

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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