UPON HEARING SPORTS RADIO'S DISMISSAL OF THE AGING CLOSER

BJ WARD

"What leaf-fringed legend haunts
about thy shape…What wild ecstasy…"
--John Keats

According to sports talk radio,
the hinge of an empire
is a right elbow.
The broadcasters
toss spite and spit at the once-brilliant aging closer,
whose arm, now enervated, can't catch up
with ambition—
and whose defeats now deflate stadiums.

But one cannot count how many grins over the years
habited those bleachers
when a lumbering slugsmith or suddenly feckless swatsman
supposed to make a bat
slap a ball
couldn't purchase a single with his million dollar paycheck.

This gaunt clothes-hanger upholding pinstripes—
part surgeon, part executioner—
would attack bats
with a fired apple
and split them into saw spray—

How many times I witnessed some hungry lumber
try to chomp the hot meal
only to splinter into a father, a son,
and the Paraclete of the white ball,
its sutures still bloody from that operation,

rolling easily toward the sure-handed shortstop—
himself all vac-u-matic torque twisting up from a pair of cleats—
who'd scoop and spin like an importuned dust devil in shallow left,
rubbernecking as if some vulpine beauty were at first

and deliver a seed to the mitt's court
like it was fresh-pressed law
sent forth from on a 10" mountain—
the tablets of the scoreboard forever etched with the news.

Photo by Mark Hillringhouse

BJ Ward's most recent book is *Jackleg Opera* (North Atlantic/Random House). His poems have appeared in *Poetry, American Poetry Review, TriQuarterly, The Normal School, Painted Bride Quarterly, The New York Times, The Sun,* and The Pushcart Prize Anthology. The poem *Upon Hearing Sports Radio's Dismissal of The Aging Closer* is from *Jackleg Opera: Collected Poems, 1990 to 2013* (North Atlantic Books / Random House)

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