

To the cowboy poets

nila northSun

went to the poetry gathering
in elko, nevada
trying to keep an open mind
about rhymes
blankets of stars
& cowboy bars
the sing song sameness
of how they toil aimless
for no monetary gain
though back's ache
& muscles pain
cuz they wouldn't trade fates
with the likes of bill gates
for there's nothing like
the wide open spaces
they collectively embrace.
yup, pardner
i walked amongst them
in my thrift store cowboy boots
& plaid cowboy shirt with pearl buttons
filling my eyeballs full
of literary cowboys &
book writing ranchers
(yeah, yeah
i'm sure there were cowgirls too
but i didn't pay them no nevermind
except to tell the blonde who was
dancing too close to me at the hoedown
that i didn't order no lap dance)
not that i was scoping them out
with less than honorable intentions
not like i was looking for a buckaroo
to buck me
but just to see grown men
all decked out in their wild west best
they coulda put peacocks to shame.
they came in all sizes
long & thin
short & thick

& i'm not talking about
the bulges in their wranglers
cause I DIDN'T LOOK!!!
i'm talking about their moustaches
that either concealed thin lips
& bad teeth
or framed bright eager smiles
but this one
in particular
caught my eye
in fact
it coulda poked it out
cause it reached like tentacles
off his face
twisted stiff tips
like wire coat hangers
extending beyond the shade of
his stetson
i said 'that's amazing
how do you make it defy gravity like that?
body-building maximum control mousse?
extra hold texturizing styling gel?'
to which he responded in a slow
texas type drawl
"no, ma'm. ah use wax. good ol'
fashin moustache wax"
to which i ventured "can i touch it?"
which caught the attention of his pardners
all of which sported various versions
on their own upper lips
now i must confess
this was the night of my birthday
the birthday that weeks before
i had gifted myself the gift of sobriety
& so i had
on this special night
drank a toast to myself
for being so good to me
just one now
but when others heard
it was my birthday
i found myself facing a veritable
choo-choo train of libations

& not wanting to be rude
partook
so to cut to the chase
that's all i remembered
my fairly innocent question
'can i touch it?'
until the next morning
when i was pulling moustache hairs
out from between my teeth
& my tongue had a waxy coating
later, mid-morning as i waited for
a taxi in the hotel lobby
him and his crew came striding through
i looked up
& they all grinned
my face flushed red
& i stammered 'o-my-gawd
i remember!'
& they said
'we do too'
& tipped their hats.