Natinals

Company apologizes for Washington Nationals ‘Natinals’ jersey error
—ESPN.com, April 21, 2009

By then, we’d seen our mistake. A nation
was what really—words,
some stitchwork? & if
just one letter were missing—slipped,
maybe, to the sweatshop floor,
or forgotten
that week in a pattern book
in Matamoros
over lunch break—what,
then, of our bomber crews
waiting at Ramstein? What
of our electoral system
& Glocks & Preamble? For three
& two-thirds innings, not one of us
noticed. The sodium lights
blazed on the field’s green canton, catcher
& pitcher passing their slender line
between them, efficient
as a sewing machine.

So the flaw
would come to define us. Like
a snagged thread. Yes,

like the run
in the hem of the loincloth Achilles
wore, or one
of those other ancient oxes too proud
or dumb for their own survival.

Script itself
came earlier. In Egypt,
in turquoise shafts, slave families
scored prayers in the dazzling walls.

This was, we
largely accept, the origin
        of America. O,
        my doomed country. One day
we too will surface
        with our stadiums. Faded white
domes & mezzanines. Excavators
will marvel at our box scores’
        strict cuneiform, the crude
        acrostics—FOX,
        TBS—the men of this nation
raised to their one god.

I want them
to remember us smiling. The diamond’s
        brown lanes raked clean, our cups
        sloshing with the flattest of beers. Some boys,
they will say, chase a ball
        around a field to no end
        save beauty.

But I know
this isn’t us. Our custom
        is ancient & terrible. There
        is a hero who is all of us—one
nation on his chest. Cloud-
gatherer, breaker
        of horses. He parades
dreadfully, behold, to the plate.