

Richard Cecil

## BATTING AVERAGE

Terrible at sports, I knew that no one  
counted on me to bat in a run  
or throw a touchdown pass or score a goal.  
No, I'd freeze while my opponent stole  
the ball out of my unathletic hands.  
Whenever I played, I prayed for empty stands.  
So why did I try out for every team?  
Not to impress a girl, for, even in dreams,  
I booted easy grounders, dropped fly balls,  
missed tackles, fumbled, blundered into walls.  
"Hey, Elise! Watch me swing and miss!"  
was not my way of trying to earn a kiss.  
So what did I think, stepping to the plate  
like doomed Hector, going to meet his fate  
against Achilles, his bound-to-win opponent:  
*God help me? Or This time it might be different? . . .*

as once it was for me, when, by mistake,  
I swung just as a curve began to break,  
and it dipped down and somehow found my bat.  
I ran to first so fast I lost my hat  
and stood there breathless in a glory haze—  
a hit! But next pitch as I stepped off base,  
the pitcher threw to first and picked me off.  
*You're out!* the umpire cried. Once more, I'd goofed.  
I trotted from the field with my head down,  
knowing this was not the time to clown,  
and when I reached the bench I kicked the dirt  
and cursed as if this failure really hurt.

But inwardly I was relieved to flee  
my fluke success before coach labeled me  
a savvy curveball hitter and moved me up  
a notch or two in our weak starting lineup,  
raising expectations I'd prevail  
once or twice at bat, instead of fail  
every time, however hard I tried.  
Once you've grown used to being unsuccessful,



screwing up becomes a lot less stressful  
than playing well, which raises futile hope  
that you are not a loser, not a dope,  
not the one whose enemy will slobber  
on your corpse after he has clobbered  
you at a sport, or in single combat.  
It's best to strike out every time at bat.

