

Outdated, Outmoded—Absurd and Obsolete

The clickety-clack of railroad tracks  
becomes a yawning sweep  
of bluffs and hollows—  
with whorling dust devils  
nipping at the heels  
of horseback riders.

“Why looky there, Sawbones,” I say.  
“I’ll be the dead man’s throttle,  
if it ain’t the Sundance and the Cassidy.”  
I pull on the whistle,  
handing out free toots,  
before singing out with a full moon puppy howl.  
The outlaws howl right back  
and a tingling tiptoes up my spine:  
    May the most merciful ones  
    born to whatever the new west might be  
    preserve those bandit smiles for posterity.  
A thing of beauty, if ever there was one.  
They’re gun-spinning pistols and hat-tipping howdy,  
riding the jingle of jail break time

until Sawbones senses the trouble.  
I feel the whoosh of security walls  
slam down all around me.  
Pinkerton drones crack the sky  
and Banshee sirens wail at 120 decibels  
(the dead rise from beneath the tracks—  
crosses of gold  
on bare naked bones).  
Houdini bots shroud the train  
in plumes of futures past.

I’m stark-dead-dumb on my feet  
before shivering clarity washes over me:  
    “Sawbones, Goddamnit,” I scream,  
punching at the override screen.  
But it’s no use.  
I can’t stop a thing with a head of steam.  
Those squealing brakes are squealing for nothing.  
That was Sundance.  
That was Cassidy.  
Those smiles. Those poor, lost smiles  
never knew what hit ‘em.