

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

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 Lhassa, In its place, Is an invisible element of that place Made visible.

-Wallace Stevens (1923)

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The Dogs at Live Oak Beach, Santa Cruz

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

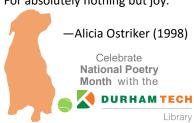
The owners throw sticks
And half-bald tennis balls
Toward the surf
And the happy dogs leap after
them
As if catapulted—

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.





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 sugary air, that sweet blue light spun out of nothingness. It was just a moment, 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 grandfather, an old man from the Old World who long ago disappeared into the nether regions. And I remember that eight-yearold boy

who had tasted the sweetness of

which still clings to my mouth

and disappears when I breathe.

—Edward Hirsch (2010)

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air.



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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