

ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

50th

GUNSLINGER

EDWARD
DORN

*"Gunslinger is a fundamental
American masterpiece."*

—THOMAS MCGUANE—

Praise for *Gunslinger*

"*Gunslinger* is perhaps the strangest long poem of the last half-century: a quest myth wrapped around an acid-inspired western comic strip adventure in which a gunslinger, astride a drug-taking, talking horse called Levi-Strauss, searches for Howard Hughes."—PATRICK MCGUINNESS, *The Guardian*

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"This is a jokey poem, high-spirited and good-tempered, carried forward on a steadily inventive play of puns and pleasantries."

—DONALD DAVIE

GUN SLING -ER

**EDWARD
DORN**

...
50th Anniversary
Edition
...

With an introduction and a new foreword by Marjorie Perloff

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham & London*

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B O O K

I

*The curtain might rise
anywhere on a single speaker*

for Paul Dorn

I met in Mesilla
The Cautious Gunslinger
of impeccable personal smoothness
and slender leather encased hands
folded casually
to make his knock.
He would show you his map.

There is your domain.
Is it the domicile it looks to be
or simply a retinal block
of seats in,
he will flip the phrase
the theater of impatience.

If it is where you are,
the footstep in the flat above
in a foreign land

or any shimmer the city
sends you
the prompt sounds
of a metropolitan nearness
he will unroll the map of locations.

His knock resounds
inside its own smile, where?
I ask him is my heart.
Not this pump he answers
artificial already and bound
touching me
with his leathern finger
as the Queen of Hearts burns
from his gauntlet into my eyes.

Flageolets of fire
he says there will be.
This is for your sadly missing heart
the girl you left
in Juárez, the blank
political days press her now
in the narrow adobe
confines of the river town
her dress is torn
by the misadventure of
her gothic search

The mission bells are ringing
in Kansas.
Have you left something out:
Negative, says my Gunslinger,
no *thing* is omitted.

Time is more fundamental than space.
It is, indeed, the most pervasive
of all the categories
in other words
theres plenty of it.
And it stretches things themselves
until they blend into one,
so if youve seen one thing
youve seen them all.

I held the reins of his horse
while he went into the desert
to pee. *Yes*, he reflected
when he returned, that's less.

How long, he asked
have you been in this territory.

Years I said. Years.
Then you will know where we can have
a cold drink before sunset and then a bed
will be my desire
if you can find one for me
I have no wish to continue
my debate with men,
my mare lathers with tedium
her hooves are dry
Look they are covered with the alkali
of the enormous space
between here and formerly.
Need I repeat, we have come
without sleep from Nuevo Laredo.

And why do you have such a horse
Gunslinger? I asked. Don't move
he replied
the sun rests deliberately
on the rim of the sierra.

And where will you now I asked.
Five days northeast of here
depending of course on whether one's horse
is of iron or flesh
there is a city called Boston
and in that city there is a hotel
whose second floor has been let
to an inscrutable Texan named Hughes
Howard? I asked
The very same.
And what do you mean by inscrutable,
oh Gunslinger?
I mean to say that He
has not been seen since 1833.

But when you have found him my Gunslinger
what will you do, oh what will you do?
You would not know
that the souls of old Texans
are in jeopardy in a way not common
to other men, my singular friend.

You would not know
of the long plains night
where they carry on
and arrange their genetic duels
with men of other states —

so there is a longhorn bull half mad
half deity
who awaits an account from me
back of the sun you nearly disturbed
just then.
Lets have that drink.

STRUM

strum

And by that sound
we had come there, false fronts
my Gunslinger said make
the people mortal
and give their business
an inward cast. They cause culture.
Honk HONK, Honk HONK Honk
that sound comes
at the end of the dusty street,
where we meet the gaudy Madam
of that very cabaret going in
where our drink is to be drunk —

*Hello there, Slinger! Long time
no see
what brings you, who's your friend,
to these parts, and where
if you don't mind my asking, Hello,
are you headed . .*

*Boston!? you don't say, Boston
is an actionable town they say
never been there myself
Not that I mean to slight the boys
but I've had some nice girls
from up Boston way
they turned out real spunky!*

*But you look like you
always did Slinger, you
still make me shake, I mean
why do you think I've got my hand on
my hip if not to steady myself
and the way I twirl this
Kansas City parasol
if not to keep the dazzle
of them spurs outa my eyes*
Miss Lil! I intervened
you mustn't slap my
Gunslinger on the back
in such an off hand manner
I think the sun, the moon
and some of the stars are
kept in their tracks
by this Person's equilibrium
or at least I sense some effect
on the perigee and apogee of all
our movements in this, I can't quite say,
man's presence, the setting sun's
attention I would allude to
and the very appearance
of his neurasthenic mare
a genuine Nejdee
lathered, as you can see, with abstract fatigue

*Shit, Slinger! you still got that
marvelous creature, and who is this
funny talker, you pick him up
in some sludgy seat of higher
learnin, Creeps! you always did
hang out with some curious refugees.*

*Anyway come up and see me
 and bring your friend, anytime
 if you're gonna be in town we
 got an awful lot to talk about
 for instance, remember that man
 you was always looking for
 name of Hughes?*
 Howard? I asked
*You got it — that was
 the gent's first handle
 a texas dynamiter he was
 back in '32
 always turned my girls on a lot
 when he blew In,
 A man in the house
 is worth 2 in the street
 anyday, like I say this
 Hughes had a kind of interest
 about him, namely
 a saddle bag full of currency
 which don't hurt none
 You remember there was this trick
 they called her Jane —
 she got religion & left the unit
 but I heard this Hughes*
 Howard? I asked
 Right, boy
*they say he moved to Vegas
 or bought Vegas and
 moved it.
 I can't remember which.
 Anyway, I remember you had
 what your friend here*

*might call an obsession
about the man —
don't tell me you're
still looking for him
I mean they say,
can't prove it by me,
this Hughes —
Howard? I asked
Hey Slinger you better shut
that boy up!
Cut it, my friend
I was just —
Drop it!
Anyway, they say
this Howard is kinda
peculiar about bein Seen
like anywhere anytime
sort of a special type
like a lotta texans I know
plumb strange the way
they operate.*

*You know,
I had to deal with a texan once
nearly drove one of my best girls Out,
insisted on her playing black jack
with his stud horse
who was pretty good
held the cards with his hooves
real articulate like and could add
fastern most humans
recall before I put a stop to it
we had special furniture
hauled in from Topeka.*

*That horse would sit at
the table all night, terrible
on whiskey and rolled
a fair smoke
and this texan insisted he was
payin for my girl's time
and he could use it any way he
saw fit
as long as he was payin like
and I had to explain
a technical point to that Shareholder
namely, that he was payin for her ass,
which is not time!*

How did you get rid of him
I asked

*Well boy, that was singular
you know I thought and thought
and I was plum stumpt
that is,
until one of my Regulars of the time
who had an interest in this girl
can't recall her name
but you'd know the fella
a wrangler from wyoming, THE Word
his name was
anyway he Suggested we
turn that horse on —
Hughes? I asked.
Jesus! Slinger can't you do
something about that refugee
no! his mother was Religious*

*so we turned this stud on
and it took most of a Tampico
shipment to do the job
but I'll tell you Slinger
that horse laughed all that night
and they carried him out next morning
and put him on the stage
for Amarillo, him and the texan
sittin in there all alone
and that horse was tellin everybody
what to do
Get that strong box up there,
get them "horses" hitched up
he'd say
rollin a big tampico bomber with his hooves
his shoes had come off, you see,
and he could do it so natural anyway
and then he'd kinda lounge
inside the stage coach and
lean out the window winkin
at the girls, showing
his teeth, I can't say he was
Unattractive, something kinda
handsome about his big face
and suggestive he was
a sorta manner
he had
He kept sayin Can You Manage?
and Thank You!
every time the hostler hitched up
another horse
and then he had a kinda what
you might call a derisive air*

*when he'd say "Due In On Monday"
because you see it was Sunday
when they left town, but
he kept knockin his right hoof
against the inside of the coach
sayin You All Alright Out There?
and he had the texan's hat on
a stetson XX sorta cockwise
on his head it was
I tell you Slinger you would of
split your levis and dropped your
beads to seen it.*

*Because he
was sayin some of the abstractest
things you ever heard
like Celery Is Crisp!
and we ain't seen him
or that individual texan
who owned him since.
I swear
that stud must have become a congressman
or something since then
He sure was going strong on that
fresh Tampico — Some of the hands
that was there that day in fact
claimed he didn't leave on the stage
at all, there's still people
around here who'll claim that horse
flew back west when the texan
went to sleep 5 miles out of town.*

Where were we I asked,
when I noticed my Gunslinger
had retired to a shady spot
cast by the town's one cottonwood
Hold on, requested the Gunslinger
and held a conference to the side
with Lil

and then he kissed with a smile
her hand and she said *you boys
enjoy yourself, I'll see about you later.*

Then as we mounted the steps
of the cabaret
The Gunslinger sang

*Oh a girl there was in the street
the day we rode into La Cruz
and the name of the name of her feet
was the same as the name of the street
and she stood and she stared like a moose
and her hair was tangled and loose . . .*

STRUM **strum**

Do you know said the Gunslinger
as he held the yellow tequila up
in the waning light of the cabaret
that this liquid is the last
dwindling impulse of the sun
and then he turned and knelt
and faced that charred orb

as it rolled below the swinging doors
as if it were entering yet descending
and he said to me NO!

it is not. It is that
cruelly absolute sign my father
I am the son of the sun, we two
are always in search
of the third — who is that I asked
Hughes?

Howard?

Yes.

No.

Why not?

Because the third can never be
a texan

*N*ever?

Yes.

Why not?

I told you, back there
when you held my horse.

Ah. If that is the case then
is your horse the Turned On
Horse of whom we've just now heard
and if that may be true how is it

your horse is also that
magnificently nervous mare

I've back there held?

Back There?

what is it you ask?

Is that your horse and was it
the Turned On Horse.
Possibly.

Possibly! what do you mean?

No, my horse is not a texan.

What?

Drink the yellow sun
of your tequila and calm
yourself, Jack
and then I shall tell you
because you are inattentive
and expect reason to Follow
as some future chain gang does
a well worn road.

Look, by the way, a fight
has started, order again
before the place is Smashed

I then did order, yet
wondered, the inexplicability
of all that had, in this half
hour passed. And when
the divine tequilas were served
we two had retired to a table
obscure in the corner.

Lo que pasa he breathed
this place is
in the constructive process
of ruin — Gaze upon it :
tables upended, the flak
of chips and drink surrounds us
with perfect, monday night slowmotion

And now my Gunslinger
in his steady way deliberated
on the scene before us — Note
he said
that confusion.
I did.
What do you see
he asked.
Men fighting I answered
Is that all, he asked
Do you want the deetails
I asked
Don't be evasive he replied
What is the *principle* of what
you see.
I was hard put to understand this
I tried.
The principle, I said
is leverage. Not quite
the Gunslinger rejoined,
that is the mechanism
I asked for the principle.
Yes you did, quite plainly
said I
But I am afraid I —
Never mind he said, are these
men men.
Yes I answered on the heated margin
of that general battle
Is my horse a horse? he continued
I'm on that score not sure
I said.

Your horse seemes different
from these men.

Quite right
but that's not altogether
what I am getting at.

Here
he said, passing me the cigarette.
I think, he added
of taking you to *Las Vegas*.
Then you aren't going
to *Boston*. Not now he
exhaled, fresh distortions
as you yourself heard
have reached my ears.
Uh-huh I managed to exhale.

Thus we sat and still
I knew not the principle
of which he spoke.

STRUM

strum

Then there was an interlude
in which the brawl before our
indented eyes went on.

Auto-destruction he breathed
and I in that time was
suspended
as if in some margin of the sea
I saw the wading flanks
of horses spread in energy

What makes?
he suddenly asked in the smoke
and turmoil, and the bullets
flying,
What makes you think
oh what makes you
that this horse sitting between us
and who has not spoken
a word
or is it that I have
from the beginning
misjudged you.
The Horse grinned at me

Oh my Gunslinger, I said
If this be true
and it must be
because I can see in this horse
the Horse described
Will it not be very inappropriate
that Lil see this same Horse
in her establishment?
What of the girls?

Why, untaught alien
do you think I have arranged
this mass collision, standard in its design
you see raging not 15 feet away
but to distract the vision
of that spinning crystal?
She seemed nice enough to me
I said.
You have not lived 2000
and more years and as he
disengaged his eyes from mine
he said And speaking of said
Lady here, she, comes —

My god, Slinger, she said
I am at your service,
replied the Gunslinger.
Oh knock that off!
I've got a Business to tend to
and the smoke in this corner
is blindin besides, say
haven't I met that Horse
before? The Horse
rose from his chair and
tipped his stetson XX
Hello *Lil*, it's been a long time
here have a seat,
we've got a lot to talk
about, *Slow down*
the Gunslinger said and
that was the only time
I ever heard anybody speak
obliquely to the Horse.

Thus sat the four of us
at last a company it seemed
and the Bombed Horse took off his stetson
XX, and drew on the table
our future course.

Whispered, as I did, aside
to the Gunslinger, Who, finally,
is this gaudy Lil? Lil,
I didn't expect to see
here — we were in Smyrna
together, now called Izmir
when they burned the place
Down, we were
Very young then
I might add. Does that
satisfy you?
Yes I answered.

And then
the Oblique Horse
having waited patiently
for the course of that aside
to run
asked Have you finished.
It occurred to me
I might not readily
Answer a Horse
but I was discouraged,
in whatever question
I might have felt,
when the Gunslinger
on my arm put

the pressure of his leatherbound
fingers and gave me
a look
in the aftermath of those bullets
and that dispersing smoke
which said, Quietly.

STRUM, strum

Then sat we mid aftermath
and those unruly customers in Lil's
cabaret and the Plugged In Horse
covered the table
with his elaborate plans
and as he planned he rolled
immense bombers
from the endless Tampico
in his saddle bags.

What's happened to my black ace
the Horse inquired
scraping his chair, reaching
under the table,
smiling, passing at the same time
his bomber without limit to me.
But, I,
don't recognize
this size,
it is, beyond, me.
No, mortal, that size is beyond your conception
Smoke. Don't describe yourself.

*That's right, referee, the Horse
thinks he's makin telescopes*

Lil observed

*but one often makes a remark
and only later sees how true it is!*

Jast pass it! Hey Slinger!

Play some music.

Right, breathed the Gunslinger
and he looped toward the juke then,
in a trajectory of exquisite proportion
a half dollar which dropped home
as the .44 presented itself in the proximity
of his hand and interrogated the machine

A28, Joe Turner *Early in the Mornin'*

came out and lay on the turntable

His inquisitive .44 repeated the question

and B13 clicked

Lightnin' Hopkins *Happy Blues for John Glenn*,

and so on

the terse trajectories of silver then

the punctuations of his absolute .44

without even pushing his sombrero off his eyes

Gawddamit Slinger! there you go

wreckin my Wurlitzer again

sittin there

in that tipped back chair,

can't you go over to the machine

and put the money in and push

the button like a normal bein?

We're at the Very beginning of logic

around here

*so them things cost money
and besides that Slinger, some
of these investors
is gettin edgy
since this Stoned Horse come in
they're talkin bout closin my place
Down
scarin my girls with hostile talk.
My bartender gettin tighter
every time you do some shit
like that.
Don't bring me down Lil,
we'll be out of here by and by.*

Yea Lil, drop it
the Stoned Horse said.
We'd all rather *be* there
than talk about it.
It's all right Lil, I
said. *Oh refugee
you talk like a natural
mortal, take your hand
off my knee
I've got other things to do
now.*

STRUM

Just then a Drifter carrying
a divine guitar
passed by our table and the guise

inlaid around the string cut hole
pulsated as do
stars in the ring
of a clear night
Hi! Digger
the drifting guitarist greeted
the Bombed Horse
who was in his saddle bags
rummaging
Heidigger? I asked
the Xtian Statistician
is that who you are?
Are you trying
to “describe” me, boy?
No, no, I hastened to add.
And by the way boy
if there’s any addin
to do around here
I’ll do it, that’s my stick
comprende?
Where’s my dark ace?

Into the cord of that question
a stranger turned his brilliantined head
pulled open his fabrikoid coat
and Said

What’s your business
with Any dark ace!

The scene
became a bas-relief
as the length of the bar froze
arms and legs, belts and buckles caught
drink stilled in mid-air

Yea! You! You're a horse
aincha? I mean you!
and, "looking around", *Horseface!*

strum

The Stoned Horse said Slowly
not looking up
from his rolling and planning
Stranger you got a *pliable lip*
you might get yourself described
if you stay on.

Come on!
Who's the horse, I mean who's
horse is that, we can't have
No Horse! in here.
It ain't proper
and I think I'm gonna
put a halter on you!

Uh uh, the Gunslinger breathed.
Anybody *know* the muthafucka
the Stoned Horse inquired
of the general air.
Hey, hear that the stranger gasped
that's even a *negra* horse!

Maybe so, maybe not
the Gunslinger inhaled
but stranger you got an Attitude
a mile long

as his chair dropped forward
all four legs on the floor
and as the disputational .44
occurred in his hand and spun there
in that warp of relativity one sees
in the backward turning spokes
of a buckboard,

then came suddenly
to rest, the barrel utterly justified
with a line pointing
to the neighborhood of infinity.
The room froze harder.

*Shit,
Slinger, Lil noticed, You've pointed
your .44 straight
out of town.
I keep tellin you
not to be so goddamn fancy
now that amacher's
got the drop on you!*

Not so, Lil!
the Slinger observed.
Your vulgarity is flawless
but you are the slave
of appearances —
this Stockholder will find
that his gun cannot speak
he'll find
that he has been Described

Strum

the greenhorn pulled
the trigger and his store-bought iron
coughed out some cheap powder,
and then changed its mind,
muttering about having
been up too late last night.
Its embarrassed handler
looked, one eye wandering,
into the barrel
and then reholstered it and
stood there.

strum

The total .44
recurred in the Slinger's hand
and spun there
then came home like a sharp knock
and the intruder was described —
a plain, unassorted white citizen.

You can go now,
the Turned On Horse said.
That investor'd make
a good janitor Lil observed,
if I was gonna keep this place
I'd hire him.

What does the foregoing mean?
I asked. Mean?
my Gunslinger laughed
Mean?

Questioner, you got some strange
obsessions, you want to know
what something *means* after you've
seen it, after you've *been* there
or were you *out* during
That time? No.
And you want some *reason*.
How fast are you
by the way? No local offense
asking that is there?
No.

I like you mi nuevo amigo
for a mortal you're exceptional
How fast are you?
Oh, average fast I suppose
or maybe a little more
than average fast, I ventured.
Which means
you gotta draw.
Well, yes.
Umm, considered the Gunslinger
taking the telescope
from the Turned On Horse.

Please don't hold my shortcoming
against me oh Gunslinger
and may I enquire of you —
Enquire? he breathed
don't do *that*
Well then may I . . .
no I wouldn't do that Either

How is it then?
How can such speed be?
You make the air dark
with the beauty of your speed,
Gunslinger, the air
separates and reunites as if lightning
had cut past
leaving behind a simple experience.
How can such aching speed be.
Are you, further,
a God
or Semidiós
and therefore mortal?

First things first
he reflected in the slit of his eyes
your attempt
is close
but let me warn you
never be close.
A mathematician from Casper Wyoming
years ago taught me That
To eliminate the draw
permits an unmatchable Speed
a syzygy which hangs tight
just back of the curtain
of the reality theater
down the street,
speed is not necessarily fast.
Bullets are not necessarily specific.
When the act is
so self contained
and so dazzling in itself

the target then
can disappear
in the heated tension
which is an area between here
and formerly
In some parts of the western world
men have mistakenly
called that phenomenology —

You mean, I encouraged
there is no difference
between appearance and —
“Reality?” he broke in
I never “mean”, remember,
that’s a *mortal* sin
and Difference I have no sense of.
That might be *your* sin
and additionally —
Don’t *add*, that’s my stick,
the Horse said smiling.
Furthermore, the Gunslinger instructed —
More is more divine
said the Immobile Horse
Furthermore, don’t
attempt to burden me
with your encouragement
because
to go on to your second Question,
I am un semidiós.

And so you are mortal
after all said I

No mortal, you describe
yourself
I die, he said
which is not
the same as Mortality,
and which is why I move
between the Sun and you
the ridge is my home
and it's why you seem
constructed of questions, uh,
What's your name?

I, I answered.

That's a simple name
Is it an initial?
No it is a single.

strum

Nevertheless,
it is dangerous to be named
and makes you mortal.
If you have a name
you can be sold
you can be told
by that name leave, or come
you become, in short
a reference, or if bad luck
is large in your future
you might become an institution
which you will then mistake

for defense. I could
now place you
in a column from which
There is No Escape
and down which The Machine
will always recognize you.
Or a bullet might be Inscribed
or I could build a maze
called a *social investigation*
and drop you in it
your name
into it —

Please! I implored him
you terrify me.
What then, I asked
is my case? looking into
the Odd toed ungulate's eyes
who had his left leg resting on my shoulder.
The mortal can be described
the Gunslinger finished,
That's all mortality is
in fact.

STRUM

Are you hungry
mortal I
the Gunslinger asked
and Yes I answered reflecting.

Well then Lil,
let's have some food
of two sorts
before we depart for Vegas.
Lil snapped
her gaudy fingers
and drink was brought
but not for the Classical Horse
who forewent drink
with a brush of his articulate hoof.

The usual he said
Usual! There's nothin
usual about your diet Claude
Lil said, *Horse chestnuts with the*
spiny covering intact
and 38 stalks of celery
in a large bowl.
Claude I enquired —
Don't enquire boy
It can be unhealthy
pass the salt
Do you get called Claude?
Why not? Listen, I,
I'm as mortal as you
born in santa fe
of a famous dike
who spelled it
with an e too.
So your name is *not*
Heidegger after all, then
what is it? I asked.
Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss?
Do I look like his spouse!

No . . . I mean I've never
seen his wife.
You're a very observant type
Claude replied.
Well what do you do I persisted.
Don't persist.
I study the savage mind.
And what is that I asked.
That, intoned Claude leaning on my shoulder
is what you *have*
in other words, you provide
an instance
you are purely animal
sometimes purely plant
but mostly you're just a
classification, I mean it's conceivable
but so many documents
would have to be gone through
and dimensions of such *variety*
taken into account to realize what
you are, that
even if we confined ourselves
to the societies for which
the data are sufficiently full,
accurate, and comparable
among themselves
it could not be "done"
without the aid of machines.

Got it! the Slinger asked
Yea, I *heard* it I said
Not the same thing he said
Tell me more I said
The Horse has an interest in business,
haven't you noticed.
Noticed? I replied
Forget it he said, remember
you're just average fast.
The Horse is a double agent —

strum

Oh? But what about his name
Claude Lévi-Strauss is that —
Yes, you guessed it
a homonym. Don't get bugged Amigo

strum

Here comes Lil.
OK, the Gunslinger breathed
we're briefed
Hughes? I asked
Not now the Slinger said
here's Lil
*Slinger! that Drifter claims
he can sing you a song.*
What shimmering guesswork
the Slinger smiled
and beckoned to the young guitarist.

strum

As he travels across
the cabaret may I ask
a question? Move on he said.
Are those rounds
in the .44
of your own making?
No bullets, I rarely use
ordinary ammunition.
What then?
Straight Information.
What?
You sound like the impact of a wet syllojism

Look, into each chamber
goes one bit of my repertoire
of pure information,
into each gesture, what
you call in your innocence
“the draw”
goes Some Dark Combination
and that
shocks
the eye-sockets of my detainers
registers what my enemies
can never quite recall.

Another question.
Naturally.
What do you know
of Love?
Know? Nada, if I knew it
it couldn't be Love.
Even a mortal knows that.

Then, what *is* it?
IS is not the link
it takes nine hundred years
to explain one blown
spark of Love
and you don't have
that much time Amigo.
How can you?
Leave it friend
I was with Gladys,
in Egypt
witnessed messengers
turned into phantoms.

He pressed one long finger between
his eyes —
it beats me how you mortals
can think something *is*.
Hush, pues, here comes our Drifta.

STRUM

Salud, poeta
what song can you sing?
All songs but one.
A careful reply.
Then can you sing
a song of a woman
accompanied by that
your lute which this
company took to be a guitar
in their inattention.

Yes I can, but
an *Absolute* I have
here in my hand.
Ah yes, the Gunslinger exhaled
It's been a long time.

The drifting singer
put one foot on a chair
and began

I shall begin he said

the Song about a woman

On a plane of this plain
stood a dark colonnade
which cast its black shadows
in the form of a conception made
where I first saw your love
her elbows at angles

her elbows at black angles

her mouth
a disturbed tanager, and
in her hand an empty damajuana,
on her arm an emotion
on her ankle a band
a slender ampersand

her accent so superb
she spoke without saying
and within her eyes
were a variety
of sparkling moments

Her thighs were monuments
of worked flesh
turned precisely to crush
what they will enclose
and in her manner is a hush

as if she shall enrage
with desire
with new fire
those maddened to taste
from her jewelled toes
to her swelled black mound
her startled faun

which has the earthy smell
of slightly gone
wild violets

O Fucking Infinity! O sharp organic thrust!
the Gunslinger gasped
and his fingers
spread across the evening atmosphere
My Sun tells me we have approached
the 24th hour
Oh wake the Horse!

Lil, will you join us
on our circuit to Vegas?
Leave this place and be done?
The stage sits at the post
its six abnormal horses driverless,
chafing their bits
their corded necks are arching
toward the journey

How far is it Claude?

Across

two states
of mind, saith the Horse.
But from Mesilla said I
to Las Vegas — Vegas!
the Horse corrected
have you been asleep
. . . Must be more like
a thousand miles.
More like? he laughed
as we waited
for the Slinger
on his long knees
facing the burning hoop
as it rolled under
the swinging doors west

Mortal what do you mean
asked the Horse lounging and yawning
More Like!
how can distance
be more like.

Thus, in the thickening vibration
our departure took shape
and Lil
the singer holding her arm
followed us out the swinging doors
and into the stage coach we got
and the Horse was leaning out
making his pitch

distributing fake phone numbers
and baring his teeth and the singer
was whispering a lyric to Lil
who had her hand on the Slinger's knee
and he was looking at me

And the stage its taut doubletree
transfixed and luminous shot forth
and the Horse
pulling from his pocket
his dark glasses
put them on and spoke not
and by those five missionaries
Mesilla was utterly forgot.