

Explaining the Joy in the Text of Jim Bouton's Ball Four:

A Study in Analyzing Prose Rhythm
by Reader Expectations and Colometrics

George D. Gopen
Professor Emeritus of the Practice of Rhetoric
Duke University

Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* is clearly a "good read." It is a "page turner." We smile, we cackle, we think, we are moved. How does his writing make us do these things?

In my work both as an English professor and as a writing consultant to professionals (lawyers, scientists, and academics), I have developed two new techniques for explaining why prose succeeds (or fails) to communicate to readers what the writer was trying to say. I call these techniques the "Reader Expectation Approach to Writing" and "Colometrics." This essay will explain a bit about them, demonstrating through them how and why Jim Bouton's book has continued to engage readers for half a century.

I. Introduction: A Good Rhetorical Ear

Look at the way he invites us in as readers. The opening moment of his Introduction demonstrates not only an awareness of the power of rhetoric, but a wish to engage in it.

I'm 30 years old and I have these dreams. (p. xvii-xix)

Each of the next 3 paragraphs begins with "I dream"; and then the next paragraph begins with "I dream all these things, I really do."

This is an attempt at "the high style," in which most of the rest of the book is not written. He apparently felt the opening was a place to be formal, to attempt the uplifting. While the book is mostly anecdotal in nature, its wholly serious purpose is an attempt to investigate the qualities of his athletic career and the life that he lived because of it. For him, this was indeed his dream, his vision. When he wants to be serious, he can be serious. Even his humor is, in significant ways, serious.

In 1970, what tone, what technique, and what allusion might one summon to make prose soar with elevated meaning? What was the greatest American rhetorical moment in the previous decade - indeed, in the whole of the 20th century? It was Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech (August 28, 1963). Bouton clearly alludes to it by his stating he has "these dreams." But, even more significantly, he refers to it by adopting its powerful reliance on the number 3 - a number revered in our religions and folklore as a symbol of completeness and perfection. Can you imagine Goldilocks and the four bears? Too many bears.

Threes organize. Threes lull. Threes achieve satisfaction by fulfilling the expectation that three there will be. They let us know where we are. If we hear of bear #2, then we know what to expect of the next sentence. And we know #3 will bring us to an end of this current narrative unit.

So Bouton follows his “I have a number of dreams” statement by giving us three of those dreams. He is honest, telling us that he dreams of different kinds of successes in baseball, hoping that, at age 30, he will yet be able to accomplish them.

Then, with an irony that arose only long after he retired, he tells us, “You can always be a teacher or a social worker when you reach 35. That gives me 5 more years” Who could have guessed back then that his greatest fame would come as an author?

In addition, Bouton understood or intuited that MLK’s famous passage relies on the ancient rhetorical figure of speech called anaphora. It is the name given to structuring a passage by repeating the same thing at the beginning of each sub-unit. His use of “I ... dream” here is anaphoric: After being highlighted at the end of the first sentence, it begins each of the next three paragraphs, organizing the content, convincing us that this order will be maintained until we have a signal that the anaphoric passage has come to an end. His fifth paragraph proclaims that end by beginning it with, “I dream all these things. I really do.” It is like the crash of the cymbals at the end of an energetic symphony.

Had Bouton used but this one rhetorical figure of speech, anaphora, we could assign it to his ear for imitating the Reverend King; but we find him also using anaphora’s rhetorical sibling, epistrophe.

Epistrophe is the name given to structuring a passage by repeating the same thing at the ending of each sub-unit. Sometimes he uses it to enhance the escalating drama of a moment; but he also uses it to produce humor.

We were winning the second game 4-0 in the eighth when Fred Talbot, who had a beautiful three-hitter going, got tired. He came out with a runner on base and none out. Disaster set in promptly. First Joe Schultz used Locker. Then O'Donoghue, then Segui. Everybody in the Minnesota lineup got a hit. Rod Carew, just off the bus after coming back from his weekend in the army, ran into the stadium, threw on his uniform and, with his fly still unbuttoned, got a hit. I swear they pulled an usher out of the stands and he got a hit. We lost 5-4. (p. 259)

Bouton first gives us the effect of epistrophe by ending three phrases with the names of the three relief pitchers - "Schultz used Locker. Then O'Donoghue, then Segui." First one, then another, then another. (Note that there are three of them.) And what is the result of this parade of pitchers? - a parade of epistrophic hits. First everyone got a hit; then the superstar Carew - his sentence being interrupted by his chaotic last-minute, disheveled manner of arrival - got a hit; and then even a purveyor of hot dogs (fictitiously, and therefore deliciously hyperbolically) is whisked onto the field, and even he got a hit. (Note that there are three disparate hitters - "everybody," "Carew," and the "usher.") He started the paragraph with them winning 4-0 and ended it by them losing 5-4. This catastrophe is delivered to us with the whirlwind of the pitchers and the strangely different hitters; but that chaos is kept in order by the rhetorical devices of epistrophe and sets of three.

I am not suggesting Jim Bouton studied rhetoric; I am suggesting he has a good ear for its uses.

II. Reader Expectations: The Stress Position

In nearly 40 years of teaching writing to lawyers, scientists, and other professionals, I have discovered that for 250 years we have been barking up the wrong educational tree. We have been concentrating on the writer – what the writer must or must not do – and rewarding (or punishing) students on the basis of their ability to conform to what Society demands of language use. That is the school world. But in the professional world, the important person is not the writer; it is the reader. The bottom line definition of quality of writing depends simply on this question: Did the reader get delivery of what the writer was trying to send? If the answer is “yes,” the writing was good enough; if “no,” it wasn’t.

The breakthrough concept behind my Reader Expectation Approach (REA) has to do directly with this question of delivery. If we only knew how readers go about making sense of the words on a page, we could tell writers how to go about making those necessary deliveries as effortlessly and accurately as possible. Here is the single most important discovery to come out of REA: Readers take the grand majority of their clues for the interpretation process not from word meanings but rather from the structural location of words in a sentence. Where a word appears in a sentence will control most of the use to which it will be put by most readers.

In trying to make of any English sentence the sense the writer intended, readers need the correct answers to four essential questions. If readers get even one wrong, their interpretation will not be the one the writer intended. The four questions:

1. What is going on here?
2. Whose story is this?
3. How does this sentence connect backwards and forwards to its neighbors?
4. What are the pieces of information in this sentence that should be read with special emphasis?

Remarkably, the interpretive clues for the answers to all of these essential questions are sent to the reader not through the choice of words, but rather through where the words are located. Quite simply, readers know where to look for what.

The fourth of these questions is the most critical. As readers, we know where we wish to apply extra emphasis. As REA demonstrates, readers have a natural tendency – and desire – to give greater emphasis to any moment in a sentence when the grammatical structure comes to a full halt. This is created by the proper use of a colon, semi-colon, or period. I call such a moment of grammatical closure a “Stress position.” If writers can deposit their items of greatest interest in Stress positions on a continual basis, more than 90% of their readers will read the sentence the same way – the way the writer intended.

(Note: A Stress position can never occur at a comma. There are so many different comma uses in English that we never know what job a comma is trying to do until we have read past it; and thus there can never be full grammatical closure at a comma.)

What if we could call the reader's attention to the important stuff in every sentence by printing those words in red? If everyone knew to stress the red words, they would always stress what you wanted them to stress. Sadly, they won't let us constantly print words in red; but placing those words in Stress positions works just as well.

Jim Bouton has an intuitive sense of this. His putting stress-worthy material in a Stress position on a regular basis makes his prose immediately available for comprehension. It also makes it continually forward flowing: No re-reading is necessary for the reader to reach full comprehension. This is one of the two major reasons *Ball Four* is such a page-turner.

Almost all professionals in this country suffer from a Stress position problem. As writers, we are so engaged with the new idea we want a sentence to convey that we tend not to be willing to wait for the end of the sentence to announce it. Down it goes - and then we can add all the modifications we want. Very few people intuit for themselves the communicative power of the Stress position. In my last 15 years of dealing one-on-one with thousands of research scientists, I have encountered only two who did not suffer from a Stress position problem.

Jim Bouton seems to be able to sense that the important thing in a sentence belongs at the end. He places it there much more often than most of my scientist and lawyer clients. Unobtrusively, he draws

our attention away from the middle of the sentence and towards that which he has deposited in the Stress position. That is remarkable; and it is the surest sign of a good writer.

Sometimes he uses it to maintain order in his narrative. Sometimes he uses it to create humor. Here is an example of both.

In September 1966 when the Yankees were in ninth place, 26.5 games out of first place, Murray Olderman of Newspaper Enterprises Association, asked me what I thought was wrong with the Yankees. After carefully examining our statistics and lofty place in the standings I said, “I guess we just stink.” The headline in the papers the next day said “Bouton: Yankees stink.” The distortion was only minute.

[Manager Ralph Houk calls him in to warn him about talking to the news media. Bouton responds he wasn’t really misquoted.]

Houk didn’t think that was enough. He thought I should say more. I asked him like what. And he said I should apologize to the players. I said I would. And I did. I’m not sure what for, though. I mean, boy, did we stink. (pg. 87)

One can follow the narrative and sense the humor of this passage just from perusing a list of its Stress position occupants:

- ... wrong with the Yankees
- ... we just stink
- ... “Bouton: Yankees stink”
- ... only minute

... was enough
 ... say more
 ... apologize to the players
 ... I would
 ... I did
 ... (what for), though
 ... boy, did we stink

Bouton's candid use of the Stress position steals the show here. The repetition of "stink" in the second and third sentences (again a use of epistrophe) make it seem like that is all there is to say. The repeat ending in the last sentence drives home that point with finality. And remember the power of that magic number 3: The third time here is indeed the charm. Olderman is prying; Houk is exasperated; and yet all Bouton has to say is "we stink" - a trio of verbs.

All Reader Expectations can be violated to good effect. They are not rules; they are predictions about what most readers will do most of the time. Note that Bouton also has an ear fine enough to undercut - just a bit - the "I'm not sure what for" by stumbling past it to the final, hesitant word "though." This momentary anticlimax produces the humor needed for the moment. It gives us the sense that he is second-guessing his agreement to comply with Houk's demand - and winking at us in the process. It sets us up for his final Stress position.

I can transform - and thereby decrease - the quality of his first three sentences simply by re-locating the comic material elsewhere than in Stress positions. I've retained all the information; all I've done is to alter its structural placement. Here is the resulting, inferior revision:

I was asked what I thought was wrong with the Yankees in September 1966, when the Yankees were in ninth place, 26.5 games out of first place, by Murray Olderman of Newspaper Enterprises Association. I said, “I guess we just stink,” after carefully examining our statistics and lofty place in the standings. “Bouton: Yankees stink,” ran the headline in the papers the next day.

The narrative remains; the humor has evaporated. Rhetoric is like real estate: The three most important things are location, location, and location.

III. Reader Expectations: Inter-Sentence Linkage

Whenever Bouton wants, he is able to insert in the midst of his humor and cynicism a moment of lyricism. Here is one such moment. He is skillful not only in the way he creates it but also in the way he works his way out of it and back to the business at hand.

Riding back to Tempe I had a beautifully serene feeling about the whole day, which shows how you go up and down an emotional escalator in this business. It was my first really serene day of the Spring and I felt, well, I didn't care where the bus was going or if it ever got there, and I was content to let the countryside roll by. It was desert, of course, with cactus and odd rock formations that threw back the flames of the setting sun. The sun was a golden globe, half-hidden, and as we drove along it appeared to be some giant golden elephant running

along the horizon and I felt so good I remembered something Johnny Sain used to talk about.

He used to say . . . (p. 77)

He takes us on a bus ride. That ride progresses smoothly from one end of a sentence to the other and then from that sentence to the next one. Here is the passage again, with those linkages italicized. (Recall the third REA question from above: “How does this sentence connect backwards and forwards to its neighbors?”)

Riding back to Tempe I had a beautifully serene feeling about the whole day, which shows how you go up and down an emotional escalator in this business. It was my first really serene day of the Spring and I felt, well, I didn’t care where the bus was going or if it ever got there, and I was content to let the countryside roll by. It was desert, of course, with cactus and odd rock formations that threw back the flames of the setting sun. The sun was a golden globe, half-hidden, and as we drove along it appeared to be some giant golden elephant running along the horizon and I felt so good I remembered something Johnny Sain used to talk about.

He used to say . . .

Readers will try to connect a new sentence to its predecessor as soon as they can. A writer who allows for that to happen with ease, by placing the backwards link as early as possible, will be greatly increasing the readers’ ability to continue flowing forward.

If you still have the concept of Stress position in mind as you read this bus trip example, you might want to raise the question why Bouton pulls his Stress punch somewhat in the first and last full sentences. Wouldn't "emotional escalator" be a stronger end to the first sentence than the weakling "in this business"? Wouldn't the giant golden elephant on the horizon be a better place to end than stumbling along to introduce that pitching guru, Johnny Sain?

I think Bouton made the right choices for both of these. The escalator and the elephant at the end of their sentences would make the paragraph sound more like it was trying awfully hard to be lyrical. Bouton obviously had a delicious time writing this brief and elegant description of the trip; but that is not the major business at hand in this book. So instead of his elephants basking in the Stress position so that we may admire them center stage, Bouton undercuts their stardom by refusing them that moment of syntactic closure; instead, he runs us right back to Johnny Sain. The first few words of the next sentence -- "He used to say . . ." -- bring us back to the concerns of baseball. They connect backwards with great ease because Johnny Sain was allowed to occupy the previous Stress position.

This is remarkably subtle: He offers us lyricism, but not too much and not for too long; and the Stress position brings us back to Johnny Sain, who begins the rest of our trip.

IV. Colometrics: What They Are, and Why They Are Essential to Fine Writing

The second of my new analytic techniques I call Colometrics. It has to do with the music of prose.

The music of prose is a major element in the communication process between writer and reader.

The sentence you have just read was intended to sound reasoned, controlled, and balanced. It is a proverbial-sounding claim about an element of style. It is not intended to prove anything; it just wants to make a claim. It is intended to be far-reaching; but it needed to be contained in its delivery. To look closer at its own music, we can be helped by my reprinting it in the style of a horizontally interrupted poem, with each internal, one-beat, rhythmical unit - each "colon" - being deposited on the page in a manner so that we can see the music. Seeing aids hearing.

The music	of prose
is a major	element
in the communication	process
between writer	and reader.

Each of these eight units was intended by me to absorb one "beat" in the rhythm of the sentence. The rhythm of the sentence is made available to the eye by my having separated the "beats" from each other by the extra spacing in each "line." This organization of the prose on the page for musically analytical purposes is the technique I call "colometrics." The term comes from the Greek word "colon," meaning "to cut." Colometrics cuts the auditory meter into easily

visualized pieces.

But more than horizontal rhythmic balancing is taking place: Verticality counts, too. So “The music . . . of prose” balances vertically against “is a major ... element.” And taken together, those two lines balance the two that follow. It sets up a rhythmic expectation. (There is that word “expectation” again.)

But wait (as the late night television ads tell us once the copper pot or the powerful flashlight has been displayed and explained) – there’s more! Yet more contributes to this sense of balance: The words “music” and “major” are vertically in the same spot; and they both start with the letter “m,” producing the rhetorical figure of speech called alliteration.

Similarly, the “p” sound is vertically reproduced between “prose” and “process” -- along with a repetition of their hard and soft “s” sounds.

And in the fourth horizontal line, the “r” sound adds to the sense of balanced by its being repeated in “writer” and “reader.”

All of this structure-by-sound helps make the sentence sound like what it is trying to say.

In trying to choose a famous passage to demonstrate this simply and clearly, I immediately thought of the 23rd Psalm. Its balanced lines, and the changes in how many “beats” make up a single line, display visually on paper the music which has helped so many children to memorize the psalm in its entirety. The better arranged the music, the easier memorization becomes. Here is the famous text, displayed in a colometric:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures

He leadeth me beside the still waters;

He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for Thou art with me:

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou annointest my head with oil;

my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy

shall follow me all the days of my life;

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Now please: I know this is not the only way to arrange these lines. Two weeks from tomorrow I may well change my mind about a number of details, here and there. But this is one convincing possibility; and it allows us not only to learn things about how to balance the various materials, but also how to perform it orally in an elegant way. It also represents the music of its presentation learned by most children. The colometric is the psalm's song.

Here is a schema for the number of "beats" that appear horizontally in each line. I have separated these lines into five sections below, labeled by capital letters. These five sections coincide with the five sentences into which the psalm is divided – and, consequently, into the divisions in which the psalm is usually read aloud.

A	4	D	5
	4		3
	4		2
	2		
B	3	E	3
	2		4
			5
C	5		
	2		
	2		
	3		

The A section's first three lines balance, balance, and balance with their 4 beats, and then are brought to a sense of closure by the last line being a dramatically shortened 2. That 2-beat line seems to swell

in prominence, taking upon it the “weight” of the 4 beats we have been conditioned by the first three lines to expect. This unique, time expanding, 2-beat line therefore becomes both a rhythmical repository and a highlight. Note also that it occupies the sentence’s Stress position – yet another method of highlighting it.

Whenever a colometric line is more than one beat more or less than its predecessor, the change is usually attention getting. If that additional attention suits the text, the music of the line enhances its meaning.

The B section begins by expanding smoothly and non-dramatically from the last 2 of A to a line of 3 beats. When its second line reverts to 2 beats (“for his name’s sake”), it resounds as a rhythmic echo of the 2-beat line that ended the A section (“he restoreth my soul”). Both sentences have now been resolved by a 2-beat line in their Stress positions. The 2-beat unit here is therefore taking on a sense of urgency, of greater importance.

The C section begins with a surprise – with a line of 5 beats. The great escalation from 2 beats to 5 makes this moment somber, weighty, momentous. In music, a rhythmical unit of 5 is quite unusual. Most songs, from the 16th century to the 20th, from the classical to the popular, feature either 4 beats (such as a march tempo) or 3 beats (such as a waltz tempo). The only other widely common rhythm has 6 notes, but only 2 beats: ONE - two - three, FOUR - five - six. A 5-beat unit is a rarity. Even Shakespeare, who wrote in iambic pentameter (5 stressed syllables out of 10 or more – xX xX xX xX xX), fashioned most of his most famous lines to be read with only 4 stresses:

NOW is the WINter of our DIS-conTENT
 Made GLORious SUMmer by this SON of YORK.

OR

To BE or NOT to be, THAT is the QUEStion.

Each of these lines can be divided into five metrical “feet,” as required by the meter of iambic pentameter; but no good actor would perform them with five accents. We wouldn’t all know that famous line if all five accents were pronounced:

To BE or NOT to BE, that IS the QUEStion.

It is not the content of the line that is so memorable; it is the way that content is supported by its music.

5's are by nature Shakespearean in weight and solemnity. (That does not mean they cannot be used for comedy. Shakespeare wrote many comedies.) A 5-beat line in prose functions well if it is intended to call attention to itself, as an expansion of tension, much like drawing a bow string to its final extremity. That fits the solemnity of “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” That is a long and serious walk.

The second and third lines of section C revert dramatically to the 2-beat line already associated with heightened emphasis. The fourth and final line of the sentence expands to 3 beats, resolving somewhat the dramatic tension created by the previous sudden shift to 2 beats. (These moments are harder to read about in this kind of analysis than they are to hear when you read them aloud. Read them aloud. You will probably hear what I mean.)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for Thou art with me:
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The journey through the valley of the shadow of death is long and threatening; the expansion of its final line eases the strain with a Stress position filled with “comfort.”

The D section combines rhythmic echos of the earlier sections. Like C, it begins by swelling to a 5-beat line and then congeals, this time to a 3. Like A and B, it reaches closure with a 2. The two 5-beat lines balance each other; and all the 2-beat lines all have a sense of ultimate importance.

The final sentence, the E section, is arranged as a single, continuously expanding crescendo. Its first line, “Surely goodness and mercy,” is 3 beats, expanding from the 2-beat line, “My cup runneth over,” that ended the D section. The expansion continues, as the 3 beats are increased to 4 in the penultimate line and then 5 in the final line.

All the 5-beat lines sound/mean something like each other:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,”

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:”

“and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

They share a similar weight and dignity. The first deals with a threat; the second acknowledges momentary aid; and the third offers eternal rest.

Similarly, all the 2-beat lines sound/mean something like each other:

“He restoreth my soul.”

“for his name’s sake.”

“I will fear no evil,”

“for Thou art with me:”

“my cup runneth over.”

They all epitomize the relationship between the “Thou” and the “me.”

You can meaningfully read this psalm - and perform it - as a counterpoint between the 5-beat and 2-beat lines, with the 4-beat lines providing the rhythmical default value expectations and the 3-beat lines providing the transitions. It is a musical marvel.

Once again, it is harder to read this rhythmic description than it is to see and hear it functioning in the colometric. Another reading of the psalm, aloud, using its colometric format, might convince you of the efficacy of the rhythmic analysis.

Again, this is not the only musical performance possible; but it is one we have often heard. The music supplied by the rhythm, with its parallels, its expansions, its contractions, and its dramatic changes, helps inform us of the relative emotional power of each line and each sub-unit.

No wonder this Psalm is so memorable – and so memorizable. No wonder any number of people were unhappy to do without “runneth” in the New King James Version, which “modernized” the line to “my cup runs over.” Modern though it may be, notice the rhythmic damage the revision wreaks. Go back to the colometric and re-read section D, substituting “my cup runs over” for “my cup runneth over.” The once-elegant 2-beat line now has how many beats – 2? 3? 4? The very difficulty of making that decision demonstrates the resultant rhythmic problem.

In my studies of prose rhythm over the past 40 years, I have consistently found that great political speeches markedly differ from unmemorable ones by the quality of their music. The content of two speeches may be of equally great import; but if the music of one is far superior to the music of the other, the former can be remembered far more easily. Want an example? Compare John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address to Richard M. Nixon’s speech declaring the end of the Viet Nam War. You will see/hear what I mean.

In many ways, the 23rd Psalm is an example of perfection. The content is important: God’s graciousness will help you through the toughest of times. The metaphor is well constructed and well maintained: We are sheep, and our Shepherd will take good care of us. But I could write you a prose paraphrase of the psalm that would be totally devoid of its magic, its warmth, and its supportive nature,

just by robbing the text of its musical pulses. You would not care to memorize my paraphrase; nor would it be of as much comfort to you when you were in need of that comfort.

Does this rhythmic music invade prose less exalted than the Bible?
O yes. Perhaps you will recognize the music of this one:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation
under God,
indi- visible,
with Liberty and Justice for all.

The rhythmic structure all by itself, without the words, suggests a musical journey from beginning to end that has its own sense of character:

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	
1	2	3	4
	1	2	
	1	2	
	1	2	
1	2	3	

Twice we have a 4-beat line that resolves to a 3-beat line; but the second resolution is interrupted by a dramatic crescendo of three 2-beat lines. Have you ever heard such an interruption of 2-beat lines before? You may recall this 5-beat line interrupted in the same way:

and that government

of the people,
by the people,
for the people

shall not perish from the earth.

(The ending of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address)

The Pledge of Allegiance quoted above is its fourth and (to date) final revision (1954). If you were educated in the United States, you probably memorized it as a child. See if you think you could have memorized the second revision (1923) as easily:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.

Its colometric shows why it is such a struggle:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the United States,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation indi- visible,
with Liberty and Justice for all.

Can you see - and hear - the "bump" in the second line? The "United States" failed to have that ring of elegance, that intimation of greatness, that it needed to have to balance a 4-beat line with only 2

beats. The five-syllable, single beat of “of the United” is not well resolved by the one-syllable, single beat of “States.” It “bumps” to a halt.

Someone soon understood this and therefore added (in the third revision, 1924) the words “of America.” That made a substantial difference in the music – and thus a difference in the substance:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag
 of the Unit- -ed States of America

The country no longer sounds clumsy; it sound elegant. We like 3s. Our fans at the Olympic Games do not chant “U – S!”; they chant “U – S – A!”

And with President Eisenhower’s addition of “under God” in 1954, the Pledge changed not only its content, but also its music: The three lines of 2 beats each – “one Nation/ under God/ indivisible – form themselves into a crescendo, leading up beautifully to the final line of 3 beats that elegantly brings it all to closure. Try reading it aloud with this in mind.

Why have I spent so much time and space introducing this concept of colometrics? Does it have anything to do with the prose of Jim Bouton? It certainly does. In addition to reading the book, I on occasion would open it to a page at random and put my finger down on a paragraph. If it turned out to be one I particularly enjoyed reading, I tried to transform it into a colometric. Over and over and over again, the colometric of the passage displayed his ear, his artistry, his sense of rhythm. It will help to look at a number of examples.

V. Colometrics as a Way to Perceive and Exemplify Style

As we begin these examples, it might help for me to repeat some details about colometrics. I have arranged them by sentences, with an extra vertical space between sentences. Each line is separated into a number of units corresponding to the number of prose beats in the line that I hear as a rhythm. My choices of these rhythms are by no means definitive: I could easily change my mind about any given line; and you may “hear” the lines differently from the way I do. What I have offered you here is the “music” for one way in which I could ‘perform” the prose, if asked to read it aloud. That music forms the basis for the points I then make about Bouton’s writing tactics. If I constructed a different colometric, I would have to make different points about it; but in general, a good writer makes the rhythms of prose support both the substance of each sentence and the way contiguous sentences talk to each other.

The decision of how many beats to include in any single line of one of these colometrics might be arguable and revisable; but when Bouton can be shown to be making certain kinds of decisions over and over again, consistently throughout the book as a whole, then the colometrics become a way to track down, bring up, and point out the essence of his style.

Ex. 1a. Text: Salary Naivete and Disillusion

When I started out in 1959 I was ready to love the baseball establishment. In fact I thought big business had all the answers to any question I could ask. As far as I was concerned, club owners were benevolent old men who wanted to hang around

the locker room and were willing to pay a price for it, so there would never be any problem about getting paid decently. I suppose I got that way reading Arthur Daley in *The New York Times*. And reading about those big salaries. I read that Ted Williams was making \$125,000 and figured Billy Goodman made \$60,000. That was, of course, a mistake. (p.4)

I start with this passage expressly because it is ordinary - or at least ordinary for *Ball Four*. It is representative of how Bouton's narrative composes itself much of the time. Being such, it therefore invites inspection. How does Bouton fashion his prose when he is not telling a particularly intriguing anecdote but is still making a point? Why does the self-denigrating punch line at the paragraph's end work?

Before looking at the colometric, I want to point out Bouton's highly skillful - even if entirely intuitive - use of the Stress position. In one seven-sentence paragraph, he takes us from the unquestioning trust he had originally for the owners of baseball teams all the way to his permanent disillusionment. A glance at the Stress positions displays how he did this, step by step. (The Stress position occupants are in bold.)

to love the baseball establishment.

- This suggests total admiration for the baseball establishment.

Had all the answers to any question I could ask.

- This suggests total trust in that establishment, a faith

that all his questions would receive reasonable answers.

would never be any problem about getting paid decently.

- After 29 words and three grammatical units about what the owners must be like, the sentence's closure veers away from them and shifts back to him. Because the owners had certain interests that satisfied them, then he was going to be well paid.

I got that way reading Arthur Daley in *The New York Times*.

- The *NYT* gets the Stress position instead of Daley because of its sterling reputation. No matter that Daley said it; it was published by the nation's most famous newspaper. It must be true!

And reading about those big salaries.

- The *Times* promises him a big salary. It must be true!

I read that Ted Williams was making \$125,000 and figured Billy Goodman made \$60,000.

- Logically, you might think that Ted's huge salary would deserve the Stress position. It is more than twice that for the fine second-baseman for Ted's team who, unlike Ted, was not likely to make the *MLB Hall of Fame*. But Bouton knows what he's doing. He, too, was unlikely to make the *MLB Hall*

of Fame. Ted was Ted, a superstar; Jim was more likely to wind up like Billy. So to Jim the author, Goodman's salary was exactly the right thing to put in the Stress position. This echoes the expectation that he would "get paid decently."

That was, of course, a mistake.

- The occupant of the Stress position of this curt final session – only 6 words – blows the rest of the paragraph out of the water. It gives the lie to all the preceding statements. The suddenness of the "mistake" is echoed by the brevity of this final sentence. The previous six sentences contained 14, 16, 40, 14, 6, and 20 words respectively; but the short 6-worder was a sentence fragment, beginning with "And," making it combine in the reading process with the 14-worder before it, producing a defacto 20-word unit. So our reading experience, in terms of the number of words in the sentences, actually unfolded in as 14, 16, 40, 20, 20; and then comes the final, spunky 6. It was all "a mistake."

Let us turn now to the colometric. As it suggests, Bouton handles ordinary moments with quiet grace and firm control. And he is good at building to a climax – without you being aware he is doing so.

Ex. 1b. Colometric

When I started out in 19- 59
 I was ready to love the baseball establishment.

In fact I thought big business had all the answers
 to any question I could ask.

As far as I was concerned,
 club owners were benevolent old men
 who wanted to hang around the locker room
 and were willing to pay a price for it,
 so there would never be any problem
 about getting paid decently.

I suppose I got that way
 reading Arthur Daley in The New York Times.

And reading about those big salaries.

I read that Ted Williams was making \$125,- 000
 and figured Billy Goodman made \$60,- 000.

That was, of course, a mistake.

The number of beats per line is crucial to the rhythmic flow of the passage. Any change in the number of beats - e.g. from 3 to 4, or from 4 to 3) - has the potential to affect the reading experience. It can help produce an increase or decrease in tension, or an expansion or contraction in a literary gesture. Usually these beat changes are only the addition or subtraction of a single beat. Any jump or drop

by more than one – like from 5 to 3 – is capable of reflecting some dramatic jump in emotion or attention. Most lines are either 3 or 4 beats; 2 is for special effects; and 5 can indicate an expansion of view or a heightening of emotion. In general, a 5 usually needs to be balanced by another 5; but only rarely will a third consecutive line have 5 beats.

The beats per line in this passage, arranged by the sentence, are as follows:

4, 4

5, 3

3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 2

3, 4

4

5, 5

3

You can see these on the page because all the 3s are vertically stacked – as is also the case with all the 4s and 5s. You naturally read the words horizontally; but I invite you to see the rhythms vertically.

Bouton's ear is usually quite careful to attend to how many beats there are in the last line of most of his sentences. It can make a

difference in the projection of closure for the rhythm/music, while honoring the sense of closure for the sentence's grammatical structure. If he repeats the number of beats from a previous line, it can result in a kind of rationality:

This actually is this // and that actually is that.

After two or more lines of the same number of beats, he can raise or lower the subsequent line by one beat to affect a sense of rounded closure. Here is a 5-beat unit followed by a 4 and then followed by a 3:

So, you can see, we must consider this, // in order to make a final decision. // That's all there is to that .

In the first sentence of this "Salary Naivete" passage, he establishes a calm, collected, logical atmosphere by creating two, parallel 4-beat lines. All is in order, says the rhythm.

In the second sentence, he expands to a 5-beat line - uncommon enough in length to attract attention. A 5-beat line can indicate a raised voice and perhaps broadened arms - a line big enough to include "all the answers." But if a 5-beat line can cause attention to itself by its unusual length, the reduction in the next line by more than a single beat - to 3 beats - is yet more compelling. It can result in either or both of the following:

- a) The reduction to 3, after the expansion to 5, can restore the rhythmic order previously established by the two 4s. (The 5 and 3, taken together, are 8 beats - the same as the two 4s taken together.) In music, there is a term to

describe a sudden increase in tempo balanced by an immediate and proportional reduction: This is called rubato.

- b) Alternatively, or simultaneously, the 3-beat line could expand in time or emphasis to parallel the shape and extent of the 5-beat line. As a result, the 3-beat line takes on the weight and importance of a 5-beat line with perhaps added drama.

The third sentence I find rhythmically remarkable. It begins with a 3, which echos the 3-beat line that preceded it; and that line generates a flood of 3-beat lines (five of them), all about those owners and what (he thinks) they like to do. At the end of that long wave of 3s, he turns the attention back towards himself in the Stress position by effecting rhythmic closure with a 2. Again, read it aloud for yourself from the colometric to see/hear what I mean.

The fourth sentence has no drama to it whatsoever. Its use will be made more apparent in the next sentence. At the moment, it seems the calmest of narrative statements. Its rhythm helps to re-establish a sense of order. It begins with a 3 – that number to which we became so accustomed in the previous sentence; and then it quietly expands back to 4, giving closure to the sentence. We are back to the paragraph’s initial line and default value length of 4 beats.

The fifth “sentence” (as mentioned before, really a sentence fragment), is an uncomplicated 4-beat line, balancing the 4 beats of its predecessor. Order has been yet further restored. This line, however, grows to a more interesting Stress position – “big salaries.”

The “big salaries” must have produced some adrenalin in the narrator, because the sixth sentence expands to two 5s – the ultimate length line for most prose. 5 being so much harder to handle for an author, it often requires the next line be 5 beats to produce balance and stability. Two fives together often sound like they are reaching for grandness, expanding to include something of weight, of worthiness. Bouton’s two 5s here take the whole progression of talk about salaries to its height. It is as if Ted Williams’ huge salary demanded the extra weight and dignity of a 5; and, as suggested above, Billy Goodman’s salary, while not as big as Ted’s, was yet the more important one for Jim’s expectations. The two 5s bring us to something that sounds like the climax of the paragraph and the climax of Jim’s financial hopes.

But then comes the seventh sentence – a dramatic drop from 5 beats to 3. It is a rude awakening, both mentally and rhythmically. “Mistake” is the only word of consequence in the sentence; and it occupies the Stress position. So brief, so abrupt, so rhythmically dissimilar to its predecessors, the sentence does a wonderful job of communicating his bitter disillusion and disappointment.

Pretty good, for an “ordinary” paragraph.

One of the main reasons Ball Four has lasted this long is, well, it’s funny. It’s often funny. But it’s often quietly funny. A great many of Bouton’s punch lines are delivered with a straight face. It is a controlled humor. That comic control is produced, in part, by prose rhythms.

Ex. 2a. Text: Skipping to a comic tune

I haven't been pitching very well and I think that as a result my sideburns are getting shorter. Also, instead of calling Joe Schultz Joe, I'm calling him Skip, which is what I called Ralph Houk when I first came up. Managers like to be called Skip.
(p.76)

Ex. 2b. Colmetric

I haven't	been pitching	very	well
	and I think	that as a result	
	my sideburns	are getting shorter.	
Also,	instead of calling	Joe Schultz	Joe,
	I'm calling him	Skip,	
which is what	I called	Ralph	Houk
	when I first	came up.	
Managers	like	to be called	Skip.

Here are the colometric beats of these lines, sentence by sentence:

4 - 2 - 2

4 - 2- 4- 2

4

This passage bounces a bit. The lines are all 4s and 2s - no 3s. The default value expectation of a reader's ear is that a line will contain either the same number of beats as its predecessor, or one more, or one less. Therefore, a change from 4 to 2 or from 2 to 4 feels like a jump, a bounce, or a skip.

In the opening sentence, the first four-beat line - "I haven't been pitching very well" - is, if not somber, at least rather sober. The first 2-beat line acts as an upbeat to the second 2-beat line's downbeat. That downbeat lands us in a curious place: Why should bad pitching result in shorter sideburns? Do they wither as a result of anxiety? (Bouton clears up this mystery 35 pages later.) Whatever reason, shorter sideburns (a bad thing, apparently) are the result of bad pitching. The balance of the two 2-beat lines helps make that clear to us. So after the bad news 4-beat line, the following lines get shorter along with the sideburns.

For the second sentence, we again begin with a 4 and shorten abruptly to a 2; and the sentence continues with another 4 - 2 combination. "Skip" (a short form for "Skipper") seems shorter still because it comes at the end of a greatly foreshortened line. Being the second half of its 2-beat line, it tries to balance the second half of its 4-beat predecessor: Compared to "Joe Schultz Joe," "Skip" seems comically short.

The second 4-beat line of this sentence - "which is what I called Ralph Houk" - neatly balances the previous 4-beat line:

Also instead of calling Joe Schultz Joe
which is what I called Ralph Houk.

The second beats both have to do with calling. The third and fourth beats name the managers.

Look back at the colometric. You will see that the 2-beat line between these two 4s has the word “calling” vertically in line with the other two “call” words. This is a strong use of parallelism, where the structure supports the parallel quality of the content.

Then comes the comic resolution, in a sentence of its own:

Managers like to be called Skip.

“Managers” sum up the two previously named managers and includes all other possible managers. The “call” word appears again, this time in the third beat, summing up all the previous “calls”; its new position in the line builds towards a release of syntactic tension in the following beat – the skimpy, short word “Skip.” This is another slight use by Bouton of epistrophe – ending two lines with the same word; but the second one produces more of a comic punch because it occupies the Stress position.

It’s quiet. It’s slight. It’s funny.

In example 3, appearing 35 pages later than example 2, the second shoe finally drops concerning the mystery of shorter sideburns; and our fearless author gets to take a comic swipe at a team owner.

Here is the paragraph:

Ex. 3a. Text: Perpetual Parallels and Comic Chiasmus

A kid named Tom Berg, who belongs to the Seattle organization and goes to school here, came over to work out with the club. And before the workout he was in the clubhouse shaving off his nice long side-burns. He got the word that Dewey Soriano, who is the president of the club, thought he would look better with shorter side-burns. Well, I think Dewey Soriano would look better if he lost weight. (p.111)

And here is my colometric:

Ex. 3b. Colometric

A kid	named	Tom	Berg,
who belongs	to the Seattle	organi-	zation
and goes	to school	here,	
came over	to work out	with the club.	
	And before	the workout	
	he was in	the clubhouse	
shaving off	his nice long	side-burns.	
	He got	the word	
	that Dewey	Soriano,	
who is	the president	of the club,	
thought	he would look better	with shorter	side-burns.
	Well, I think	Dewey	Soriano
would look better	if he lost	weight.	

Here are the line-by-line beat totals, separated into sentences:

4 - 4 - 3 - 3
 2 - 2 - 3
 2 - 2 - 3 - 4
 3 - 3

The first sentence is a flat, uninteresting narrative. Not much happens. A pair of 4-beat lines resolves into a pair of 3-beat lines. Note that the sentence ends and resolves with a 3-beat line.

The second sentence begins with a pair of 2-beat lines and resolves into a single 3-beat line. This resolution provides us with “sideburns.”

If you look at the two sentences as a continuum, you see a steady shortening of lines maintaining a 3-beat line as a point of syntactic closure: The 4s become 3s, and then 2s, with the resolution reverting to a 3.

4 - 4 - 3- 3- 2- 2- 3

Rhythmically, this is a bit like a snake coiling.

In the next sentence, it uncoils.

2 - 2 - 3 - 4

The pair of 2-beat lines echo the previous pair of 2-beat lines; but the uncoiling from there is at double speed, since there is only a single 3 and a single 4 - not a pair of each as there were at the paragraph’s beginning. The final word of this recoil is, once again, “sideburns.”

The fourth and last sentence arrives with no previous indication that something comic might await us. Again, it is relatively quiet. Both of the first two sentences had ended with a 3; and so will this one. The two 3-beat lines that make up the fourth sentence turns everything on its head. The comic sting waits until the last moment to appear.

[Dewey Soriano] “would look better if he lost weight.”

A good punch line. The working man has spoken up. The sideburns and the weight are made parallel both by their placement in the rhythmical structure of the colometric and their arrival in the powerful Stress position of the sentence’s grammatical structure.

But there is yet much more: Bouton has used another pair of rhetorical devices that Shakespeare and the great Alexander Pope (and so many other outstanding poets in our literary history) have delighted in using. One is a simple parallel form: When a line clearly contains a dominating number of beats, the following line repeats that rhythm. The other device is in some ways the opposite of a parallel: It is a reversal technique called chiasmus. Chiasmus is the stating of two or more elements and then a repetition of them in reverse order. XYYX. You will recognize the technique in one of the most famous quotes of 20th century history:

Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.

(John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address)

Shakespeare and Pope (and especially Pope) loved to juxtapose a parallel structure and a chiasmus. If the parallel came second, it would have the effect of reversing (or unreversing) the reversal of the chiasmus.

XYYX
ABAB.

Having just experienced the reversal of the YX, a reader might well be expecting the experience to repeat itself. The first AB makes that a possibility; but the second AB is then be a reversal of that expectation of a reversal.

How much more delicious and complex it can be if these two figures overlap, with the elements that close the first one becoming the initial elements of the second one. It becomes hard to tell the players without a program.

Here is an example from Pope's *Moral Epistle II: On the Characters of Women*:

Rufa, whose eye quick glancing o'er the park,
2 Attracts each light gay meteor of a spark,
Agrees as ill with Rufa studying Locke,
4 As Sappho's diamonds with her dirty smock,
Or Sappho at her toilet's greasy task,
6 With Sappho fragrant at an ev'ning Masque:
So morning insects, that in muck begun,
8 Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting sun.

I urge you to be patient with these 8 lines of poetry. They come from a literary tradition that we no longer find in contemporary literature. But the guided tour of these lines is worth the time.

Rufa and Sappho are characters Pope is creating just for this moment in his long poem about the changeability in women. (Note: He wrote about men as negatively as he wrote about women.) Rufa is a flirt, someone out to snag yet another man. Sappho is a very high class lady who will spend hours of an afternoon making herself up for her evening masquerade ball.

The parallel and chiasmic elements are simply the positive (✓) and negative (✗) characteristics he is painting for each.

Lines 1 and 2 (✗) show us Rufa on the hunt; they are juxtaposed to line 3 (✓), which pictures (improbably) Rufa giving serious study to the philosopher Locke. Two lines negative, one line positive.

Then comes Sappho in line 4, who gets only a half-line for each: Her glittering diamonds (✓) contrast starkly with the dirty smock (✗) she wears while applying her greasy cosmetics. Pope has already given us an orderly chiasmus (✗✓✓✗), but in a disorderly manner in time, with the first element taking two lines, the second one line, and the third and fourth a half-line apiece. So far so good.

The next two lines twirl us around. Line 5 gives us Sappho at her cosmetics table again, linking it to the second half of line 4 (✗); but this time it is an odor rather than a sight. Line 6 links to the first half of line 4, as we again smell her, but in a more pleasant way (✓). We have, therefore, a second chiasmus; but this uses the second half of the earlier chiasmus to construct the first half of the second one.

Whirlagig!

The 8-line passage (a complete unit of its own in the poem) ends with the disgusting insects of line 7 (✕) contrasting to the pleasant sunset of line 8 (✓). Lines 5 through 8, therefore, are structured as a parallelism - ✕✓✕✓. Like the second chiasmus, the parallel borrows the ✕✓ of lines 5-6 to be the first half of the parallel structure completed by lines 7-8.

Does this have anything to do with Jim Bouton's comic rhetoric? Of course it does.

Here again are lines 5 through 13 of our current example:

	And before	the workout
6	he was in	the clubhouse
	shaving off	his nice long side-burns.
8	He got	the word
	that Dewey	Soriano,
10	who is	the president
	thought	he would look better
		with shorter side-burns.
12	Well, I think	Dewey
	would look better	if he lost
		Soriano weight.

He artfully combines a chiasmus with a parallel. Here are its reversal elements, preceded by the number of line in which each appears:

- 7 “side-burns”
- 9 “Soriano”
- 10 “president of the club”
- 11 “side-burns”

Note how all four appear at the end of their colometric line. The rhythm makes it easier to note the four elements. All this happens quietly. It does not jump out at us. But it is going to help prepare us for the punch line.

Lines 10-13 present us with a parallel construction:

- 10 “president of the club”
- 11 “shorter side-burns”
- 12 “Dewey Soriano”
- 13 “lost weight”

Just like Pope, Bouton has used the second half of the chiasmus as the basis for the first half of his parallelism. They are delightfully intertwined. And we couldn't see the punch line approaching.

And to make it just that much more tangled, in a highly orderly way, Bouton gives us a second parallelism, this one grammatical, that lives in the midst of the other parallel structure:

he [Berg] would look better with shorter side-burns

Dewey Soriano would look better if he lost weight.

I suggest you read the example again, to see how all these structures and rhythms combine to produce the desired comic effect. Despite

the complexity of the rhetorical devices and the subtleties of the colometric rhythms, this example still reads simply and comically.

Ex. 4a. Text: Struggling with the Inevitable

I looked over Maglie's record today and noticed that he had his best years after coming back from the Mexican league and was thirty-three years old. So I'm wondering if I'm not going to end up being a fastball, curveball pitcher again this year. But then I remember what it was like last year; how frustrating it was to find my motion and get my rhythm, and how I'd get hot and then not get any regular work. All of which tells me I'd better stick to the knuckleball.

I'd guess you can say I'm torn. (p.54)

Bouton consistently displays anxiety through his manipulation of his prose rhythms. He creates a calm music in which to establish the background for his paragraph by keeping the number of beats per line regular, changing it only to resolve the introductory unit. He often uses 4-beat lines for that sense of regularity and a 3-beat line for his cadential closure. Then begins the fun, with the joke often being on himself. Here is the colometric for this passage:

Ex. 4b Colometric Struggling with the inevitable

I looked over Maglie's record today
 and noticed that he had his best years
 after coming back from the Mexican league
 and was thirty-three years old.

So I'm wondering if I'm not going to end up being
 a fastball, curveball pitcher again this year.

But then I remember what it was like last year;
 how frustrating it was
 to find my motion
 and get my rhythm,
 and how I'd get hot
 and then not get
 any regular work.

All of which tells me
 I'd better stick to the knuckleball.

I'd guess you can say I'm torn.

4-4-4-3

4-5

4-2-2-2-2-2-2

2-3

3

You can see and hear the three 4-beat lines resolving to a 3-beat line as he gives us merely the factual background about Maglie's record. It is a favorite song of his for these purposes. You can find it everywhere.

When he switches to talking about himself, he again begins with the now-expected 4 beat line; but to begin the growth of his anxiety, he expands the next line to a 5. 5-beat lines, we recall, are special moments – something that demands an expansion. He is wondering whether he can expand his repertory of pitches from his signature knuckleball to the pitches everyone else uses – the fastball and the curve. He hopes. The sentence ends. Then the real worry begins.

He begins again with the expected 4-beat beginning rhythm. But the next line does not expand to a five nor contract to a 3: instead, it jumps dramatically to a tense 2. And then another 2 . . . and another . . . and a fourth . . . and a fifth . . . and a sixth.

This technique of using a series of short, interrupted lines to increase tensions has a name in dramatic rhetoric: *Stichomythia*. Shakespeare is its master. Here is the passage in the second scene of Act I of *Hamlet* in which Hamlet, amazed, questions Horatio and his two companions as to how the ghost of the dead king looked when he appeared to them on the ramparts of Elsinore Castle. The 5-foot iambic pentameter line has dominated more than 200 lines in this scene to this point, creating the expectation that 5 beats is what we are going to get at all times. But in this passage of 19 interchanges, only a handful of lines are allowed to reach the full 5 iambic beats. When Horatio (lines 241-2) is finally allowed to speak two lines together (actually, a line and a half) without an interruption, Hamlet's nerves begin to settle, allowing him to finish Horatio's half-line and add

Horatio It would have much amazed you.

Hamlet Very like, very like. Stayed it long?

Horatio Why one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

Both Longer, longer.

Horatio Not when I saw't.

Hamlet His beard was grizzled, no?

Horatio It was as I have seen it in his life,
A sable silvered.

Hamlet I will watch tonight.
Perchance 'twill walk again.

Horatio I warr'nt it will.

Hamlet If it assumes my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still,
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight,
Give it an understanding but no tongue.
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve,
I'll visit you.

Stichomythia is a fancy name: but the technique works the same now as it did more than 400 years ago. I doubt Jim Bouton knows the term, and few people who have heard of it can spell it; but it functions simply and surely. You can hear Bouton's anxiety grow throughout his half-dozen 2-beat lines:

But then	I remember	what it was like	last year;
	how frustrating	it was	
	to find	my motion	
	and get	my rhythm,	
	and how	I'd get hot	
	and then	not get	
	any regular	work.	

The grammatical structure of his sentence comes to an end. He begins afresh with an echo of the 2-beat music, then resolving, reluctantly, to the 3-beat line he likes to use to effect grammatical closure. Having struggled, he gives in to the inevitable.

	All of which	tells me
I'd better	stick to the	knuckleball.

With another 3-beat sigh, resigned to his fate, he comically states the obvious:

I'd guess	you can say	I'm torn.
-----------	-------------	-----------

While much of Bouton's book is couched in a comic or ironic tone, there are many moments when his prose becomes starkly serious, as he deals with the challenging emotions of a job and life that is constantly oppressive and insecure. Personal relationships are made particularly difficult because of the inherent insecurity that faces athletic performers. Here is one such well-crafted passage, with its attendant analysis.

Ex. 5a. Text: Controlling a Somber Mood

It's difficult to form close relationships in baseball. Players are friendly during the season and they pal along together on the road. But they're not really friends. Part of the reason is that there's little point in forming a close relationship. Next week one of you could be gone. Hell, both of you could be gone. So no matter how hard you try, you find yourself holding back a little, keeping people at arm's length. It must be like that in war too. (p. 79)

Bouton is extraordinarily intuitive in his sense of saving the most stress-worthy information for the Stress position - at the grammatical closure of the sentence. I repeat: In the last 15 years, amongst the several thousand lawyers and scientists with whom I have worked individually, I have encountered only two that have intuited this need in the English language.

So with this in mind, the first sentence in this example might strike us as oddly or even poorly written:

It's difficult to form close relationships in baseball.

Surely, we might think, “close relationships” should receive more emphasis than “in baseball.” But Mr. Bouton knew what he was doing. Look at the final sentence of this seven-sentence passage:

It must be like that in war too.

These are literary bookends: They both contain four prose beats; they are essentially parallel in structure; and the closing sentence, because of the echo it provides for the opening sentence, retroactively creates an even more serious and somber tone for the message between the bookends. The losses and anxieties created by war shine a light on those suffered in baseball. This is not hyperbole. Baseball might be to its fans just a game; but to those who play that game, it is life itself. One always must fear the manager calling you into his office and saying something like “Out, out, brief candle.” In order to make this war/game parallel effective, the rhetoric of the intervening passage must rise to the occasion.

As usual with good writing, functional rhythm plays an important role, along with the balancing and echoing features of skillful sound repetition.

Here is a possible colometric for this passage.

Ex. 5b. Colometric

It's difficult to form close relationships in baseball.

Players are friendly during the season
and they pal along together on the road.

But they're not really friends.

Part of the reason is that there's little point
in forming a close relationship.

Next week one of you could be gone.

Hell, both of you could be gone.

So no matter how hard you try,
you find yourself holding back a little,
keeping people at arm's length.

It must be like that in war too.

The sentences are rhythmically arranged as follows:

4

4-4

3

4-3

3

3

3-4-4

4

I could make (and have made) a number of variations on this colometric arrangement, each of which would be geared to a different “performance,” reflecting various interpretations. The one I have chosen here comes closest to the performance I would give, were I to read it aloud. In other words, it is my best take on what I think Bouton is saying and emoting.

Bouton often uses the 4-beat line to establish his default value rhythmic expectation. If he starts us off with 4-beat lines, all other length lines (of 2, 3, or 5 beats) will play off of this expectation, making their own effects simply because they are different. The 4-beat line passages do a good job of setting a background for the narrative. They are often primarily expository, setting the scene for us. They do what the beginning of a song or a sonata do, giving us a home from which we can wander and to which we can return for a final sense of arrival and security.

Sometimes, he uses a 3-beat line to round off a 4-beat passage, which can provide a rhythmic sense of closure. But if more than one 3-beat line occurs not as an ending but instead as part of the passage, those shorter lines can increase the tension and even the angst.

In this example, Bouton uses only 4-beat and 3-beat lines.

As we have seen, Bouton often begins with a 4-beat line. It comes as no surprise, then, that he begins this passage with a single 4-beat line that stands by itself not only as a complete sentence, but also as the

topic upon which this passage will now expound.

Much more often than not, his line lengths come (at least) in pairs. That is especially the case at the beginning of a passage, where the “home” rhythm must be established. Having experienced a 4-beat line, we are happy to have another follow immediately. Well-written lines tend to travel at least in pairs, like Canadian geese.

So if this second line can be read as 4 beats, we might be happy to let it do that. Here, it can, and we do.

It's difficult	to form	close relationships	in baseball.
Players	are friendly	during	the season
and they pal	along	together	on the road.

That second 4-beat line here is also the first line of a new sentence. We could be completely comfortable in reading its successor in a balancing 4 beats, a companion to its immediate predecessor. That is the case in my colometric.

We have seen him often round off a series of 4-beat lines with a 3-beat line. The shorter line can provide a distinct sense of closure. Bouton's next sentence is both (1) the closure we might expect after two 4-beat lines, and (2) an isolated statement, stark in its rhythmic effect.

But they're not really friends.

So far, I have only attended to this sentence's rhythm; but look what this structure does for its substantive matter. The first sentence had

prepared us to examine difficulty in baseball relationships. The second sentence tells us that all looks – but only looks – fine from a distance. “Friendly,” given its context, sounds a bit weak or superficial, suggesting “merely friendly.” This gets reinforced in the next line by the slang, light-handed word “pal.” Nothing sinister or even important has yet happened.

But then the one-line, 3-beat sentence dramatically takes us in hand, directing us emphatically to the “not . . . friends” in the sentence’s Stress position. Its own rhythmic and grammatical isolation suits well the loneliness of which he speaks.

So far we have been thinking horizontally in the colometric, one word following another, and then one line following another. But one of the revelations of a colometric of a good passage is to notice what is happening vertically. In our reading experience, we proceed in a horizontal fashion; but the verticalities reach us as echoes of sound. We may not be fully conscious of them; but they function all the same. The colometric makes them more available to us through sight.

Look at the left-most vertical column for the three lines. It is strung together by alliteration: The two “p” sounds in “Players” and “pals” clearly talk to one another; but the “But” of the third line joins the party, since it produces what I have called “secondary alliteration.” (“B” and “p” are formed the same way by the lips. The former is uttered as voiced; the latter as unvoiced. Pronounce “b”; then do it again without voice, and you’ll have uttered a “p.”) When either of these sounds repeats as alliteration, the presence of the other can be supportive of that repetition.

The middle columns bring together emotional elements: the players “are friendly”; they congregate “all together”; but the third line shifts the emotion from a positive to a negative - “not really.” The bonding suggested in the first two lines turns out in the third line not to be real.

The vertical column on the right is powerful in delivering the third horizontal line’s dour reversal. The first two lines end with innocuous, emotionally unengaged prepositional phrases - “during the season” and “on the road.” Nothing vertical prepares us for the negated, monosyllabic single word “friends.” The horizontal third line and the vertical right column conspire to deliver the stark bad news - “(not) ... friends.” The final 3-beat line differs both in its rhythm and its contents from the preceding 4-beat lines.

It is no surprise, and perhaps something of a minor relief, that the next sentence begins with a return to the default value expectation of a 4-beat line. But we do not get two of them in this sentence - only one. And once again a 3-beat line performs the act of closure.

Part of the reason is that there’s little point
 in forming a close relationship.

The argument has proceeded apace. We had begun with it being “difficult to form close relationships in baseball.” This sentence delivers a reason and promises the support for that reason will be along shortly.

The next 2 sentences, a parallel pair, are the death knell for these wished for relationships:

Next week one of you could be gone.

Hell, both of you could be gone.

The negativity of the substance is made more dramatic by both of these being 3-beat lines. With 4 beats being in our ear as the expected length of a line, these two 3-beat lines each expand in time to fill the time, space, and lengthiness of 4-beat lines. We have once again the musical technique of rubato. Each of these 3-beat lines ‘weigh” as much as a 4-beat line. That increases the drama.

In addition, Bouton is using another Shakespearian technique – indicating we are getting down to the brass tacks of the thought – by limiting the vocabulary to monosyllabic words. They each hit with a greater intensity because of their syllabic simplicity.

Here are four examples from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar.

Note: In a mostly monosyllabic passage, Shakespeare will sometimes include a multi-syllabic word or two that will stand out in the context of dominating monosyllables.

Here is Cassius, who hates Caesar, trying to convince Brutus to join an assassination plot.

I was born free as Caesar, so were you;
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter’s cold as well as he.

(Act I, scene 2, ll. 97-9)

Notice the extra power of “endure” and “winter,” with their two syllables in an otherwise monosyllabic world?

Moments later, Cassius is outraged in his memory of Caesar’s frailty when ill during a Spanish campaign. Exclusively monosyllabic words:

And when the fit was on him I did mark
How he did shake. ‘Tis true, this god did shake!
(Act I, scene 2, ll. 120-21)

In the first scene of the play, Marullus, a Roman Senator is loudly berating a group of commoners because they have poured into the streets in celebration of Caesar’s presence in the city. He reminds them of how highly they used to think of Pompey (the ruler Caesar overcame to gain power in Rome). Marullus, in high rhetorical fashion, builds a 13-line passage by beginning with three mostly monosyllabic lines and then increasing the number of syllables as he portrays the people climbing ever higher and higher to get a glimpse of Pompey:

You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements
5 To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
10 Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tiber trembled underneath her banks

To hear the replication of your sounds
 Made in her concave shores?

The first three lines each have a two-syllable word (ignoring for the present purposes the name “Pompey”); the next line has a 3-syllable word; and the next two 2s and a 3. Recoiling in line 6 back to a single 2-syllable word (another common Shakespearian technique), line 7 greets us with two 2-syllable words and a 4-syllable word (!), leading up to the final line of this sentence, which is, starkly, completely monosyllabic. (Again, ignore the man’s 2-syllable name.) In the next lines (9-11), there is another syllabic crescendo: Line 9 has a single 2-syllable word; line 10 has a single 4-syllable word; and line 11 has three words in a row that are of 2, 2, and 3 syllables. It then bends back again, with line 12 having a single, fancy, 4-syllable word, and line 13 only a single 2-syllable word. Why, you might ask, does Shakespeare wind down a bit here, after creating that extraordinary multi-line crescendo? Because the real climax is yet to come, pounding away at these poor folks who are overwhelmed by what they are hearing.

15 And do you now put on your best attire?
 And do you now cull out a holiday?
 And do you now strew flowers in his way
 That comes in triumph over Pompey’s blood?
 Be gone!

20 Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
 Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
 That needs must light on such ingratitude.

In lines 15-18, there is only a single multi-syllabic word surfacing in a churning sea of monosyllables. Line 19 has only two words in it,

both monosyllables. It explodes. It fills the length of a whole 5-foot line, which has been the norm until now. (That is yet another Shakespearian common technique.) Marullus finishes with line 20, all monosyllables except a 2-syllable word, line 21, all monosyllables except a 3-syllable word, and finally, line 22, which has all monosyllables except for a 4-syllable word, which gets to occupy a triple Stress position, being the end of a sentence, the end of a line, and the end of this speech. Even the subtle increase of the length of the non-monosyllabic words in these three lines, from 2 to 3 to 4, adds to this remarkable sense of crescendo to a climax.

Having gone to such lengths to point out the power of monosyllables in this play, I cannot resist including the end of Antony's famous – and legitimately famous – speech in the market place, winning over the crowd just that just a moment before had been won over by Brutus. Antony inspires the crowd to (a 3-syllable word in the triple Stress position at the end of the speech) mutiny. There are 131 words in this extraordinary passage, of which only 18 have more than one syllable; and 6 of those 18 are proper names. Enjoy:

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
 I am no orator, as Brutus is,
 But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
 That love my friend, and that they know full well
 That gave me public leave to speak of him.
 For I have neither wit. Nor words, nor worth,
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
 To stir men's blood; I only speak right on.
 I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
 And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,

And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
 Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
 In every wound of Caesar that should move
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

Back to Bouton. Here are those two lines of his again:

Next week one of you could be gone.

Hell, both of you could be gone.

Their immediate context is a 3-beat, 5-word line containing a 2-syllable word and ending with a 4-syllable word - (“forming” and “relationship”). That line, by contrast, renders these two lines more blunt, more threatening, with no multi-syllabic words to soften the blow. They are two parallel, short sentences, filled with short, parallel words. (The verticality of the colometric makes that parallelism especially clear.)

Although these two sentences are parallel, they are identical mainly in their epistrophic last three words, “could be gone.” The first one is bad enough news; but the second is worse. It begins with the harshness of “Hell”; it expands the “one of you” to “both of you”; and it seems that wherever you start, you are going to wind up with the possibility of being “gone.”

The next sentence retreats from a near-death experience to a self-protective numbness:

So no matter how hard you try,
 you find yourself holding back a little,
 keeping people at arm's length.

The first line, as if imprisoned by its two predecessors, remains a 3-beat line; but the return to 4-beat lines regains for us both rhythmic and emotional stability. We back away from the danger of forming a relationship with a terminal patient to the safety of “at arm’s length.”

Lest we think we have succeeded in traveling through the valley of the shadow of death, the final sentence produces a quiet shudder of an echo, book-ending the opening sentence:

It must be like that in war too.

Just in case we hadn’t noticed.

Just as we wondered about the occupant of the opening sentence’s Stress position, we should question that of the closing sentence as well. Why does Bouton allow the rhythmic “bump” of the weak ending with “too”? I think he got it right once again. Had “war” been at the end of this sentence, the parallel would seem more heavy-handed, more unnaturally dramatic. The weak ending makes this statement seem more like an afterthought: It has not got the substance of Antony’s “mutiny” – and nor should it have.

And that’s how a fine writer of comedy produces and controls a somber mood.

Ex. 6a. Text: Rhythm and the blues

One of the worst things about getting sent down is the feeling you get that you've broken faith with so many people. I know my mother and father were rooting real hard for me, and all my friends back home, and they'll all feel bad - not for themselves, but for me. (p.115)

I so admire Jim Bouton's innate musicality. It does not sing at the top of his voice; but when you look carefully at his prose, it becomes difficult to imagine him accomplishing so many fine effects without his having planned it all intentionally and meticulously. I'd guess not; but it certainly begins to seem that way. Bottom line: Intention doesn't matter. All that matters is the effect of the finished product.

I haven't chosen the examples in this essay by scouring through hundreds of pages looking for the best colometric wonders. I just started reading at page 1 and paused every time I came to a passage that sang - and that sang in tune with what he was trying to say. When a second reading felt even better than the first, I turned the passage into a colometric. Sometimes I opened to a page at random and selected a single paragraph to investigate. Not once was I disappointed in what the colometric had to say about how he arranged his words, his rhythms, his sounds, and his thoughts. These last two examples I find just stunning - #6 in its quiet disintegration, and #7 in its flamboyant exultation.

Example #6 is quiet. It seems simple and straightforward. On first reading, I was moved by its sense of decrescendo, as he feels worse and worse throughout the two sentences. On second reading, I found that it was more than a decrescendo: It was also a kind of

disintegration. For a moment, there's nothing left of him at the end of this passage. I'm sure he experienced the feeling he describes here hundreds of times. But in taking the trouble to do a close textual analysis of it, I was astonished by how he accomplished this singing of the blues with so many intricate sounds and structures that simply do not announce themselves when one is just reading in order to read. Let me show you what I mean.

Here is my colometric.

Ex. 6b. Colometric

	One	of the worst things	about getting	sent down
2	is the feeling	you get	that you've broken	faith
	with so	many	people.	
4	I know	my mother	and father	
	were rooting	real hard	for me,	
6	and all	my friends	back home,	
		and they'll all	feel bad -	
8		not	for themselves,	
			but for me.	

The first sentence begins with two 4-beat lines and concludes with a 3-beat line. We have seen him do this over and over. He uses it, as in Example 5 above, to set the scene, to state the topic, to expose the situation. The 3-beat line, once again, reads a bit more slowly, a bit more deliberately - as the 3 beats "expand" to reproduce the time and weight of their 4-beat predecessors and bring the sentence to its conclusion. Once again, rubato.

The second sentence gives us something different. He begins with a 3-beat line, echoing the line that had just ended the first sentence. We have seen this doubling, rhythmic echoing tactic before. He gets stuck in that more intense 3-beat rhythm, repeating it for two more lines. But unlike in less somber passages, he does not return to a 4-beat line: Instead, he allows the tension to increase by descending to a pair of 2-beat lines, which sadly cannot finish the sentence. His last line is a single-beat line – something we have not seen before.

Just from the numbers of beats in the lines of these two sentences we can almost see the emotional disintegration:

4-4-3

3-3-3-2-2-1

That rhythmic development would by itself make this passage and this thought well wrought. But there is more.

Remember chiasmus? (See Example #3, above.) It's that figure of reversal – XYYX. I could sense reversal in this passage as a whole: Folks expect much of you; but if you don't accomplish much, you let down your folks: XYYX. But in my work with chiasmus, I do not limit the figure's possibilities to reversing words only. Sometimes a sense of reversal can be produced just by the reversal of sounds. In my last sentence, I have used a chiasmus in which the X factors are the sound "s," and the Y factors are the word "reversal."

Sense // reversal // reversal // sounds

It works. But it can also be accomplished just with sounds, either consonants or vowels. So I turned on my chiasmus radar machine and found the following seven (7!) chiasmi in Bouton's two sentences:

1. feeling // you // you've // faith (all in line 2)
2. feeling // broken // so // people (lines 2 and 3)
3. faith // many // mother // father (lines 2, 3, and 4)
4. mother // father // rooting // real // for // me
(lines 4 and 5)
5. for // me // my // friends (lines 5 and 6)
6. for // back // bad // for (lines 5, 6, 7, and 8)
7. my // friends // for // me (lines 6 and 9)

Wonderfully, these sound repetitions spill over each other. #1 is the most noticeable because all four sounds are in a single line, line 2. But then (in chiasmus #2) some of the sounds from line 2 spill over into line 3. And then (in #3), line 2 overflows into line 3 and then on to line 4. And then (in #4), line 4 flows over into line 5. And (in #5), line 5 flows over into line 6.

You can't tell these players without a program. You can't keep track of them; but the music happens anyway. And note that chiasmus #4 is a three-element figure - XYZZYX. A poet might take a whole day or two constructing a passage with such a structure of sound. I suspect Mr. Bouton just dashed it off. When you have music inside

you, sometimes it just comes out.

I've not attended yet to chiasmi #6 and #7. They are reliant on the colometric structure. (This had already happened in chiasmus #3, where the first and fourth elements are in the right-most column, with the second and third being in the middle column.) The words of #6 are all in the right-most column. They cascade vertically, downwards. They draw us towards the close without getting us there. And they participate in the narrowing of the colometric from 3-beat lines (lines 5 and 6) to 2-beat lines (lines 8 and 9).

For chiasmus #7, the two halves are three lines apart from each other (lines 6 and 9); but they are both centrally located in the colometric's columns. The first shoe drops in line 6; but we have to wait for line 9 for the second shoe to drop. And wait we do, because this whole disintegrative sentence, which takes six colometric lines to unfold, is inexorably leading us down to that last, lonely line. When we get there, we sense the subtle forces of reversal and cadential closure at the same time. Wow.

But recall the passage of Alexander Pope I looked at in Example #3 above. He liked to interweave chiasmus with parallels (XYYXXY). In the current example, Bouton - in addition to the rhythmic disintegration and the seven chiasmi - has woven in seven (7!) complicated but available sound parallels.

1. friends - back // feel - bad (lines 6 and 7)

This parallel plays a structural role, congealing elements from two columns in the last 3-beat line into a single column in the first 2-beat line. They narrow the focus.

2. not - for - themselves // but - for - me (lines 8 and 9)

This is the weakest of the sound repetitions, since three of the six repeated sounds do not come at the beginning of words. But the syntactic parallel is so clear (“not for X, but for Y”) that the more lightweight sound repetitions come along for the ride.

3. so - many // know - my mother (lines 3 and 4)

Like some of the chiasmi above, this sound parallel construction shows up more clearly when you see their vertical correspondences in the colometric: “so/know” are in the left columns of those two lines; and “many/my/mother” are in the central columns. This is not mere serendipity: It happens all too often to be so. All the rest of the following parallels are vertically arranged in one way or another in the colometric.

4. faith - people // father - me (lines 2, 3, 4, and 5)

To be sure, the “ee” sounds in “people” and “me” are not as evident to the ear as the two “f” sounds in “faith” and “father”; but look where these words appear. They are a downward cascade that ends these four colometric lines. This passage begins to resemble a complex piece of architecture, where there are multiple ways of each part of it being supported. The building requires all of them, even though no one of them cries out for much notice to the untrained eye.

5. so - no - all - all - not - but (lines 3-9, minus 5)

Yes, the “not/but” relationship is that of an off-rhyme. Why is it allowed to live here? Look at the left-most column in the colometric. These words appear at the beginnings of lines 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9. They travel downwards in an **XXYYZZ** parallel structure. Still an accident? Well, if #4, immediately above, controls the right-most column, and #5, right here, controls the left-most column, what about the mid-most column? See #6, immediately below.

6. many - my mother - my friends - for me (lines 3, 4, 6, and 9)

That is the mid-most verticality of the colometric - a parallel (m//m//f//f) colliding with a chiasmus (my//friends//for//me). Alexander Pope would approve of Jim Bouton.

7. bad - for // but - for (lines 7, 8, and 9)

We looked at colometric lines 2 through 5 of the rightmost column in the fourth member of this current list. Now we add lines 7 and 8 of that right-hand rivulet. This is an echo we can clearly perceive here, because so few words intervene between the repeated sounds. Look at how the forces combine in these final three lines of the colometric. From the left, the word “not” talks to the “but” in the final line; and from the right, the “bad for” talks to the final line’s “but for.” “Not for” and “but for” all seek their

resolution in that final, isolated, lonely word “me.”

Perhaps you have already noticed that this passage is dominated by a proliferation of “f,” “b,” and “m” sounds. They are all over the place: There isn’t a single line in the colometric without at least one of them. I count 8 “f”s, 5 “b”s, and 7 “m”s. Only two of the 9 lines have just one of these sounds; four lines have two of them; and three lines have three of them. Lines 6 and 9 (remember their chiasmic connection?) have all three of them. That last line is entirely dominated by them, they being 3 of the line’s 8 letters – “but for me.” These three sounds are associated with the passage’s most important words. I can imagine them forming a singing group of their own: One of their songs would be “Mother, Father, and Friends Back home”; the other would be “Feel Bad For Me.”

The upcoming final Example, #7, is for me a total delight. I am a Bostonian. I went to my first Red Sox game at Fenway Park in 1951, when I was five years old. Fenway was and is a dazzling place. Ascending from the dank underbelly of the park on the first base side, I was (and still am) stunned by the greenness of the grass and the imposing “Green Monster” of the left field wall, 37 feet high. I felt the presence of something much bigger, much grander than myself. I also had that experience every time I walked into my grandiose synagogue and into Boston Symphony Hall. They were my three holy places.

But it was the next year, 1952, that I started to memorize the names and numbers of the players. Ted Williams might as well have been God on leave from the synagogue or Beethoven coming to visit from

Symphony Hall. That grand left field wall belonged to him, it being where he played when we were on defense.

But if Williams was Jupiter, the rookie center fielder, Jimmy Piersall, was Mercury. Mercurial was indeed a suitable adjective for him. He glittered. He dashed. He dazzled. He did things that seemed pure magic. And he was funny, too. He argued with people. He once ran the bases backwards after hitting a home run. I don't mean he went to third base first; I mean he ran them backwards - his back leaning into the steps instead of following them. Having been thrown out at home once, he argued almost hysterically with the umpire and then produced a water pistol, with which he cleaned off home plate for the umpire to have a clearer view.

It was soon revealed he was bipolar. He was institutionalized for a year and then returned for six glorious seasons with a team that never was able to compete for the pennant. (The glory years of 1946-49 were over. We had become spoiled by all that winning; after 1949, we had trouble winning even 50% of the time.) But we had Williams, and we had Piersall. What more could you want out of a baseball game?

Piersall published a book, *Fear Strikes Out*, about his struggles with mental health. They made a movie out of it.

He appears briefly in *Ball Four* as a member of the Washington Nationals, playing the Yankees. Jim Bouton somehow was able to capture this mercurial sense of Piersall in a single passage, which constitutes our final example.

Ex. 7a. Text: A virtuosic performance

Piersall used to get mad as hell and call Coates a lot of names, the most gentle of which was thermometer, but it didn't seem to hurt the way he played. I remember a game in Washington. Piersall was playing center field and Coates was giving him hell from the Yankee bullpen. Piersall was turning away from the game to give it back when somebody hit a long fly ball to left-center and Piersall had to tear after it. All the time he was running he was screaming at Coates, and when he got up to the fence he climbed halfway up it, caught the ball, robbing somebody of a home run, and threw it in. But not for a second did he stop yelling at Coates. (p.132)

I am going to take a grammatical, editorial liberty here by changing two marks of punctuation. I am adding an m-dash (a double-length hyphen), which Bouton uses rarely, and a colon, which he almost never uses. These two changes do not alter the music of this passage but rather makes that music more evident.

The changes:

- (1) I am making the period at the end of the 2nd sentence into colon because it seems to me part and parcel of the 3rd sentence. It belongs with the 3rd sentence. The colon combines the two sentences into one.
- (2) I am making the period at the end of the 5th sentence into an m-dash, thus combining sentences 5 and 6 into a single sentence.

Here is the resulting revision:

Piersall used to get mad as hell and call Coates a lot of names, the most gentle of which was thermometer, but it didn't seem to hurt the way he played. I remember a game in Washington: Piersall was playing center field and Coates was giving him hell from the Yankee bullpen. Piersall was turning away from the game to give it back when somebody hit a long fly ball to left-center and Piersall had to tear after it. All the time he was running he was screaming at Coates, and when he got up to the fence he climbed halfway up it, caught the ball, robbing somebody of a home run, and threw it in - but not for a second did he stop yelling at Coates.

There you have it - a biography of Jimmy Piersall in 127 words.

When we transform this passage into a colometric, we can see how its antic energy is produced.

Ex. 7b Colometric

Piersall used to get mad as hell
 and call Coates a lot of names,
 but it didn't seem to hurt the way he played.

 I remember a game in Washington:
 Piersall was playing center field
 and Coates was giving him hell from the Yankee bullpen.

Piersall was turning away from the game to give it back
 when somebody hit a long fly ball to left-center
 and Piersall had to tear after it.

All the time he was running he was screaming at Coates,
 and when he got up to the fence
 he climbed halfway up it,
 caught the ball,
 robbing somebody
 of a home run,
 and threw it in --
 but not for a second did he stop yelling at Coates.

Here are the beats per sentence:

4-4-4

3-4-5

6-5-3

5-2-2-2-2-2-5

Bouton starts us off as he often starts us off – with a succession of 4-beat lines that provide the background for the scene he is about to unfold. Nothing unusual; nothing disruptive; everything expectable.

Instead of rounding off that sentence with a 3-beat line, which we have often seen him do, he uses 3 beats to begin the next sentence. (We have seen that before, too.) It is another contextualizing sentence; but this time, instead of a succession of 4-beat lines, we have a progression from 3 beats to 4 beats to 5 beats. This is no longer just background: It signals an increase, though subtle and gradual, in tension. It might as well be saying to us, “Get ready for something stunning, folks.” Instead of saying that, he lets the rhythmic crescendo say it for him.

As we have seen throughout this essay, Bouton saves 5-beat lines for special occasions. They are grander. They spread their wings more. They have the faint sense of Shakespeare to them, whose normal poetic format was long series of iambic pentameter lines. Pentamter – five!

He ends the second sentence with a 5. But it does not seem to be a particularly momentous or noble moment:

and Coates was giving him hell from the Yankee bullpen.

Why should this line be worthy of 5 beats? The answer appears immediately, as we begin the third sentence, where we encounter something we have never yet encountered before – a 6-beat line!

What does this hyper-extended line accomplish? The argument with Coates is already under way in the previous sentence. The 6-beat

line allows that argument to grow. But six beats? That goes against the rules. That destroys our stable expectations. Hmm. That is just what Jimmy Piersall used to do in center field – exceed the limitations set by the sober expectations of baseball fans and the etiquette of the game.

Have I now gone completely overboard in my analysis? No, I don't think so. Look what happens next. The argument (which, if not interrupted by some external agent) could have continued to grow until it destroyed all sense of order. But something does indeed interrupt:

when somebody hit a long fly ball to left-center

We have returned to a 5-beat line. It seems to restore a modicum of order. Jimmy simply must stop yelling at Coates, since he needs to divert his attention to his real job, catching fly balls hit to center field. A sense of excess still remains: Usually a return to order means a return to a 4-beat line. Returning to a 5-beat line is an unusual, perhaps even unique way of restoring order when all boundaries had just been removed by a rogue 6-beat line.

Though the rhythm may have been momentarily stabilized, the action of the moment was growing yet more pressing, more tense. How to suggest that? Reduce the number of beats yet again – but not to the expected, emotionally controlled 4 beats. Skip right over 4 and go to a 3-beat line. Now that can produce some tension:

Piersall was turning away from the game to give it back
 when somebody hit a long fly ball to left-center
 and Piersall had to tear after it.

The argument with Coates had produced the first 5-beat line. Jimmy is now “tearing after” the fly ball; but somehow he is able to continue the argument with Coates -- continuing it in, of course, another 5-beat line, which begins a new sentence:

All the time he was running he was screaming at Coates,

The argument with Coates has now been identified with a 5-beat line.

Pause to consider what is going on at this snap-shot moment:

- a) Jimmy is arguing with Coates;
- b) Someone has hit a terrific shot that well could be a home run;
- c) Jimmy must split himself in half - half arguer and half center fielder;
- d) he is screaming; he is running; the ball is about to go over the fence; the Nationals are in trouble.

How can Bouton produce this sense of tension in a single sentence? He does it - as he does so often, but here even more dramatically than usual - by manipulating the rhythm of the prose. If a jump from 5 beats to 3 beats had been dramatic, then how much more dramatic would it be to jump from 5 beats all the way to 2 beats! But since this fly ball takes a few moments in time, he must keep the 2-beat lines coming:

All	the time	he was running	he was screaming	at Coates,
	and when he got up		to the fence	
	he climbed		halfway up it,	
	caught		the ball,	
	robbing		somebody	
	of a home		run,	
	and threw		it in --	

And how does Mercury complete his magic trick? How does he make it seem like all that baseball stuff was merely an annoying outside interruption of the really important stuff – his argument with this bullpen denizen? Simple: Just jump right back to a 5-beat line, as if nothing had happened between the two 5-beaters.

but not for a second did he stop yelling at Coates.

Marvellous.

Well, you well may ask, what about all that literary stuff like the chiasmi and sound repetition that brocaded the previous Example? Is it just on vacation? Surely not. I could spend all sorts of time on it here too:

and when he got up	to the fence
he climbed	halfway up it,
caught	the ball,
robbing	somebody
of a home	run,

Left column: the two “c” words (“climbed” and “caught”) alliterate not only with each other, but also with their secondary alliteration cousin “got.” “Got” rhymes with “caught.” There is a sound

chiasmus of

robbing // somebody // home // run

and the right column rhyme of “somebody” and “run.”

But as a reader, I have no need to bother with of all that here. The rhythm and music of this extraordinary little scene are enough to get the job done all by themselves. Who would want a more entertaining center fielder? Now playing center field, Mercury.

You might well ask why in the world I would take this much trouble to write about Ball Four ‘s reader expectations and colometrics. In September of 2016, I received an email from Mitchell Nathanson, Professor of Law at the Jeffrey S. Moorad Center for the Study of Sports Law, part of the Villanova University School of Law. He told me he was writing a biography of Jim Bouton and had a favor to ask. He believes that Ball Four has continued to inhabit the shelves of book stores for a half-century because it is so well written. He had known of my work in the field of legal writing. He felt that I might be able to make a case for why the book is so well written and asked if I would look into it. The goal was for me to write about two paragraphs that he could include in the biography. I bought the book and started reading. Then I started writing. The investigation bore much more fruit than even a green grocer could have imagined. So what you have just read is the resulting essay.

I have explored prose rhythm by this unusual use of colometric form in an Advanced Composition course I taught at Duke University for

30 straight semesters. What I have learned over the years applies to far more than courses in literary analysis. It explains why great public utterances are great. Understanding how rhythm functions in prose can help writers become extraordinary writers. If you would like to see why Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address really is as great as everyone seems to think it is, please take a look at my colometric analysis of it, posted on the Publications page of my website, [www./GeorgeGopen.com](http://www.GeorgeGopen.com).

With world enough and time, I will produce a book on the subject.

I hope you have enjoyed this journey.

Epilogue:

What	I have learned	over	the years	
applies to	far more	than courses	in literary	analysis.
It explains	why great	public	utterances	are great.
Under-	standing	how rhythm	functions	in prose
can help	writers	become	extraordinary	writers.

So here is a valuable piece of advice:

Save 5-beat lines for momentous occasions.