

The Gil Carter Correspondence

On the night of August 11, 1959, a minor league baseball player named Gil Carter hit what is believed to be the longest home run in history, approximately 730 feet. When the ball disappeared over the 60-foot light pole behind the left-field fence it was still on its way up.

Before he takes his insulin, the man
who hit the really long home run responds
in longhand to another patient fan:
“Thank you so much for writing, Mr. Bonds.

Yes, I remember almost everything,
the nighthawk silhouettes, the infield chatter,
the ball becoming huge, the hitchless swing,
the lone voice swallowing its last *no batter*,

slack faces lifted to the firmament —
and by *the ball* I hope you know I mean
the one that hadn't finished its ascent
the last time it was seen,

which isn't necessarily the one
beside me as I write. It wasn't hard
in '59 to find a fresh home run
in any big New Mexican backyard.

Home run: what a spectacular misnomer.
You can't go home again, jiggity-jog.
If forced to choose a name I'd favor *Homer*,
less for Odysseus than for his dog.

What can I truly say about this ball?
It's horsehide, twine, and yarn from Costa Rica
hugging a hunk of cork from Portugal.
On its slow odyssey to East Topeka

my homer would've been the shortest leg.
I saw the seams that night, the sutured leather,
and realized this was the only egg
horses and men would ever put together,

(stanza break)

and that I should reopen it, should try
to beat it back into the cosmic batter
from which we're conjured. Chickens long to fly,
but if an egg can long it longs to shatter.

Of course I couldn't do it. Once again
I took the full cut and it simply flew.
I'd love to tell you how that felt, but then
I wouldn't be the only one who knew."

(First published in *Topeka* magazine)