

Hats



Portrait of a Man with Moustache and Hat, Felix Nussbaum, 1925

America is suspicious of the man who wears more than one hat.

—William Logan



So many hats. So many mad, quibbling hats, he feels just like a haberdasher who models his own samples: the song-man

strumming his guitar; the poet scribbling
his lines; the prosist earning his rasher.
So many hats, each worn by the wrong man.



My dad, in the day, wore a fedora,
bound with a trim-ribbon, raw-edged, pinched, creased
along the crown in Borsalino style,
affirming his identity for a
time, part crook, part aristocrat, and least
of all a man who lived devoid of guile.



Myself, I prefer the Boss of the Plains,
durable, waterproof, worn by Tom Mix,
my childhood hero, who knew how to dress,
kneeling or ambling or tugging the reins.
It's good to look good when lost in the sticks
and down on your luck, with none to impress.



Solemnly intoning their Hail Marys,
meditating on last things and noting
the skulls heaped up, the gape, the silent howl,
the monks consult their worn breviaries.
No doubt, the scriptures are well worth quoting.
Before the scalp frays, best to don a cowl.



Whatever he slaps upon his noggin,
identity resists the first person.
He is neither me nor you, a rogue in
millinery guise. Now how to log in
to his real self? I write this verse in
some discomfort, reading William Logan.



Most, I agree with Tony Soprano:
dining out, you don't wear a baseball cap
any more than you would sport a beanie
at funeral or wedding. *Cum grano*,
sure, but check it or rest it on your lap.
So my hat's off to James Gandolfini.