Backdrop addresses cowboy

By Margaret Atwood

Starspangled cowboy
   sauntering out of the almost-silly West, on your face
   a porcelain grin,
   tugging a papier-mâché cactus
   on wheels behind you with a string,

you are innocent as a bathtub
   full of bullets.

Your righteous eyes, your laconic
   trigger-fingers
   people the streets with villains:
   as you move, the air in front of you
   blossoms with targets

and you leave behind you a heroic
   trail of desolation:
   beer bottles
   slaughtered by the side
   of the road, bird-skulls bleaching in the sunset.

I ought to be watching
   from behind a cliff or a cardboard storefront
   when the shooting starts, hands clasped
   in admiration,
   but I am elsewhere.

Then what about me

what about the I
   confronting you on that border,
   you are always trying to cross?

I am the horizon
   you ride towards, the thing you can never lasso

I am also what surrounds you:
   my brain
   scattered with your
tincans, bones, empty shells,
the litter of your invasions.

I am the space you desecrate
   as you pass through.