Cowboy Pictures

I want to send away
to California
for pictures of the sun.
That state of the Union
is famous for its light.
Even in black and white,
the glamour of young men
who've oiled up their skin
till it shines with the sky
is bound to make my day,
to say nothing of night.
I can't imagine what
colour could do. Or what
those guys go through to get
to that estate. Mountain
passes, the Great Salt Plain?
A still-hostile frontier
might explain why most wear
cowboy hats black and white
as the pictures. But what
explains them lacking all
other clothes? A couple
are trying the wild
Indian bit, child
faces looking paler
under the cheap feathers
and war paint. And of course
this grown-up guy as Horse
needs some explaining too.
Or at least a lasso.
All the other rules seem the same. Whatever game they're playing, the only difference seems to be the gold there was in them there hills is now a gleam of silver bodies, still as any mineral. Cold caught in shades of grey, never aging. Will they?

Picture yourself that way in California, some green rancher, say, out riding your range, without a thought for what sweet heart you left across the Great Divide. Or maybe be the little lost dogie he cradles to his chest. So the pictures suggest some sentimental ways of bondage, yes, of boys being boys. Shining with the sky, in skin and breath and eye, they're the picture of youth—their six guns are shooting stars through the bars of the dark that covers more than half the planet. Try to bite the bullet.

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