

## Still Life w/ Spent Shell Casing

It is camp meeting time & the preacher stands  
next to the wood pile with a six-gun on his hip.

He towers over our assortment of sins – the rock  
records filling our ears with temptation, the stacks

of dirty fiction drawing us away from Christ. We have  
gathered here today to confess, to purge with fire

all the wickedness from our ways. We lay our burdens  
down, stack them like tinder, & the deacon is ready

with his blowtorch burning white hot like the hand of God.  
Raises the flame in wait for his calling, but the preacher

steadies his hand. Whispers *not now*. Steps back ten paces,  
plants his boots in the dirt, some old television standing

terrifying in its splendor. A dark monolith, screen  
blank & gaping as the mouth of Hell. The preacher swells

with holy swagger & unholsters his gun. Extends his right arm,  
stiffly, fearlessly, every muscle locked in righteous anger.

& we hear the click as the hammer drops, the echoing  
boom of supersonic lead, the implosion & the shattering

glass & we taste the smoke, the acrid stink of wires  
& vacuum tubes combusting as the preacher stares

at the cloud of dust – half in awe, half triumphant –  
shouting to the heavens *Do you see? That's the Devil*

*there, swirling into the sky like so many frightful black  
crows, can you see him? Do you see the things I see?*

& filled with faith or fear, the congregation says *Amen*.

## Self Portrait As Ghost Chant, Hidden Behind Trees

a slow moan  
    of dissonant angels  
& then the sun

    hovering above  
two winking stars  
    blinding yellow  
                    splendor  
& do you hear them?  
    the chimes    in the air

oh, how they swell  
    how they tremor  
left    then right    then left  
    again  
dancing beneath the nose  
    of the colt

& the ground shakes  
& tiny mountains shiver  
    between parallel lines  
& green leaves part like the sea

& smoke billows in the sky  
    as the slow dash of steel

drifts            three worried ghosts  
    v a n i s h i n g  
    into the fog

## Self Portrait As Tempest With Stage Lighting

Perhaps I am not  
the ship anchored  
at harbor, but only

a captain lashed  
to the mast. Perhaps  
I am always & forever

fighting the raging sea.  
So what if I see myself  
mirrored in the squall,

a dirty skeleton  
covered in straw & battered  
against the hull.

Salt scoured, flesh  
laid raw or peeled to bone.  
Perhaps I am

merely a vortex, lost  
in desperate choreography,

aching to be swallowed  
by foam-washed waves.