

Neil Silberblatt -- Two Baseball Poems

Yom Koufax

*"On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.
... Who will live and who will die?
... Who by fire and who by water?"*

- from the prayer, *Unetaneh Tokef (Let Us Cede Power)*, recited on Yom Kippur.

Who shall discover their incinerated lineage
stuffed into a locker,
and who shall languish in the
showers of doubt.

Who shall put on the uniform,
and who shall refuse.
Who shall be elevated,
and who shall strike out.

Who shall await the catcher's
coded signal,
and who shall deliver his own
clear message.

Who shall pitch a perfect game
without throwing a ball,
and who shall allow seven runs
in two and two-thirds innings.

Who shall stand with hands over hearts
as Monday night patriots,
and who shall never stand taller
than when taking a knee.

Who shall enter the ring
and bloody his opponent,
and who shall forfeit his crown
by refusing to lend his hand to slaughter.

Who shall be exalted on the mound
and in the hearts of his people,
and who shall be yanked by an irate manager
at the age of 56*.

* - *Donald Scott Drysdale (23 July 1936 – 3 July 1993), who pitched for the L.A. Dodgers in Game One of the 1965 World Series, in lieu of Sandy Koufax who refused to pitch on Yom Kippur.*

25 to 4

"The Mets lost to the Washington Nationals, 25-4, the most lopsided loss in the team's 57-year history. ... 'A tough loss,' Mets Manager Mickey Callaway said ... 'We gotta do better than that.'"
New York Times, July 31, 2018

"... You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."
from *The Unnamable (1954)*, by Samuel Beckett

Beckett must be coaching these guys
these galoots who should have thrown
in the towel nine innings ago, raised the white flag,
cried out "Uncle".

But, no, they still come out for more
swings and errors of outrageous fortune,
when Stengel would already be covering his face
(in shame) or hurling insults (which they still couldn't catch).

They must know that there is no recovery
from this score, no happy ending
to this tragedy - the way the condemned know,
the way you know after watching
three acts of *Boheme* or one of *Lucia*,
the way a tree soon to be felled knows.

After 19 runs, unanswered except in grief,
they must be longing for the solace of
the ice pack, but, no, they still come out -
these hapless fools, for whom I root, root, root.

Neil Silberblatt's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Poetica Magazine*, *The Aurean*, *Two Bridges Review*, *Ibbetson Street Press*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Chantarelle's Notebook*, *Canopic Jar*, *First Literary Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Nixes Mate Review*, and *The Good Men Project*. His work has also been selected for various anthologies, including *Confluencia in the Valley: The First Five Years of Converging with Words* (Naugatuck Valley Community College, 2013); University of Connecticut's *Teacher-Writer* magazine; *Collateral Damage* (Pirene's Fountain); and *Culinary Poems* (Pirene's Fountain). He has published two poetry collections: *So Far, So Good* (2012), and *Present Tense* (2013), and has been nominated several times for a Pushcart Prize. His poetry chapbook, *Past Imperfect*, will be published later this year by Nixes Mate Books. Neil is the founder/director of Voices of Poetry - which, since 2012, has organized and presented a series of poetry events (featuring acclaimed poets) at various venues in NY, NJ, CT and MA. In his spare time, Neil is battling Stage 4 cancer.