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# Sage and Cowdogs

by Walt McDonald

Go home, Billy Joe, and tell the brave  
you're staying. B movies and spurs  
don't feed steers anymore. Now, your rivals  
are nephews of riders you taught how.

Unstrap your movie gun and chaps,  
go back and straddle your own corral.  
Old movie cowboys on stallions  
dodged sentimentality like blanks,

but those were the thirties, when westerns  
brought the world escape, the vinegar-sweet  
aroma of dusty sagebrush and saddles.  
Dialogue was a line of black-and-white clichés

lean as the men, gunshots repeated often.  
Stars from the Bronx or Omaha seemed natural  
as trained dogs almost as fast as horses.  
Wild Bill and Hopalong spoke lines as stiff

as cold leather, but words didn't matter  
behind scowls: on Saturdays, I was there.  
Old stunt man with broken bones, gimpy  
before you turned thirty, you were never

the heavy, only an extra in eighty films  
with assorted hats and names like Buck  
or Bill, one of the boys in the posse  
trotting after the star and eating dust.

