

Hysteria

By Dionisio D. Martínez

For Ana Menendez

It only takes one night with the wind on its knees
to imagine Carl Sandburg unfolding
a map of Chicago, puzzled, then walking the wrong way.

The lines on his face are hard to read. I alternate
between the tv, where a plastic surgeon is claiming
that every facial expression causes wrinkles, and

the newspaper. I picture the surgeon reading the lines
on Sandburg's face, lines that would've made more sense
if the poet had been, say, a tree growing

in a wind orchard. Maybe he simply smiled too much.
I'm reading about the All-Star game, thinking
that maybe Sandburg saw the White Sox of 1919.

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I love American newspapers, the way each section
is folded independently and believes it owns
the world. There's this brief item in the inter-

national pages: the Chinese government has posted
signs in Tiananmen Square, forbidding laughter.
I'm sure the plastic surgeon would approve, he'd say

the Chinese will look young much longer, their faces
unnaturally smooth, but what I see (although
no photograph accompanies the story) is laughter

bursting inside them. I go back to the sports section
and a closeup of a rookie in mid-swing, his face
keeping all the wrong emotions in check.

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When I read I bite my lower lip, a habit
the plastic surgeon would probably call
cosmetic heresy because it accelerates the aging

process. I think of Carl Sandburg and the White Sox;
I think of wind in Tiananmen Square, how a country
deprived of laughter ages invisibly; I think

of the Great Walls of North America, each of them
a grip on some outfield like a rookie's hands
around a bat when the wind is against him; I bite

my lower lip again; I want to learn
to think in American, to believe that a headline
is a fact and all stories are suspect.

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