

**Anecdote of Men
by the Thousand**

The soul, he said, is composed
Of the external world.

There are men of the East, he
said,
Who are the East.
There are men of a province
Who are that province.
There are men of a valley
Who are that valley.

There are men whose words
Are as natural sounds
Of their places
As the cackle of toucans
In the place of toucans.

The mandoline is the instrument
Of a place.

Are there mandolines of western
mountains?
Are there mandolines of northern
moonlight?

The dress of a woman of Lhasa,
In its place,
Is an invisible element of that
place
Made visible.

—Wallace Stevens (1923)

**The Dogs at Live Oak Beach,
Santa Cruz**

As if there could be a world
Of absolute innocence
In which we forget ourselves

The owners throw sticks
And half-bald tennis balls
Toward the surf
And the happy dogs leap after
them
As if catapulted—

Black dogs, tan dogs,
Tubes of glorious muscle—


Pursuing pleasure
More than obedience
They race, skid to a halt in the
wet sand,
Sometimes they'll plunge straight
into
The foaming breakers

Like diving birds, letting the green
turbulence
Toss them, until they snap and
sink

Teeth into floating wood
Then bound back to their owners
Shining wet, with passionate
speed
For nothing,
For absolutely nothing but joy.

—Alicia Ostriker (1998)



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Cotton Candy

We walked on the bridge over
the Chicago River
for what turned out to be the last
time,
and I ate cotton candy, that sug-
ary air,
that sweet blue light spun out of
nothingness. It was just a mo-
ment, really, nothing more,
but I remember marveling at the
sturdy cables
of the bridge that held us up
and threading my fingers through
the long
and slender fingers of my grand-
father,
an old man from the Old World
who long ago disappeared into
the nether regions.
And I remember that eight-year-
old boy
who had tasted the sweetness of
air,
which still clings to my mouth
and disappears when I breathe.

—Edward Hirsch (2010)

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My Madonna

I haled me a woman from the
street,
Shameless, but, oh, so fair!
I bade her sit in the model's seat
And I painted her sitting there.


I hid all trace of her heart unclean;
I painted a babe at her breast;
I painted her as she might have
been
If the Worst had been the Best.


She laughed at my picture and
went away.

Then came, with a knowing nod,
A connoisseur, and I heard him
say;
"Tis Mary, the Mother of God."

So I painted a halo round her hair,
And I sold her and took my fee,
And she hangs in the church of
Saint Hillaire,
Where you and all may see.

—Robert W. Service (1953)

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