like they’re rooting for Casey. They know Casey will strike out--the poem, "Casey at the Bat," always ends with Casey striking out--just like they know their teams won’t win the World Series. But the Cub fan, like the Mudville fan, has "hope that springs eternal in the human breast" (Thayer 21)8. The team hasn’t won a World Series since before World War II and
the organization has been consistently incompetent. But this hasn’t kept the fans away from Wrigley Field. Wrigley has never suffered from lack of attendance. In *Why Time Begins on Opening Day*, Tom Boswell says, "The Cub fan not only knows in advance that his club will fail pathetically, but he knows why; he can provide the etiology of defeat at the drop of a pop-up. The immutable first cause, of course, is that the miscreant is a Cub and therefore damned perpetually" (9). Why keep going back to suffer more?

And things aren’t so different to the east in Boston. There’s an old story about the Boston club that when they let Babe Ruth go to sign with the Yankees, they gave up their right to ever win a World Series again. It’s called "The Bambino’s Curse." In 1986, the Red Sox came very close to breaking the curse but didn’t quite get there. In *The Heart of the Order*, Tom Boswell writes of the ultimate defeat of that Red Sox team:

The Red Sox became the second team to win the first two Series games in the other club’s park and still be defeated. They became the first to have a two-run lead with two outs in the last inning and nobody on base and lose. Of course, they were also the first gang to get within one strike of a world title and fail (154).

Bruce Hurst, a pitcher on that team, said, "It hurts a lot more to lose that it feels good to win" (Boswell, *Heart* 156). And the team’s long-suffering fans would have agreed with Hurst. So why keep suffering? Why keep rooting for losers?

Part of the answer lies in understanding the game itself. Nobody gets a hit every time up to bat in baseball. No team
goes undefeated in baseball. It is statistically impossible to be perfect in baseball; there are too many chances to fail. And even the greatest hitters fail sixty percent of the time or more. The hero who can’t begin the journey, or finish the journey is as important as the hero who does it all. To appreciate success, one needs to experience failure. And like the tragic and comic masks that symbolize the theater, creating an image of wholeness, tragedy is as important to baseball as comedy to make the game a whole, and very human, experience.

When De Wolf Hopper first recited "Casey at the Bat" he wasn’t sure what to expect; the hero fails. But his audience that night, New York Giants and Chicago White Sox players, loved it. Part of the reason they loved it was they saw themselves striking out at crucial moments in their baseball careers and could relate to the cocky Casey. Part of the reason fans continue to support losing ball clubs and part of the reason "Casey at the Bat" is so popular is provided by De Wolf Hopper in an excerpt from his memoirs:

When I dropped my voice to B flat, below low C, at "the multitude was awed," I remember seeing Buck Ewing’s [catcher for the Giants] gallant mustachios give a single nervous twitch. And as the house, after a moment of startled silence, grasped the anticlimatic denouement, it shouted its glee.

They had expected, as any one does on hearing Casey for the first time, that the mighty batsman would slam the ball out of the lot, and a lesser bard would have had him do so, and thereby written merely a good sporting-page filler. The crowds do not flock into the American League parks around the circuit when the Yankees play, solely in anticipation of seeing Babe Ruth whale the ball over the centerfield fence. That is a spectacle to be enjoyed even at the expense
of the home team, but there always is the chance that the Babe will strike out, a sight even more healing to sore eyes, for the Sultan of Swat can miss the third strike just as furiously as he can meet it, and the contrast between the terrible threat of his swing and the futility of the result is a banquet for the malicious, which includes us all. There is no more completely satisfactory drama in literature than the fall of Humpty Dumpty. (Gardner 4)

"Casey at the Bat" so fascinated Hopper’s audiences that parodies and sequels began to spring up immediately (Gardner 8). In the next ninety years, the poem only gained in popularity. Dozens of parodies and sequels continued to be published, radio dramatizations were broadcast, cartoons and films were made, books were written, even an opera and a ballet were produced, all based on Casey’s mighty strike out (Mote 255). Some of these reproductions detailed Casey’s revenge, his comeback, the reasons he struck out. Some are fanciful, such as the Disney cartoon, Casey Bats Again, in which Casey’s baseball player/daughters need him to "bat again," and "'Cool' Casey at the Bat," written by the staff of MAD magazine in 1960, in which Beatnik lingo is substituted for the original language of the poem.

"Casey at the Bat" is now an integral part of American culture, baseball history and the American psyche, and Casey is an "American folk hero" according to James Mote in Everything Baseball (253). Indeed, Casey is an American folk hero because he inhabits the conscious memory of Americans, but he is also an archetype because his failure, his image, is part of the American unconscious. Casey is an American archetype, a failed hero archetype. He is the tragic mask
together with the comic mask that perfectly reflects baseball, the game of human experience, a combination of both victory and the defeat, something we can all relate to and something we all ponder.

The Frustrated Ballplayer as Archetype

Tristram Potter Coffin says "the 'frustrated ballplayer' is an American type as surely as the cowboy, the movie starlet, or the man in the grey-flannel suit" (181). But Coffin wonders why such a "type" exists at all. Rollo May says it's because of the restless energy of Americans, the need for the West, the cowboy, the ballplayer, to serve as a myth of "the rebirth of humanity, without the sin or evil or poverty or injustice or persecution which had characterized the Old World" (93). The seasonal, cyclical nature of baseball symbolizes a rebirth of humanity; each season is a new chance, a new world, a breaking of ties with the old.

Part of the appeal of the myth of the West, the frontier, Coffin speculates, has to do with the rise of industry, the emasculation of men and the dominance of women, i.e. civilization--churches, school maids, families--and the repression of the "wild man." He also claims it has to do with "a kind of 'Huckleberry Finn' urge to remain young forever, to escape from 'village mores' and Sunday School laws..." (Coffin 181). Baseball allows that part of us, the part which wishes to remain young and retain the traditional
power of the male, to recapture a bit of youth each time we hear the first crack of the bat hitting the ball in spring.

Johan Huizinga might say that the frustrated ballplayer archetype has to do with a primal need for man to play without seriousness. Regardless of the seriousness of the financial side of baseball on the major league level, the game is still a game, and mostly played for fun. And despite the competitive edge many bring to the game, players and fans still jump up and down over a grand slam and smile in response to a perfectly executed double play. Even the non-fan can acknowledge the fun of the game, of playing, and many would certainly recognize the type of the frustrated player or, at least, the failed ballplayer/hero. It seems inconceivable that an American wouldn't recognize this image: "The picture of the father shoving a glove and bat into the crib of his first son is an American cliche simply because it symbolized something typical about American hopes and fears" (Coffin 3).

Campbell might say that the American archetype of a frustrated ballplayer is really just another kind of hero's journey, that the frustration moves the hero onto an alternative path that can only be recognized and learned from as the journey goes further and further inward toward self-actualization. The quest then is not so much geographical, but psychological. Where the hero leaves from is his former self laden with frustration. The path is self-discovery, not the base path that might have been previously coveted. Where the hero returns to isn't homeplate, but a new self, shed of
the frustration and reconciled to whatever the new role for the hero might be. The hero gains strength by understanding the need to give up the pipe dream of playing major league baseball and be content with reality. In the case of baseball, the healing powers come from the same source which causes the wound which needs healing. By going to ball games, those frustrated players can live through the heroes on the field, through the professional players' journeys, even though the game initiated the frustration.

The archetypes of the failed hero, the frustrated ballplayer, the cowboy and the myth of the West come from the collective unconscious; they exist as part of the mythology of baseball. Just as the hero's journey exists in the physical realm of baseball but transcends it, so does the archetype of the frustrated ballplayer and others exist in baseball, and outside baseball, and still transcends the physical reality of the game.

Baseball as an American Mythology and an American Ideology

It is obvious that baseball's appeal lies in the sphere of the psychological which is by definition complicated. It is also clear that the archetypes of baseball overlap in the realms of ideology and mythology. The connection here, as in the relationship between the hero's journey and baseball, is metaphoric. The metaphor is the key to understanding in all the realms of baseball, including the mythological, the
ideological and the archetypal: the baseball player is a hero on a journey; the game of baseball is America; the baseball player is a cowboy and the ballpark is the range, the West. It is through these kinds of metaphoric relationships that the importance of baseball as a defining feature in American culture becomes obvious. What remains obtuse, and perhaps should remain so for most, is the mythology. The strength of the mythology lies in its resultant education through experience, not through direct instruction. As one experiences baseball, the mythology goes to work on one's psyche.

Even though baseball is called our "National Game," even though it may have healing powers, even though it may be a kind of hero's journey, and even though its ideology is part of the big picture of American beliefs, it is, above all else, human. We see in baseball all that we wish we could be and at the same time we see all that we sometimes are, both good and bad. It is the nature of the game to promise perfection while usually delivering less than that. As fans and casual observers come into contact with baseball and all its facets, an identification process happens which calls into action all that Jung, Campbell, May and Frye believe occurs within the mind as it embraces myths and archetypes. Baseball is at once a dream and a reality, combining the only two ways humans have of conceiving. At the point where dream and reality touch, mythology is born.
Chapter III

Baseballspeak and American Culture:
The Metaphor and the Mythology in the Language

Conversation is the blood of baseball. It flows through the game, an invigorating system.... This rich verbal tradition--the way the game has taken on the ambiance of the frontier campfire or the farmer's cracker-barrel stove and moved it into the dugout--is what marks baseball so distinctively, not only among our games, but among all our endeavors.

Tom Boswell in How Life Imitates the World Series

As far back as 1913, the language of the game of baseball, baseballspeak, has been a topic of discussion. A professor of English at the University of Chicago thought baseballspeak should be dropped from newspapers. His fear that it would influence the speech and writing of the readers was not unfounded. He ultimately lost his battle with baseballspeak (Dickson, Dictionary xiii), as baseball metaphors abound in American speech and writing. It is understandable that the professor should have lost his war against baseballspeak. The game's popularity was on the rise, the first real sports pages were daily reading for many, and the game just seems to foster the growth of a distinctive language. In Pungoes, Floaters and Fork Balls: A Colorful Baseball Dictionary, Patrick Ercolano agrees with Boswell that baseball is "by nature a talking game, its gradual pace and pastoral setting lending itself to conversation. Words flow in the dugout, around the batting cage, in the press box, in
the radio and TV booths, and in the stands" (vi). He also claims that the language connects its speakers and writers to the past. He says, "The language of baseball contains many of the elements that appeal to lovers of words--vibrancy, humor, and tradition. Especially tradition. Our oldest native sport, baseball connects us to our past. The game's lingo is part of that connection" (Ercolano vii).

Baseballspeak is indeed effective in bonding its speakers and writers with each other and with their past through the power of metaphor. Through metaphor baseballspeak is created. Through metaphor it is learned and passed on. Metaphor, part of the fabric of our lives, is, as Lakoff and Johnson say in Metaphors We Live By, "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (3). The power of metaphor is at work in our thoughts and actions and can be seen in the mythology and ideology of baseball, but it also is the binding element between the mythology, ideology and the language of the game. The community of baseballspeakers is instrumental in the process of creating the language, and disseminating it to a larger audience. Perhaps through the migration of baseball terms to other communities, the mythology and ideology are further sustained.

Understanding metaphor in baseballspeak is the key to understanding not only the game of baseball, but what it means to our culture, where the metaphors come from, why we create metaphors, how we learn language and why baseballspeak and the baseball discourse community are important in and to
mainstream American English. That our language generally is filled with metaphors shouldn’t be surprising. In Metaphors and Symbols: Forays into Language, Roland Bartel says, "Scholars are now saying that all words began as metaphors, that our language is a necropolis of dead metaphors" (17). That some of our dead metaphors have come from baseballspeak is natural given the importance of the game in our history and given that our language is filled with dead (and living) metaphors.

The American Baseball Discourse Community

Inside the American baseball discourse community baseballspeak is born. It begins as metaphors to describe the game or circumstances surrounding the game. These metaphors, this language is created on many different levels within the community, the two most obvious being the spoken and written communities. The spoken or speech community exists on the game level. Members of the community include players, coaches, trainers, owners and others who touch the lives of those in the inner sanctum, the inner circle of baseball. The written community exists on the level just beyond the game. Members of this community would include all who write about the game, players and reporters alike. And within these two sub-groups or sub-communities, many levels exist according to the baseballspeak's knowledge and prowess. Tristram Potter Coffin, in The Old Ball Game: Baseball in Folklore and Fiction, writes of two levels of baseballspeak expertise: the
level in which speakers know the impenetrable language of the inner circles and the level in which speakers only understand the metaphors which have already reached mainstream American speech and culture (55). What Coffin is talking about when he refers to the two levels is surprisingly like the speech and written communities of baseball’s discourse community. (In reality, there are varied degrees of these two levels in which the spoken and written communities overlap and intertwine as illustrated later in this chapter in TABLE II.)

Because of the rising popularity of the terms, "discourse community," "speech community," and "written community," in various academic areas, confusion reigns. What the sociolinguists mean by "written" or "speech" communities is different from what scholars of composition and rhetoric mean. John Swales’s suggestion, in Genre Analysis, that a definite separation of concepts is vital to avoid ambiguity. He offers these main differences between a speech and written community: the speech community is concerned with time; the written community or, as Swales sometimes calls the written community, the discourse community, is concerned with time and space (22). Also, speech communities’ needs are social; written communities’ needs are functional. He further claims, "A speech community typically inherits its membership by birth, accident or adoption; a discourse [written] community recruits its members by persuasion, training or relevant qualification" (Swales 24).
Using these differences to define the two terms of "speech" and "discourse" makes sense, but Swales seems to misuse "speech" and "discourse." "Discourse" is a valid modifier of both spoken and written communicative acts, discourse being the communication of ideas or information either through speech or in writing. A "discourse community" should then be one in which both spoken and written communication takes place; or, if only one or the other takes place, then the definition would still stand as a description that dialogue, conversation, understanding, communication is taking place among members. For instance, there exists a baseball discourse community in which spoken and written communication takes place between members. But some members only belong via spoken communication (those who only listen to or watch ballgames) and some only by written communication (not regular fans but those who occasionally glance at a sports page or read an occasional sports article); members of both groups can and do communicate with each other. The term "discourse community" is the umbrella underneath which the other two terms belong. (Please see TABLE II toward the end of this chapter for a breakdown of the American Baseball Discourse community which includes the spoken and written communities.)

Despite Swales's use of written and discourse to mean the same thing, his idea of a narrow conceptualization and criteria to analyze communities which speak and write as modes of communication is a valid one. Using the criteria and
conceptualization Swales establishes, an analysis of the American Baseball Discourse Community leads to a greater understanding of the group. Of the six concepts and criteria, the discourse community of American baseball mirrors all six concepts and fulfills the six criteria.

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed upon set of common public goals.

   Baseball has a broadly agreed upon set of common public goals—the fair and smooth conduct of the game, the perpetuation of baseball and the means by which this is accomplished (the rules of baseball are explicitly laid out in the rulebook used by the Major Leagues).

2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.

   Baseball has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members, even though fans and players may only participate in baseball in isolated areas of the country having no contact with other isolated fans and players, communication would not be impossible because the same circumstances surrounding one game of baseball surround any other, due to the rules and the practical diction necessary to describe and play the game.

3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.

   Baseball's informational opportunities abound—more is published about baseball than any other sport in the United States (Boswell, Heart 95). Baseball writing,
which is written primarily for people in and around the baseball discourse community, takes the form of daily journalism, fiction and nonfiction—essays, biographies, etc.

4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

Baseball utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims—genres being, as Swales quotes Martin, "how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (26). These genres in baseball, how things get done or how things are communicated, consist of three different kinds of media: television, radio, newspaper/print. Language is the key element in transmission of knowledge in all of these, less so in television than in radio and newspaper/print, but all still are vital in the communication of game information to other members not in the presence of the players during play. Non-members also have access to these three genres, but would not necessarily understand the language used and consequently move on to different channels, stations or pages.

5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.

Baseball definitely has its own specific lexis. In How to Talk Baseball, Mike Whiteford talks about the vocabulary and syntax specific to the baseball discourse
A slow roller dribbles just out of reach of the shortstop and second baseman seems to have eyes on it. A sharp line drive to right resembles a frozen rope or clothes line. You could hang out the wash on that one. A drive between outfielders is a 'tweener. The bat is a wooden implement and is logically called a stick. A good hitter, therefore, is a good stick. An outfielder picks up the ball and fires it to the plate, and his arm is thereby designated a gun. The right fielder has a good gun. A batted ball that travels directly upward, high above home plate, is, well, a home run in an elevator shaft. (12)

Whiteford also documents several community members who are particularly adept at baseballspeak. For instance, Dennis Eckersley—formerly a starter (starting pitcher) for the Boston Red Sox, currently the Oakland A's ace closer (number one relief pitcher, called in for usually the last inning only)—is a master of baseballspeak. (Please see TABLE I for examples of Eckersley’s descriptions of game situations and translations.)

Much of Eckersley’s language is disseminated through the reporters to the other members of the community via the three genre/media mentioned in number four above. Therefore, players aren’t the only ones to use baseballspeak. Announcers, often ex-players, as well as reporters, use baseballspeak in describing the action of the game to listeners or viewers. Bob Prince, ex-announcer for the Pittsburgh Pirates, in attempts to
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<tr>
<th><strong>Baseballsppeak</strong> (Eckersley)</th>
<th><strong>Translation</strong> (Whiteford &amp; Woodworth)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They wanted a punchout. But I didn’t want to get caught up in it... if I throw him the heater, maybe he juices it out on me.</td>
<td>The fans wanted me to strike out the batter, but I didn’t want to give the batter a fastball that he could possibly hit out of the park for a home run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No way he was going to get it. I just gave him a little off-speed job on the outside. He was sitting on my fastball.</td>
<td>No way was the batter going to get a fastball. I knew he would be expecting a fastball for an attempted third strike, so I threw him a pitch that was off the speed of a fastball pitch to fool him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had good cheese tonight.</td>
<td>I really had extraordinary speed in my pitching or on my pitches tonight. I threw hard—as in hard cheese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint masters are usually bridge masters.</td>
<td>Control pitchers usually yield the most home runs, as in painting the edges of the strike zone, theoretically shaped like a box; a homer lofting out over the outfield fence might just look like a bridge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those last two were real nasties... I was trying to punch him out. Can’t worry about a tater.</td>
<td>Those last two pitches were particularly wicked or effective breaking balls... I was trying to strike him out. Can’t worry about the possibility of a home run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want the Bogart because that’s where the iron is.</td>
<td>I want to be the starting pitcher on opening day of baseball season because that means I’ve had a huge increase in my contract because the highest paid pitchers start on opening day. (Whiteford 51-4)</td>
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inspire the team, used to ask for Pirate home runs with phrases like "Let’s have a bloop and a blast" or "Let’s go downtown" (Whiteford 56). A bloop is a soft hit beyond the infield and a blast is a home run, and to "go downtown" means to hit a ball out of the park for a homerun, like a player could hit a ball all the way to "downtown." Some announcers consistently refer to high, inside fastballs as "chin music" and "getting into a batter’s kitchen," or they talk of a pitcher fanning a batter (striking him out) or batter whiffing (striking out). This is the language of the inner circle, the dugout, the training room. On this level, language is much like fashion: everything old is new again. Coffin says of the fickle nature of baseballspeak, that the "in" vocabulary of baseballspeak in the inner circles of the game "comes and goes with amazing rapidity," but then he predicted that "tater" would die when George Scott retired (56). After fourteen years in the majors, Scott retired in 1979, and Dennis Eckersley and other players are still using the word today.

When words and phrases of baseballspeak move beyond the player level, it is a metaphorical move in nature and transference, like the word, "fanning" or to "fan." That a batter makes a circle with his bat, like a fan, when he strikes out is easily linked with the concept of a pitcher "fanning" a batter. It’s simple to see that this kind of metaphor making is begun in the literal then
transformed into metaphor by the comparison of the 

fanning (sweeping motion of the bat) to that of a fan.

6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

The American baseball discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise. The community has an ever changing membership, stable at around one thousand members, who enter as rookies (apprentices) and through interaction with the veterans (journeymen) learn to speak the language of the community. Every team has veterans and rookies that interact on a daily basis and consistently influence each other's language. The departure of members does not leave a void in the community as new players are constantly replacing retirees. The retired players do not necessarily cease to use baseballspeak (especially if they become announcers or reporters) but they do cease to be members of the inner circle of the players, coaches, managers and such. But as members of other communities after baseball, they spread the language through use of analogy, metaphor and repetition. As lawyers, salesmen or stamp collectors, they influence others by their speech, who in turn influence others and so on.

Demonstrating how baseball fulfills the six criteria proves that a baseball discourse community exists. This, in
itself, is not a great linguist break-through nor is it unusual; many communities could fulfill Swales’s criteria. What makes the discourse community of baseball a more worthy subject of study than most is that the discourse, the language, is part of the tradition of baseball, a part of American culture and language. The language of baseball is linked to both the ideology and the mythology of the game through metaphor, and again, through metaphor, the language is linked to culture. Metaphor makes the myth and supports the ideology. Metaphor is also the key to learning language and contributes to the semantic range of the language. Other communities may not have as large a population base, nor would they have the advanced vocabulary or ways of speaking, creating language and knowing how to use it that baseball does. The language begins in the inner levels, but because of the immense appeal of the game the language and metaphors, eventually transfer from one sphere to another until what was baseballspeak exclusively becomes a metaphor for something else in another community. And because the baseball discourse community members interact with countless other community members, it’s often hard to distinguish who first shared which language with whom.

Communication In and Out of the Community

The levels of the American baseball discourse community are much like the levels of any discourse community anywhere, much like a spiral with the smallest, most elite group forming
the core. At the innermost levels, the members speak in exclusive texts. At the outer, more populated levels, the members speak a modified version of the exclusive text, based on knowledge acquired through limited association and interaction with the first-level, core members. As the community members, both exclusive and otherwise, interact with members of other communities, overall language usage is influenced and changed. This sort of evolution also parallels the evolution of language in general in our country. As American English has become a melting pot composed of parts of other languages, so has baseballspeak influenced and become part of American English. (Please see TABLE II for more details on this interaction and the relationship of members in the baseball discourse community.)

While looking at TABLE II, imagine the first level of the community as a tiny, tight spiral with elite core members. As the community membership grows outward and upward, the spiral gets larger and taller until it touches the outer and upper levels of the spirals of other communities. Members who inhabit the innermost levels of the spiral may move up the spiral and back down to their original level at will. Members may not move below their original level unless they become initiated to that subsequent lower level. Because of the movement of language from inner/low level to outer/high level and back again, both members on the inside and outside of the baseball community may touch any level within the community and any level within other communities. At these points of
### TABLE II

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<tr>
<th>Levels of the American Baseball Discourse Community</th>
<th>Members of the American Baseball Discourse Community</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1st Level of Speech Community</strong></td>
<td>This group includes all those who are involved in the game on a daily basis: players, managers, coaches, trainers, owners, umpires, groundskeepers, bat persons, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes spoken communication and non-verbal communication such as the signs used between players and coaches, catchers and pitchers, and between umpires.</td>
<td><strong>2nd Level of Speech Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Level of Speech Community</strong></td>
<td>This group includes the announcers for radio broadcast as well as for television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes only oral communication.</td>
<td><strong>1st Level of Written Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st Level of Written Community</strong></td>
<td>The baseball writers that make up this group are the bridge between the first two levels of the speech community and the first level of the written community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes oral communication with members of the speech community which is translated into writing.</td>
<td><strong>3rd Level of Speech Community and 2nd Level of Written Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Level of Speech Community and 2nd Level of Written Community</strong></td>
<td>This group includes devoted baseball fans who become directly involved with the 2nd level of the speech community by listening to broadcasts of baseball games, and with the 1st level of the written community, by direct involvement as an audience for the writers. As well, many fans write accounts of baseball, called fan writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes both oral and written communication as listeners/readers and as participants. (As levels increase, the members' resemblance to real speech and written discourse communities is only academic as those members do not participate according to the criteria established above. But for purposes of overall community interaction explained later, I continue to name peripheral members as part of the overall community to avoid confusion.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levels of the American Baseball Discourse Community</td>
<td>Members of the American Baseball Discourse Community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4th Level of Speech Community and 3rd Level of Written Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes oral and written communication for occasional, part-time participants in the community rather than full-time members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The members on this level participate in the baseballspeak discourse community only occasionally by listening to or watching a ball game or once in a while reading the sports pages.</td>
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| **5th Level of Speech Community and 4th Level of Written Community** |
| Includes oral and written communication of an accidental nature. Participation in the lower, elite levels of the community is neither sought nor usually understood. |
| This group includes the general population who are aware of baseball but never consciously participate in the game by listening to, watching or reading about the game. Their knowledge and participation is limited to what members may inadvertently share with them or what knowledge they may occasionally stumble across. |

intersection, language exchange can take place. Thus, accountants, who interact with members in the outer regions of the baseball discourse community or belong there themselves, may occasionally use a baseball expression learned from a member at the inner level of baseball to convey meaning when speaking to other accountants. For instance, one accountant might refer to another, "star" accountant as the "cleanup hitter" for their firm, meaning the one who comes in at important times to assist with critical work. In baseballspeak, the cleanup hitter is the batter (the fourth
one up to bat) who hits often enough to allow the greatest
number of other batters, turned base runners, to make it home
to score. Typically, the strongest hitter or most successful
batter on a team is the cleanup hitter. Other accountants,
besides the original accountant speaker, who had interacted
with members of the various levels of the baseball discourse
community or were members themselves (e.g., the accountant who
is a baseball fan) would understand the usage of such a
phrase. And chances are that even accountants with little
knowledge of baseball might recognize "cleanup hitter" in the
given context. Conversely, a member at the innermost level of
baseball, the level of the players, will occasionally borrow
and use a word or words from an outer level member, such as a
home run in an "elevator shaft" to describe a high fly ball
which travels straight up and back down again in a confined
area, like an elevator shaft.

The spiral image, then, is a complicated one in which
speakers or writers who belong to many communities circulate
within countless discourse spirals changing spirals or
communities as quickly as changing their minds. But the image
of the interacting levels and intersecting spirals works to
demonstrate the confusion and overlapping nature of discourse
communities, both spoken and written. One person can belong
to many groups, and often diction can intermingle for
startling results and interesting linguistic twists. Language
is, after all, the product of people, and therefore, it can be
assumed that language is often irrational, unpredictable but always delightful.

The Silent Baseballspeak

At the core of baseball communication on the field are signals or signs, the silent baseballspeak. In order to communicate over space and through the noise of crowds, managers must give signals to players to indicate what they are to do next. Catchers and pitchers use signs. As well, the first and third base coaches use signals to communicate to the batters, the runners or their bench. Even the umpires have their own set of signals or signs to communicate when circumstances prevent conversation.

Many of the signs are simple but become elaborate combinations as one team tries to prevent the other from stealing their signs and learning what course of action is planned. Often to prevent stealing of signs by the opposing team, a manager will have several people giving signs, only one of whom will be "hot," or the one to whom the player should pay attention. They may also prearrange with players which signal will be "hot" (Loughran, October 1991). For instance, the hit and run sign may be indicated by adjusting an article of clothing, but only if it's the third sign in a sequence of many signs and only if the man to the left of the manager is adjusting his clothing. A team may also regularly change signs to keep ahead of sign thieves. Catchers, too, may alternate the sequence of their signs, or alter them, if
there is a runner on second base who can easily see every signal as well as the pitcher.

The silent language of the game acts as an agent of separation between the players and the fans. Most of the signs are arbitrarily assigned a physical movement. For instance, there is no natural sign for the hit and run play. Signs are concocted based on what is the easiest thing to remember, not because there are physical movements that inherently indicate a hit and run. If signs were not arbitrary, then they would be understood by any observer and secrecy would be lost. Besides this, most observers of the game are not educated in the interpretation of signals or in sign stealing, and are left out of this communicative loop. But some signs have bridged the gap between the field and the stands.

Like the spoken language of the game, some of this silent baseballspeak has moved into the realm of the everyday. The signs that have made the leap from the field to the fans are usually the ones which have a natural movement intrinsic to the meaning of the sign, such as the "out" sign or the "safe" sign, and do not have an arbitrary relationship to the physical movement assigned. The safe signal of the umpires--palms down, hands put together then spread apart--is used to indicate a player is safe at a base. The signal is also used "not only to indicate that a tennis shot is good, but also to indicate that there is no real problem in a particular situation" (Coffin 67). The clenched fist and outstretched
thumb of an umpire passed over the shoulder or waved in the air indicates a player is out on a play or out of the game altogether". This signal is also understood outside of baseball and can be used to demonstrate what is wanted, that someone should leave or get "out", or what has happened, that someone has just left or gotten "out." But these few signs that have moved beyond the field are relatively minor compared to the silent language regularly revised and "spoken" by the players, managers and coaches.

The Social Nature of Baseballspeak

In the baseball discourse community, specific baseball language originally functioned to assist in communication between players. If agreed upon word usage functioned correctly, then the game went smoothly. When players couldn't communicate, things went wrong. Eventually oral agreement became the written rules for the Major Leagues. And while the written rules were by no means stagnant, most often the way a player learned to play baseball and speak the language was (and is) by oral initiation and imitation of older members of the community of baseball. The way anyone learns language is by this same method which combines metaphor and imitation. Bartel states that all people are born with the ability to learn language, but what's so miraculous about this is that children, like rookie ballplayers, are "then able to perfect whatever language he or she hears, even though that language is likely to be fragmentary and erratic, since parents [or
veterans] do little in the way of formal instruction" (75). Neither do veterans provide rookies with lists of vocabulary words that are in vogue. The current usage is something the rookies learn by listening and adopting and, in some cases, adapting to create a new metaphor. Even as early as 1912, baseball journalist, Hugh Fullerton wrote:

Baseball needs a Webster and a standing-Revision Board to keep the dictionary of the game up to date. The sport is building its own language so steadily that... interpreters will have to be maintained in every grand stand to translate for the benefit of those who merely love the game and do not care to master it thoroughly. (Dickson Dictionary xiii)

Vocabulary, as in any group, evolves in baseball for a purpose, and words are assigned meaning metaphorically. As this metaphorization takes place, the members also learn the way to use the language they acquire. In his article "Rhetoric's 'Audience' and Linguistics' 'Speech Community': Implications for Understanding Writing, Reading and Text," Martin Nystrand says, "We go about both knowing things and making them known by relating them to other, comparable things. In other words, relationships are significant only if they are made--indeed CAN be made--in the context of a particular system or framework" (17) such as the structured framework of a baseball game. It also helps that baseball is played every day from early spring through early fall. This repetition of imagery and communication enhances the learning process and the ability of the participants to internalize the entire operation of language, baseball and communication.
Aside from the innermost circle of baseball, that of the players and coaches, baseball writers and announcers may well be the most pervasive users and creators of colorful baseball metaphors simply because they must describe the same kind of action over and over and therefore, must be continually creative and inventive. In Baseball: The Early Years, Harold Seymour mentions the importance of metaphor in the journalists’ work who covered baseball in its youth:

The tendency of American speech toward colorful metaphor is well reflected in the baseball writing of the day. Teams that failed to score a run were "whitewashed," "calcimined," "skunked," "shut out," or "Chicagoed." Balls were not caught; "flies" were "hauled in," or "throws" "pulled down." Batters "wielded the ash," "slapped out a dandy single,"...

Seymour finds that the expressive language of journalists was not only entertaining but important socially as it bound together communities who had baseball in common:

The argot of baseball supplied a common means of communication and strengthened the bond which the game helped to establish among those sorely in need of it—the mass of urban dwellers and immigrants living in the anonymity and impersonal vortex of large industrial cities.... With the loss of traditional ties known in a rural society, baseball gave to many the feeling of belonging. (351)

And Nystrand agrees with Seymour that speaking baseball draws together divisive groups through knowledgeable use of the language. As he says, within discourse communities, we go about knowing not only what to say but have developed "ways-of-speaking" (15) which implies knowing what to say, to whom and when.
The journalists had a difficult job in the beginning of baseball reporting. Daily, they had to delight their readers over a long baseball season with a relatively small lexicon of baseball language at their disposal. Even today, writing daily on baseball can be a challenge to the best of writers. Coffin sympathizes with the reporters, then and now: "Facing the tedious task of describing the same events day after day, the newsmen and announcers frequently rely on colorful language to make the routine dramatic" (62).

Occasionally, journalists even became vitriolic when describing the play in a game, players, managers or owners. The readers loved this kind of word play and faithfully followed their favorite reporters. The colorful language of baseball writers not only helped to sell newspapers, but also help to spread the popularity of baseball. Seymour says, "Even those who could not witness the games were able to enjoy them vicariously. People could learn the language of baseball and follow its development through the sports page" (351). The same is true of the writers and announcers of today. The vocabulary has changed somewhat as some metaphors have fallen out of favor and others have taken their place or others still have migrated into mainstream speech, but the journalists, with much help from the players, still create interesting new ways of speaking baseball through creation of metaphors. And their language still provides a bonding mechanism between players and fans or anyone who knows a little bit of baseballspeak.
Beyond Baseballspeak

Much of the influence baseballspeak has on other groups’ speech and writing is metaphorical. Other group members use language, phrases and words from baseball to describe situations in their daily or business lives. The phrases, "home run" and "struck out," have been incorporated into our daily language as metaphors for success and failure, respectively. This sort of influence is seen in all areas of society and is not the exclusive property of those who are prone to slang. It’s not just that the language of the baseball discourse community is learned metaphorically, but the words and phrases become metaphors in other communities. Just as Nystrand has said, we go about knowing things in terms of other things (17). This is precisely the relationship of baseballspeak to American English. Some baseballspeak terms and phrases are defined in APPENDIX I, a partial glossary. Most of the terms listed in the appendix are used metaphorically outside the baseball discourse community. Even though some of the metaphors are dead--clichés--they continue to be effective confirmation of baseball’s influence because they have transmogrified from literal meaning to metaphorical or from metaphorical meaning back to literal. "Charley Horse" and "hit and run" are prime examples of how baseball language may begin as metaphor and then become a literal description, and how it may move from the literal to the metaphorical, and how each way of evolving influences mainstream speech and writing.
There are several stories of the origin of "Charley Horse" to describe a particular kind of leg cramp, but all agree that the term came from baseball. One story asserts that the term came from baseball players who had gone to the track and bet on a horse named Charlie who pulled up lame. The players then referred to any player with leg cramps as "our old Charlie horse" which eventually was shortened to just "Charlie Horse" to describe the muscle condition. Another story attributes the term to the son of a blacksmith who noticed that players limping because of muscle cramps looked like an old horse named Charlie employed at his father's shop (Dickson, Dictionary 91). The term has become so synonymous with the condition that the Journal of the Medical Association officially changed the title of the injury from "Injury to Quadriceps Femoris" to "Charley Horse" in 1946. Coffin, in The Old Ball Game, is convinced that "most people would have trouble describing the ailment if the phrase were taken away from them" (59). This term began in the metaphorical and is now literally what it describes.

"Hit and run" is a baseball play and, unlike "Charley Horse," originated within the game itself. This offensive play, usually requested by the manager, is one in which a runner(s) on first and/or second base starts to run as soon as the pitcher releases the ball with the intention that the batter will hit the ball so that the runner(s) will be safe upon arrival at the new base. There is no dispute concerning this origin. The hit and run play was invented by John McGraw
and Wee Willie Keeler of the mid-1890's Baltimore Orioles. The play was meant to upset the opposing team's rhythm by striking quickly. The term began to be used to describe any number of non-baseball events which happened quickly and then were over, such as a hit and run auto accident, hit and run love or hit and run politics or picketing (Dickson, Dictionary 202). This term began literally within baseball and emerged as a metaphor in the communities outside of baseball, unlike "Charley Horse" which originated outside baseball, became a metaphor within baseball, then returned to mainstream speech as a literal definition.

The Other Side of Baseballspeak

Although baseballspeak is the source of many metaphors in American English, the reverse is also true. Baseballspeak borrows regularly from mainstream American English to create interesting metaphors to describe the game. Metaphor acts as a throughway by which language may travel from one community to another and back again. For instance, a "line drive may be referred to as an aspirin, a BB, a bolt, a clothesline, a frozen rope, a pea, a rocket and a seed" (Dickson, Dictionary xv). All these terms are part of the mainstream but baseballspeak has borrowed them and turned them into metaphors to describe a line drive. A line drive is a hard and relatively straight shot reminiscent of a frozen rope or a clothesline or as hard as a pea (uncooked, of course) or a seed. There is also an entire array of anatomical metaphors:
a pitcher’s arm is a gun (and frequently a pitcher with a great gun can throw smoke or heaters—fastballs), eyes are lamps, a neck or throat is a pipe (sometimes arms are pipes, too), hands are hooks, legs are wheels and feet are tires. Like the metaphors for "line drive," such metaphors describing a player’s anatomy make some physical sense.

The metaphors in baseballspeak which use terms borrowed from mainstream American English that make the least sense are those that begin with food and end with baseball. Does a potato ever look like a home run or vice versa? When does anything in baseball look like a can of corn, least of all a high fly ball, an easy out? How is it that good prospects for the major leagues look like bananas, but bad bats are banana stalks? But this doesn’t mean all the food metaphors are odd or that they aren’t plentiful. As Dickson states in the introduction to his dictionary:

So many allusions are made to food and dining—including pitches that seem to fall off the table—that a fairly well-balanced diet suggests itself in terms like can of corn, cup of coffee, fish cakes, banana stalk, mustard, pretzel, rhubarb, green pea, juice, meat hand, grapefruit league and tater. Among the many terms for the ball itself are apple, cantaloupe, egg, pea, potato and tomato. (xvi).

All this attention to food has to do with the pastoral, farming imagery in baseball. The minor leagues are the farm system, and players are harvested, just like food. There’s a bullpen near the outfield just like there might have been a bullpen near the cow pasture. And the leisurely pace of the game encourages hunger and thoughts of nourishment. Ercolano
says of all the food metaphors in baseball, "No wonder people are always eating at the ballpark" (vi).

The Language, the Metaphor and the Myth

Because of the long standing tradition of baseball and its inherent mythology and popular ideology, baseball has always had a substantial impact on American English. Much of the language of the game and its slang has become embedded in our daily communicative acts. So much of the language, learned by apprenticeship, remains within the sphere of the playing field, and undergoes continual revision. The inner circles regularly invent new metaphors and initiate privileged others into their language as they go along. But this is the way of all metaphor. Bartel states, "Popular metaphors illustrate the flexibility and growth of language. As metaphors are eroded by their own popularity, they are added to our stock of literal words and are then replaced by new metaphors" (17). This constant rehashing of baseballspeak keeps the inner circle of language somewhat fresh, but the community language only stays fresh until it is shared with others who then incorporate it into their speech and repeat the metaphors until they die and become clichés. The fact that many words and phrases have entered American speech and made themselves a home in standard English is evidence of baseballspeak's strength and the flexibility of American English. Coffin believes our language is probably better off for having been influenced by baseballspeak:
No other sport and few other occupations have introduced so many phrases, so many words, so many twists into our language as has baseball. The true test comes in the fact that old ladies who have never been to the ballpark, coquettes who don't know or care who's on first, men who think athletics begin and end with a pair of goalposts, still know and use a great deal of baseball-driven terminology. Perhaps other sports, in their efforts to replace baseball as "our national pastime," have two strikes on them before they come to bat. (74)

Coffin is probably right to portray baseballspeak in such glowing terms; as Ercolano said, the game’s lingo is part of what it is about baseball that connects us to our past. It is also part of what connects us to the message of the mythology of baseball and part of what keeps the ideology alive.

Beyond intimate consideration of language but connected to it, the metaphor is the key element in mythology. The connection between the language of the American baseball discourse community and other communities is the metaphor—mythology (and ideology) is the hook, metaphor is the line and language is the sinker, all three part of one process. The metaphor, on all levels within baseball, functions as an intellectual and emotional liaison between the baseball community and other communities, and it functions as a connection between the language and the myth, between the old and new members of the community, and between the game and those who don't know or care about baseball but who still use "baseball-driven terminology" (Coffin 75). If the game were not a national pastime, if the hero's journey and other mythic images were not intrinsic to the game, if baseball had changed enormously over the years, the language might not be so
influential because the community of speakers and writers might not be so widespread. And those on the periphery of the baseballspeak community might not be so eager to speak the language of their baseball heroes. Without the myth to support the language of the game, as well as supporting the game itself and keeping the ideology alive, baseballspeak might not be worthy of academic exploration. In fact, baseballspeak might not be such a dynamic force in American English.

Through metaphors, baseballspeak is made known to all levels of society. Acquiring skill in using it is a metaphorical process just like learning any language. To illustrate this theory, to prove that baseballspeak changed the face of American English, to show that discourse communities have specialized languages that can become metaphors for other activities in other communities, an alphabetical (and partial) list of definitions of baseball terms and phrases is compiled in APPENDIX I, A Partial Glossary of Baseball Words and Phrases. The word or phrase is listed first and underlined and is followed by the baseball origin or definition; the use in other discourse communities comes after with examples if necessary.
APPENDIX I

A Partial Glossary of Baseball Words and Phrases

A

Alibi Ike is referred to as a player who has an excuse for every fault and mistake. It was first used after Ring Lardner published a short story by that title with a player whose nickname was Alibi Ike. It has now come to mean any one who has excuses for everything that goes wrong.

At bat is to be at home base for a turn at trying to hit the ball. It is also used to mean someone expecting to be or in the limelight as in someone who finally got that big break in show business has finally gotten up to bat or gotten his chance at bat.

B

Ballpark figure is a rough estimate. It has an odd connection to baseball considering that most figures in baseball are precise. Dickson cites lexicographer Stuart Flexner as quoted by William Safire in the book I Stand Corrected: "Our Random House dictionary citation files show the term first started out as in the ballpark (1962), as when talking about figures estimates, etc.... Then, in 1968, we first recorded ballpark figure from The Seattle Times" (25).

Base is the white pillow-like object positioned around the infield that the runners must touch en route to home to score the run. In other community usage it has been used in a variety of ways: to "touch base" is to make contact of some kind; to "touch all the bases" or to "cover all the bases" is to be thorough; to be "off base" is to be wrong.

Base on balls is when the batter may advance to first base without hitting the ball because the pitcher has thrown four pitches outside the strike zone that the batter hasn't swung at. It also means that someone who waits for "a base on balls" forgoes any action in the hope that something will happen or it can mean to assume a passive posture in an attempt to force one's opponent to make a false move. A headline in the San Francisco News, February 22, 1950 reads "U.S. Should Stop Waiting for Bases on Balls" referring to our diplomatic relations with Bulgaria (Dickson 39).

Bat, in baseball, means the wooden implement used by players to hit the ball, or it can mean to take a turn at bat, to describe one's ability to hit, or a player seen in his role as a hitter. But these several definitions pale in comparison to the way American English has borrowed the word and expanded on
its use: "right off the bat" is from the start, immediately; "to go to bat for" is to stick up for someone else; "to not get the bat off one's shoulder" is to not be given a chance; "to bat two for three or three for four, etc." is to be only somewhat successful as in this newspaper headline "Mayor Bats Two for Three in Washington Circuit" (Dickson 41).

Bat 1000 or bat one thousand means to amass a hit for every at bat--a statistical impossibility after a few at bats. Batting one thousand has therefore come to mean a flawless performance or the achievement of perfection.

Batting average is the statistical measure of a player's effectiveness at the plate (offensively). But in other communities it is a measurement of success or failure in gradations. For instance, consider the following dialog between an unemployed man and his friend:

Friend: How goes the job hunt?

Unemployed Man: I'm batting zero.

The unemployed man has found no success in the job market. Franklin D. Roosevelt even used baseball metaphors in his speeches to whip Americans into a patriotic frenzy. In his second Fireside Chat, Roosevelt said "I have no expectation of making a hit every time I come to bat. What I seek is the highest possible batting average, not only from myself but for the team" (Colunga 25; The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt 2:165).

Beanball is a pitch deliberately thrown at the batter's body to inflict damage or intimidate. It is used sometimes to indicate a verbal assault in other communities. A phrase such as "George Bush Throws a Beanball at Bill Clinton's Economic Policy" would be an accurate use of beanball.

Bush, busher and bush league all refer to leagues below the majors, especially the lesser minor leagues--out where the bushes grow. It also means having to do with a group or class of things that is at best mediocre, but more likely inferior.

Can of corn is a phrase used to describe a fly ball that is caught easily. There are several baseball scholars who have pondered the origin of this phrase, all have this in common--it means an easy fly out. In other communities it therefore makes sense that can of corn has come to mean any easy accomplishment. There was even a court case nicknamed "Can of Corn Decision" because a thrown baseball was at the heart of the case (Dickson 84).
Charley Horse is the name for a muscular cramp, particularly in the legs. Like can of corn, Charley Horse has many theories of origin. Nevertheless, all theories point to its birth in baseball. It is now the standard phrase for muscular cramps in the legs demonstrating what an influence baseball has had on American English at all social levels (Dickson 91-2).

Cleanup hitter is the fourth position in the batting order. Assuming that all three previous batters get on base the cleanup hitter will "clean" up and bat all three home to score runs. It also means the most talented or skillful person in a group or a political candidate who can make changes in policy or impose reforms (Dickson 100).

Curve ball is a pitch that instead of traveling in a straight path to the plate appears to curve in or out from home plate. It has come to mean a surprise, a tough situation that wasn’t expected.

Doubleheader is two games played back to back on the same day. It also means any two consecutive events.

Double play is the execution of two outs on the same play. It also means any two things accomplished at once or very closely together.

First base is the first of all the bases the runners must pass and tag on their way to scoring a run at home, the fourth base. It is also used as a way to describe failure in an initial attempt at some endeavor, like "I never even got to first base on that deal." Also, it is the first step (usually kissing) in a sexual metaphor where each succeeding base is another step in the advance toward home base, or sexual intercourse.

Grand slam is a term used to describe a home run hit with the bases loaded. It also means any extraordinary event or thing. For instance, Denny’s restaurant chain advertises a "Grand Slam" breakfast special, professional tennis players do well when they are able to win one of the "Grand Slam" tournaments. There is also a "Grand Slam" of golf that apparently predates the baseball use but was much less popular and therefore, less influential. Grand slam is also a metaphor for sexual accomplishment.
Grandstand is the location where the main seating is in a ball park, usually right in back of the reserved seats around the infield. In other communities it is used as a verb—to show off.

Grandstand play is, based on the above definition of grandstand, a play in baseball in which a simple play is embellished to look daring, usually right in front of the grandstand seats. In other communities, especially the legal community, a grandstand play is an unexpected and dramatic courtroom move. It also means an attempt for the sensational that is really ineffective.

Ground rules are the rules specific to each ballpark. Each home team establishes these rules and then shares them with the visiting team. In other groups it means any set of rules established in advance of an event. Tom Clancy uses this phrase in his novel, Sum of All Fears, to describe a negotiation between two characters (58); they decide to set up the ground rules before they begin.

Hit and run play is a strategic move called by the manager for implementation by the batter and runner designed to advance the runner to the next base. The batter must hit the designated pitch because the runner on base begins to run as soon as the ball is pitched. This phrase began to be used, as early as 1929, to describe auto accidents where the driver of the car leaves the scene of the accident. It’s also used to describe things that happen quickly or suddenly like "hit and run" love.

Homerun is a ball hit out of the park or far enough away from home base that the batter may touch all the bases and advance to home for a score, without the possibility of being tagged out. It is also used to describe any resounding successes. Gene Siskel used this phrase to describe Kathie Lee Gifford’s successful repartee on "Good Morning America"; Dan Rather also used a phrase related to homerun to describe Jesse Jackson’s successful speech at the Democratic National Convention. During a commercial break update, Rather alluded to a later broadcast in which viewers could see parts of Jesse Jackson’s speech. Rather said, "He [Jackson] really hit one out of the park." As well, homerun is used to indicate the highest level of sexual achievement on a scale of first base to home base, home base being, relatively speaking, best.

Innings are how the game is divided so that each team evenly plays offense and defense. Each team has a chance to bat at least three times and get the other team out at least three
times. If one team is ahead at the end of nine innings, the game is over. Related to this is extra innings, which are the result of a tie game which must proceed longer than the normal nine innings to break the tie. It also means any event that runs over the original projected ending time. Dan Rather, during a news break, describing the Democratic National Convention, said, "Be sure to stay tuned, it looks like the convention is going into extra innings tonight." Also related to innings is late innings which means the 7th, 8th or 9th innings in any game or it has also become a metaphor for the latter portion of any event.

J

Jinx was first used in baseball to indicate a streak of bad luck. Because of the word's extremely strong relationship to baseball it was credited in scholarly circles (like the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary) as baseball slang, not general slang. It is now used to mean bad luck or some act or thing that is the harbinger of bad luck.

L

Long ball hitter is a player who usually hits home runs. It is also used to indicate stamina or dramatic performance. Rocky Marciano, the boxer, was said to be a long ball hitter because of his extraordinary ability and appeal (Dickson 249).

Lou Gehrig's disease is the popular name for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). It is the disease which killed Lou Gehrig, Hall of Fame player with the New York Yankees. The popular name has so stuck to the disease, many would be hard pressed to acknowledge a name for it other than Lou Gehrig's disease.

M

Major league indicates the highest level of play or competition in baseball and refers to the name of the combination of the National and American Leagues. Major league also works as a metaphor for anything which is of the highest degree: major league backache, major league homework assignment. In this vein, minor league denotes the level of professional play just below the major leagues but has also come to mean mediocrity as in, "He only thinks he's hot. Believe me, he's strictly minor league."

N

New ballgame, as in "all new ballgame," is used to describe a ballgame in which the action turns around very quickly. The term also works to underscore the fact that each day a new baseball game is played; play does not continue serially, each
game is brand new. It also can describe any situation in which changes take place to tip the scales of power. For instance, an attorney may say to his client after a new witness has been introduced that may enhance their case, "This changes everything. We've got ourselves a brand new ballgame."

Not much on the ball refers to a pitcher who isn't too effective; he doesn't have much on the ball. It also can be said of a person who is intellectually challenged.

On deck indicates the position of the next batter up. He waits outside the field of play between the batter and the dugout. On deck also refers to anyone whose turn is next in order. A doctor might call out to his nurse, "Who's up and who's on deck?" meaning who does he see right now and who does he see next. Despite the nautical connotations normally associated with "deck," the phrase "on deck" originated in baseball (Dickson 283).

On the ball describes a pitcher who is doing a good job at deceiving the batter. The pitcher can also put a little something on the ball which means he may put an extra twist on the pitch or apply a foreign substance that alters the path of the pitch. This phrase has become a metaphor for intelligence and ability to perform in any realm.

Out in left field is the phrase used to describe an oddity or someone who is "out of it" in baseball or outside baseball. It can be applied to anyone or anything that is out of the ordinary or misguided in all walks of life. There are several theories about the origin of this phrase two of which are worth mentioning. The first one says the phrase originated with the "insults heaped on the kids who were stupid enough to buy left field seats in Yankee Stadium, which for many years would have put them far away from a right fielder named Babe Ruth" (Dickson 288). The second begins with "the Neuropsychiatric Institute, in back of left field in the old, 19th-century West Side Park in Chicago... 'When someone said that one was out in left field, the implication was that one was behaving like the occupants of the Neuropsychiatric Institute, which was literally out in left field’" (Dickson 288). This is one of the few phrases that means exactly in baseball what it does in other discourse communities.

Pinch hit is to come to the plate and bat in place of the original batter. In other communities, it means any substitution or take over for a regular performer. For instance, "While Joe, the graphic artist, is out on paternity
leave, I’ll pinch hit in the advertising department” is a valid use of the phrase.

**Play ball** is the traditional phrase that opens every game; it is uttered by the umpire. It also means to cooperate or participate, a team effort. Dickson cites this example, “If the union will play ball with us on this one, I think we can make the deadline” (304).

**Play-by-play** is a continuous description of the action of the game, each play is noted and broken down for the listener or audience. It has come to mean any detailed recounting of anything, like, “I thought I was going to fall dead asleep halfway through that play-by-play of Cindy’s wedding.”

**Rain check** dates as far back as 1884 when the first ones were issued to make up for the rain-out during a St. Louis championship game. It has consequently become a descriptor for any deferred or postponed acceptance, and it is also commonly used to mean the coupon issued for future redemption of sale items not in stock during a sale in retail establishments.

**Right in there pitching**, is a compliment, which denotes a pitcher who is working very hard. Accordingly, it can be used to describe anyone who is putting forth the best effort possible.

**Screw ball** is a kind of pitch thrown which curves in toward the batter rather than away from him like a regular curve ball (this assumes that a right-handed pitcher is throwing to a right-handed batter). Because it tended to be a different, wild, weird pitch, screwiness came to be associated with the purveyors of the pitch as well as the pitch itself. It is used in baseball still to describe the pitch and players and is used outside baseball to indicate eccentricity or insanity.

**Slugger** is a term used to describe a home run hitter. It is also a term of endearment from, for instance, an adult to a child as in “Why, yer a right little slugger, ain’tcha.” The phrase may or may not be accompanied by a healthy pinch of the child’s cheek between the index finger and thumb of the adult speaker.

**Swing for the fences** means to attempt a home run by swinging with all your strength. It also is a metaphor for trying your best to succeed.
Switch hitter means a batter who can bat equally well from the left as the right. It has also come to mean someone who radically can or does change their sexual orientation as in bisexuals, someone who "swings both ways" (Dickson 386).

Triple play is a situation in baseball where all three outs occur during one play. This is also a euphemism for a sexual encounter between three people; for example, "a March 1968 ad for an X-rated film in the San Francisco Chronicle features Bianca, Mona and Sylvia in Triple Play" (Dickson 402).
NOTES


2. Chapter III is somewhat limited in scope. I've interviewed primarily professional ball players, management and associated journalists and writers. Occasionally a college player or coach, a fan or scholar was consulted. But because it is at the professional level that much of the language is developed and used (as is usual in discourse communities), it is more reasonable to look at this primary core of the community. While other levels of baseball play an important part in the baseball community, garnering their share of media coverage and contributing to the baseball lexicon, they could not be a principal focus for this portion of the thesis because of their unwieldy numbers. Accordingly, when referring to the American baseball discourse community, it is the major league baseball community that is meant in this context, but this shouldn't negate the cultural importance of other members of the larger baseball community.


4. Like banging a bat three times to ward off bad luck, some players never put away any equipment before the last out, and some teams even have a charm of some kind which must be in the right place before, during or after a game to insure good luck or prevent bad.

5. While it could be argued that this is stretching comparisons to the limit approaching infinity because baseballs haven't always been what they are now, I argue that they are what they are now. Just as the game has changed somewhat, so have the balls. 108 stitches or no, this connection exists.


7. The bullpen is usually located near or alongside the outfield (pasture). While baseball uses the term to describe where the relievers stay until called into the game, it is also the term for where real bulls wait until they are called into action, or rather, are put out to stud in the pasture (outfield). When their job is finished, the
bulls all end up back from whence they came, just like the relievers. The relievers in the bullpen are also typically the players who have the most time available to converse during a game, hence a proportionally higher level of "bull" may be heard from a relief pitcher. For more on baseball "bull," see Dennis Eckersley’s "baseball speak" in TABLE I in Chapter III.

8. This line is originally from Pope’s Essay on Man, Epistle III:

Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be blest.


10. In the Major Leagues, signs or signals are almost always assigned on an individual basis. As players are traded or transferred between teams, they are, then, only able to take their particular signs with them. On the amateur level, teams have group signs since little "trading" is ever done.

11. Major league umpires usually leave their thumbs tucked into the clenched fist to indicate an out, but the signal when transferred to silent language outside the baseball speak elite core is still widely used with thumb outstretched. Also, the umpire may point with his index finger toward the dugout to indicate when a player is thrown out of a game or must "hit the showers" (Page, July 1993).
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