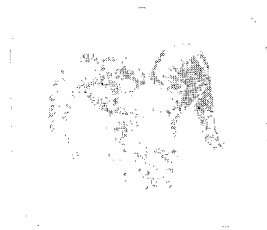


HOW CROWS TALK
AND WILLOWS WALK

by

Gary Esarey



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Introduction

To the author, my friend, greetings and apologies:

I should have recognized the signs. Bouncing a rubber ball down the hall. Drinking too much coffee. Rude noises in committee. Hogging the sports page. He was all the while making a secret joke. Now he has sprung it on us, and on a wider public. Amusing perhaps, but why at the expense of common good people of this decent place?

The Columbia Basin, the Palouse, Idaho's Panhandle have produced or attracted many retrograde persons. There is no doubt of that. The land buffets the sensibilities of would-be settlers and causes them to be stupid about and indifferent to the human spirit, falling into idiosyncratic and isolated folly. Sometimes this is trumpeted as revelation. While that is not the claim of Esarey's little book of rhyme, where the heresy is mild and mostly harmless, he does enroll himself in the society of those blustering in the wilderness, half blind if not dumb.

It is a myth to say that people of this west lack the essentials of civilized life. It is calumny to say that these people have a cruder kind of mentality or a coarser perception than other civilized nations. It is perhaps only, let us be tolerant, a literary device that portrays these western people as if they were absent the arts that make us all creatures of God under heavenly mandate. Such a human is rounded and made fine. Without benefit, the human is a rough beast. Such beast now do we see in the pages that follow. The collection of coarse features endear themselves to Esarey who parades them as if they were the face of his people. If so, they are people that should be consigned to silence, as indeed they would choose, I am sure, if they existed. They do not exist, not in these days.

These voices masquerade as one, his, him who takes them up as an exercise, hardly more exalted than a crossword puzzle. They are a conceit, lacking in credibility, lacking in honest craft. What a terrible folk they would be. How little deserving of art's attention. If they were real. If this were their voice.

Fortunately they are not, it is not, and this little book no art and no craft but a parody of art, a grim bouffe stiffened by hard weather and cold, made bitter by overwork, perhaps, or a defect in the author's imagination, or worst of all the delusion of prophecy. The people here are not revealed.

They are worthy of greater respect. I know them, they often believe in God and the Book of their childhood in spite of the landscape, which counsels despair. What a surprise it was for me, coming here, to find

Semitic themes (familiar from my own youth) flourishing so far from the authors of civilization. It is these good people, not the place, that proclaim themselves worthy by their sacrifice and unyielding faith.

They honor tradition and family who honor transcendent truth and profess it naturally and simply by everyday catechizing. The landscape remains background, which is its rightful human place. It is outside, after all, while life goes on indoors in good company. Except for idle hobbyists, those posturing hunters, fishers, campers, boaters, bikers, hikers who are mere holidaymakers, true men and women rise above these pursuits. It would be foolish for the faithful to linger on the sod and on the rushing water. Why in heaven's name not rise above? This Land is not Holy. Here one misses the well-blooded soil of my Middle East whose inhabitants know themselves submitted to the Book of Authority, and the Sword, which can be trusted more.

These odd first person caricatures are only a few steps from Chief Joseph, to whom nothing was revealed, but rather for whom all was laid out in things. But these things are invisible or incomprehensible to European souls, as to most good peoples. As they should be, and governed by a clear orthodoxy written and forever true.

It is all false, of course. These blisters of lyric pretend to be real people who find a soaring voice but always leave it cracked and broken on the ground. It is cruel, but it is best understood as a practical joke.

While the author disputes my remarks, he knows me as an old friend and will go so far as to admit the need for confession, to declare a hoax a hoax even while publicizing it as true. It is a kind of parallel bookkeeping that corresponds to his own attitudes toward his people and the weak nature of truth. So I choose myself to reveal what is false in what is here portrayed as natural and manifest.

Do not believe that dirt is dirt and lark is lark singing. No one in this world pays attention overmuch to those matters. Family, community, faith, yes even sports, these hold the mind together firm, ever strong, and focus unruly souls on the good and the right. Such is the garment of civilization that heaven bids our city wear. Where this fabric grows thin, cruel animals appear, as though bursting out of the ground, along with drought, pestilence, war, famine, cracks in the earth, fierce weather and visions in heaven. That is the grim wages of idiosyncrasy, the liberation of treacherous mind. A joke is a joke, and hardly a matter of concern. But a bitter joke should be set right because it is slander and, even while entertaining, invites retort. My voice should be your voice and always raised to good when it hears evil or simple foolishness. Keep in mind the balance that I urge against sympathy in your mind for the rough lyric, the

unsophisticated, not innocent, wordplay that sees little but what is underfoot. It treads too heavy that wonders unceasingly at passing things of no greater merit than their passing.

To my friend the reader, caution and farewell.

Noradin Alwariyah
Aleppo and Walla Walla
September, 1994

Young fellah

What I did as a boy was cowboy, really
it had to do with horseplay (I was too west of cattle),
running on the willowy wind.

Having graduated from kindergarten,
I thought all America was horseland
but it isn't so, it's all folded up like a roadmap
and you noodle around in there on car trip vacations.

Fish

Out early like that with a pole
you figure they know about fish
morning, I yell, I'm out for a walk;
they shake their rod in the wind
pulling it, bow like the willow.

Bears like honey, bees like honey,
but they don't like me, who like honey.

What bothers me apart from everything
about bears is their disposition.
The hound muzzle's so unlike it,
the girly doe's not a bit similar to;
would the grumpy cow bear come down sweet
like kids, precious as grace,
to snuffle your face?
And the gristly bull neither, for he come down rude
to the camp spice of the smelly-mouths,
to the talking stench of the glade, he say:
my need is greater than my strength,
I crush you like little fella bear brother.

You set them off hunting by a tickle in the middle of the snout

You pepper the air one hundred times
rapid sneezing, oops, did I do that?
Guns popping down a hill,
then five deer bound up over wheat stubble
the buck last I see his rack in heaven,
where will they go?
Guns, sneezing are everywhere.

Dog pond

A skinny red setter splashes
into the reservoir
that is the trouts land
who say "Brother Furry
run deep with us."

But fish are hard to read by dogs
stoic dimwits
Red paddles on, a woofing log
toward the rising ducks ignoring the featherless food
that plunge like rainbows.

Eau de travail

Near fishers creek I have a greening hill
by having which I wrest a living
straight up from sullen God; but seasonably,
as a garden more garden like
and grass green grow
I dapple thus in rushing water
better nectared than the yellow black bees
ho hum.

Mouse medley

Nap away the morning blight
the sun may happy heat the day
that feckless birds light on the sill
the fearless mouse comes out to play

“O Chattering Dawn”

on a mouse-made mandolin;
the cats till noon stay on
the lawn and then slouch in
the sitting room and chase
the mice away

to cheese, the birds

to seeds, the cats

have humans tend their needs.

Surprised at abandoned doggery do

Woof woof I wag my way
to bestiality, not intending today
starting at the feed trough
snout deep
(I am the whole farm, even)
the terns on the meadow —
I oversaw geese honk south
 yesterday, a pretty vee alas
 too bad, for me
 they fly away; inconsequential!
I'll overwinter residential at a wood
companion to the lumpy bear
who blissful sleeps in brutish lair
 arf arf I'll say ruff awake ruff and grumbles hearing
 will not stay, not arf.

Famine of birds

Cat got one
red-gutted
robins starve, one plops
over like a dark orange.

Bugs badgers bees bears

Outdoors is dusty dirty rank and hot
with bugs badgers bees bears — objectionable the lot —
even deer may scratch or give you fleas
(while a rattler wouldn't do the latter); in fact
if they had a little fur and four short legs,
concealed their teeth, made sweet chirping
noises
(lose the tail)
women would embrace 'em, men reeducate them —
for we love best beasts that we can safely kiss
or kick
who are good with girls and boyses.

Teapot dome controversy

I'm here to do damage
I'm here to do hurt
I wanna kick big lumps in the dirt

or

am I a teapot short and stout
where you pour in water and tea comes out
where this is my handle this my spout
I blunder into mountains like dark clouds.

Poor traction

You see how fallen and winter solemn drifts
that woman who likes Montana
at the supermarket
like snow
and cloud-patch drape the hills
that suddenly are again
storms having passed
into February;
audacity I have never had nor any other city
but Helena I'll give you a lift to
queen of ice.

Cowtown daze

Plain water
thanks she said I'm not
that cheap
 to a F250 size
 Ford truck
 full of thunder; she of sudden light
it was the rodeo late night
waiting for the beasts
of joy and peace you bust your butt for
not the raw frontier
whiskey!
 opened more than hearts
 or addled women still
 you wonder Pendleton,
 long another year until.

After hours

For the sexual companion of young cowboys
it was a mistake those two skinny guys
in their international harvester yellow truck
a lapse of taste and judgement on everybody's part
they just couldn't make up their minds about things;
cranky, they went all three at dawn down noisy
fishing to the river.

Harvest home

O moon my silver pal enchant
me, my town in time, for
with cold chicken
wine and bread
summer's fled, though a moment
summer's feast abides;
the grape that sucked her supper
from the day is chill,
and I (as autumn will)
harvest me, o moon, and darling
Eatonville.

Saturday night's special

Where seagulls screech white
circles over town
gray harbor breezes
soak salt in wooden
architecture never painted
raising spray oxidizing
auto finishes and stiffening
joints of lumberjacks
fishermen and sullen
barroom Indians: there,
all restless coffee drinkers
after midnight sleepers
in their wool shirts,
and spitters of balled tobacco
in their little bedroom sinks.

Property lines

When did my father get his farm
and lose it how
brown two mares snuffle dark and sleek
for a hundred years
of summer
grazing now as then
down the meadow weaving with the wind;
when did he learn to shuffle
who could walk a week
except for meals and sleep
outdoors
across the kitchen for his tea?

Summing of uncalculated happy days

That day bore some number in felicitous June,
friends had seen to it all in winks
 of ignorance
better than he they held the state esteemed,
he that, what the hell, quite innocently married late
doing what all men that did, they say,
regret, the baby filth and grunt,
love's lockets of retribution;
the aggregation of facts may become suddenly clear
as mystery how in the adoring forest
songs of hunger sing.

Driving in stakes

We holiday in make believe camp,
and loving children
with unspeakable pain
I hear them stone the river
and I see them skipping down to sea,
in tents
rather similar in villainy
to city life; upstream
when dad came first in the river there were fish
in the forest where he cut there were trees
when he got a little ground there were cows all round,
I act it out with stuffed bears for livestock
trees of tinker toys
I hear the plashing stones for trout.

Horselike will the summer day be

When night wags the pink tail of day
the final dusty thing is mounting
 of the crows
 from loud trees
for night is crow; and next light
the neighing of the barnyard
I check for serpents — none
 course the field
 it is very hot
 my daughter trills
I'm off for a run
 like a filly.

Pacifica

I thought Dad was drawn as sharp as Colorado
he had a smokeless clarity.
In the curly sea I saw Hawaii like my mother's garden
it was a steaming hospitality,
the inn, and tumbling down the forest fruity
to the wine-dark deep.

Me and mom got along
till I left home,
the smoke of two fires ravelled in the wind.
How dad and me ran apart!
for a time
like a two-fork river to the sea.

Looking for tools

Everyday I go in and out of my shed
at least three times in and out
miles and miles away my dad dodders about
he says "when I make my trip."

In and out of the window
things come and go unmended
there is a state of disrepair
there are snow, pine trees,
one high slope
it is all around my simple house
always is my father welcome.

Dry then wet

One's titled property is wrapped by
a big dark sea,
the dust that even gentle spring falls
hard rock, salt,
gall, blistered stumps
by dynamite and chains,
the worst in eastern Washington.
But as we motor to Seattle
rain falls more gentle on the common bay
darting to the creatures of the deep
starting little water wings
as brightly as the caps
of swarming men.

Lap of old luxury

When Dad's Ford broke down
we borrowed Uncle Woody's Packard,
that had a radio, do you remember,
'Yes, we have no bananas'; we sang
to Redding and Elko, reflecting on
the motels, midnight trains and mosquitos,
but rising mountains in the morning
I never saw at night I saw.

Bearing cold

In winter you would shiver
big with child, near
the meadowed horses
cold as black and snowy milk cows
snuffling for grass;
the only brown in winter
you are like the mare
but more of summer's color

First unravelling of care

That good morning was the first sun
grandma Smith trod not the earth
since 1895,
having died.
Interring her we're sure
it's barbarism dressing carcasses
that compromises us, but we obey.
To her only daughter falls the selection of garments
that her mother sleeps
in familiar sort of plaid
washed of ten years illness sweet
reverence the grandchild faces starched
careless round the grief.

On Buddhist funerals

Your resolutions are 1) go to more hockey games,
2) enter a rodeo, and 3) that's all
you miss your boys sports but's
too late you'll have no new year ever
nor an old; what, you wanna be torched?
How about a plot gouged out of January
—you'll have a chapel for reflection, Ma'am,
a little wood and in it a gazebo
set aside for sorrow—

You object: planting what will never grow . . . (you)
preserving in a cellar . . . (meat) . . . who could be calories today
ho hum whether the heart is better dust or ash
it's really better to be rich
and alive in Edmonton
than dead.

City life

I am humiliated by the poverty of my ancestors,
which has not eased,
indeed the greater wealth had they
for having the earth,
though I can go to hotels sheetrocked and cable-ready
which are not like the sombre oak
that you had in protestant times,
but they keep people apart,
so I can work my little day on tasks
inconsequent and gay; while living in,
I laugh at, megalopolises like Tacoma;
water drips on and on our city bright
with electricity, and swishing cars
disturb, by glistening, the drizzle of the night.

Gelded youth

Women are to blame for my ugliness
they keep bringing it up
just once I nearly danced but not since
junior high; being crazy excused me
from P.E. I could find no business in my head
I felt like a bear reared up with a fish in my mouth
not cool
because I am more snouted and gluttonous than a school boy.
Some names I heard my uncles say I want to live in
Whitehorse Yellowknife Okanogan they're so artless
raw meat towns like Montana. But if I were better looking
—if I could drive to heaven in a Maserati—I'd go
through Vancouver and Seattle, I'd have faith in Jesus
though it meant no self respect.

Blake's new world piece

The happiness of birdsong is conceit,
larks care nothing but to eat,
though to me they sing
peep cheep, peep cheep,
and down the bug our hungry larklets sweep —

and on my land, too,
that I inherit from my fathers,
it is a kind of fierceness which
they sought in Dorset, then in Mississippi;
laying down, moulder to moulder
the sturdy yeomanry of wormland
furrowed in their own dirt,
my claim.

I winnow what they cropped;
I turn my own wheel grinding firm and cutting fine.
I still take meat out of the flashing river
and out of the lumbering land
out the even grunting fur.

Turning both ways

Like flying the duck cuts a V on the lake
there is a glossy water and a dark still water
where the wind blows where the shade's cast.

On the last farmed slope before the mountain
big sprinklers chukk-chukk like fowl;
I see my shadow on the next hill down
as if I rightly lived in hills, I could be two hawks
like Robbie says out by her place she saw two hawks
hunt the same ground.

Fat Alberta

Under the rain
there's the hawk clutching his rodent companion to breakfast,
 all the while
there's the knifethrust of the lark's heart singing,
that is how I think about England; it is
what is under the sun,
a great simplicity, I think
under the weight of gray Alberta
under boncracking it's to the love of music
that the hawk bites.

Wet, then hot

This holiday you are a trout watcher
mostly listing stupid
baseball on the radio
the boat parts water round the glittering fishes
like a canted road.

Your next holiday is baseball
in Sonoran desert boots —
kick dust up the leathery yucca! — for
the Padres beat out a bull snake
that flows like a creek over the road.

Old but still horsed

For years now you have eaten loaves no fishes
with a few good teeth
you chew hour long,
you grind them down chewing,
you start every dawn with horse food.

As far as dirt farming you have six thousand things
you talk them over and over,
 include motor oil, toothpicks,
 years of drought, the newspaper—
you read it after supper,
coffee you take it heavy with the bean
and sugar in a milk white cup.

Eating dirt like crow

What's a hundred year wind to the dogwood
you could hear it month long whistle
like a single day
just getting acquainted;
likewise go down flat among the chalk white dust
of long dead soldiers long dead braves
unsmiling as Missouri
you bed with horse break bone with dog
and hungry still, eat dirt baked clean,
take it in a bowl with a wet root
then harshly pee in the glittering desert
then bleed there then lie down dead in it
then putrefy yourself in it,
when bleached to a fine blot
come the inevitable wind of drought
fly about, kiss the feathery cottonwood.

Pinch ruddy those cheeks of slumber

Pastel-gray on black
the streaks of May do jog awake,
the clouding night the day
doth disendarkle;
dawn bites like a snake,
ouch! how pink on mud
half heaven
black on rose.

Renaissance widow

How men like kine are placid in the field
and when abed at last meadow
relying on God's weed
there nothing real rests but nature
much improved upon
by medicament, by testament
men croak comfort claw for air that long won't animate or cure,
while
women more for trees should naméd be far hardier and fair
than spring or March flower they
like April strut-a-butt by
Rose be thornier
renamed Oak-a, Willow-a
bide the winter when they wilt but
to endure.

Rolling the stone

This is the evening time: I read the editorial
followed next after custard by,
 sequentially now,
ogling video'd women
but I can do things simultaneous like
dump trash lust after schoolgirls wreak fantasy vengeance.
So I live my via mostly imaginativa and partly solid.
This passes the time.

My day job is nosing the outdoors in the army
of sniffing whitemen. My generation has perfected
what is contemptible, it's the walking corpse
(I saw one yesterday still eating in public).
Me, too, I go pale into the forest with hamburgers.
I have always longed for twinkies in the wilderness.
Ruminating on the book of days I repeat the steps
but I have to put a good face on, failing to
transmute, that's nearly golden.

Carryon love of Babylon, Canada

You rarely talk but rudely
mumble, shuffle, snuffle all
about in rags in winter
summer less
are you a friend of seasons, beasts
you hiss all curséd creatures them
that bite and bitten by you, cold within
without you couple in the dirt
on the hidey of the snake
I supply the snake —
austere hysterical art
I need more time to pick my nose in solitude about —
I've joined the church of the north goose and
youth is flapping into consequences, over deep waters;
a duck of ordinary plume
fit for Canada no more
I engage amour in foul but temperate
alliance
honk, fuck, quack, beep
no more
I say beep with puritan disdain
lament of prurience and shame
it is a terrible appendage, monstrous
fell
and swoop
carryon babylon carryon hell.

Boxing the fox

You can't whiskey-start women
in the grave,
buckaroo,
nor you should, what good's
warming but to speed
the greater decomposition
that is, the rot to glut.

(Why fucking not grumble over sentences of death
what law stands against the commonplace
maudlin couplet, rhymed resentment,
eh, bucko? what good dead poets
ever wrote or even prose
in coffin carcassed plot
composed?)

In attitude so loving sweet, madly,
life, how did you expect to die, well,
equanimitably? — with a bloody snap
of the fingers, dearie? with a bleeding cast
of facial contemptuosity, ducky?
I thought not, but in tense confusion; now
you'll lie soft instinkingdifferent
to the reeks of men this sod particular
in afterpath and overrot surpassing.

Out is what is in the window shut

In nursing homes they publicize the month and day
as memory needs a jog though time does not
matter anymore yet it is all
we have a little of
save money

(for your dotage is the measure of your work)
do you hear your father talking in the ground
certain phrases and a tone of voice I hear in me
of mine
heed where you place your boot, boy
you're not the snake's supper
you're not worm's meat, so

I never volunteered for pain
I signed for peace and pension.

Witless witnessed, rued rest
O gruesome error, hard fallen by the land of terror
how long did you deny in the face of furious anecdotes
and jokes of evidence
plain senility?
I think still the ocean is the ocean
the sea the sea
but that could change
as the forest is the weather in my windowpane
that could change by season;
it is hot
and late to be so
flower in a pot
it grows still
I see it out a glass
I should have draped my spirit on the folded hill.

Town of no content

Aliens demolish Tacoma (not Koreans)
in old cars
I knew as a child I could live
like a star —
I had the quality —
but I only remember three things about Spanaway:
the blizzard of '49, baseball
one summer night, a constant
blank savage idiocy like static,
that's why rainy streets are like old films
nor do I recall any technicolor in my childhood
which had the quality of kelp — as I say
the squalor of Spanaway white trash stupid
step aside
where the nature of welfare was so ugly
even the land went cheap
I'd cruise around in Tall & Big Man clothes
gasping "more beer" to the drizzled neon wood.

Migrant loafer

For you passion is far off, elflike,
snowfall; having grown thin,
less opaque and hungry for little,
you see things more vaguely
like they nearly are, and pass by.
You tell a fortune: Slavs will go to war.
So I abandon Europe for where the lark sings.
There I am a cowboy on a weathered fence
spitting at bugs; for me passion is dirt plain,
potato-like, black clouds.

Near Jiltwood

Your summer of affection's like a wind
in the lazy cottonwood,
a whisper of attention,
then it turns away.

I challenge you to love me
who am ugly and tormented
who am full of rage,
do not turn aside me, sir
not a human woman, sir
the best hills you love are women
dusky dry and everlastingly
your whitethroated birch
poses on the draw

Check-out time

Even old one wakes in spring
at the first gray turning
did you have a bad dream?
— don't remember
are you ill? — don't think so
am I in heaven, the wet fir smell
is Enumclaw, a motel room there
is travel involved, a funeral.

Out of war clouds

The rain makes me think of what is:
a dismantled pump on the deck,
white painted shingles in the shed;
young men work in this weather.
I put off doing the gutters for fear of height;
truly this is great peace,
this is the not grunting into bullets,
this is the not gutted like a fish.

Morning after morning

Up a leaden morning with a jolly "Golly,
I didn't die last night,"
you brush and brush, for you have bad teeth
and gargle twice a day for toxic wind
that accompanies speech;

 it is to celebrate the commencement of winter today
 in the window's red berry and a green leaf;
 in the middle of the day it's a sandwich on the table,
 in the dark it's mashed potatoes.

You like to feel the gears of the truck
in the cold growling over rutted landsides;
you do this again and again, it is a dream of peace
in the day, turning over in the night.

Prairie maple

The last time I saw Aunt Margaret
Uncle Woody was alive but couldn't talk sense
I mentioned Iowa she showed me a photo
where she was raised and a school program
that contained a brave poem good names
the photo was a plain woman Mabel
by a one room house, like Woody
said, on the prairie, her grandmother.

No mortgage

Before March tomorrow to a sullen broth
of brown leaves turn
to recollection: a farm in fee simple
by a cloud green hill, it's 1946 I think
I live in a wood house with the wind
and the hard seasons;
though spring it's snow I hear
the customary tremolo of country
singing, I like a woman singing
you know honestly I could sleep outdoors
regardless of raccoon and rattlesnakes
where do they drooling lurk for summer anyhow
that could bite me so I die
and eat me, bears will, when I do
but a truck coughs gentle up the cottonwindy wood
and a woman's country singing from the hill.

War nears Tacoma

I recall when my father's right arm
was like an iron bar
and my mother as a black-eyed schoolgirl
skating through Eatonville
fetched her daddy from the brickworks yard
home.

My daddy, what did he know (a cotton picker,
shock of corn hair come north to lumberjack) but
a Ford truck and a stump ranch by the mountain road.
Mamma, who could she be, a blackberry picker
skipping out of high school, down the dusty logging roads
toward a town with big stores.

Did he pluck a sack of roses for her long black hair,
did she put her pretty cotton dress from Sears on?

So
she settled on a dairy farm, unhappy in Yelm
where he run fat Jerseys on a rain soaked field.

When black-eyed mama rose to morning there was war,
she foresaid that the core of the old day'd
crack; do you hear it?
when the fir tree falls like steel to the sea
when the millstack roars like a great wind
when the timber saw shrieks like a man.

The road to Vietnam

When Hawaii recalls it is raining and hill clouds
the abandoned hospital just above Hilo
even when I was young it was old
for the old war; little league practiced
on the grounds one coach angrily “Whaddaya
think this is a game?” I knew sport
was fascist oppression — how old the hospital
is now! you could see the sea from the theatre
where we operated on . . . and baseball
how transforming into grace.

I have a daughter tall and slim

At the park I was startled
by spring, a white ball in heaven
like a flower;
later I had to ask twice
“lily-of-the-valley” my wife remarked
on the fragrance several times I couldn’t
smell it even at the dining table, who
cut and brought them in.

Three and two

Dad described once I never saw
my granddad playing baseball up till
just before he died,
and him a preacher
out with the boys all yelling.

Good game

First the catcher gets hurt on the elbow off a foul tip
then some little kids drag a snake out of the creek
and play it to death with sticks
as dark clouds build up, but the rain held off
till after the tough loss;
how shall we signify the day?

Naturally you could compare against the more general time
that contains all weather, all little league games, all beasts
that walk, fly, crawl and swim
or you could list particulars, it doesn't matter which
for example passes out of memory first?
 roiling clouds
 lackluster pitching
 an uprooted poplar
 fielding errors
 serpents with their heads torn off
 the proliferation of weeds in 1993
 so that I decide to get plastic ground cover;
these are absent minded
 footfalls
 in the forest,
 as you lumber
 to the dark
like clouds into mountains.

Old hand

Among the things I cease to be is cowboys
and baseball I neither play nor do farming any more
imaginarily

I was never any one of them anyhow now it's time
my philosophy was no trouble prudence dictates
mild inactivity as best for hobbled hearts
brutish with little pasture no tillage few teeth
I ride on truckbed one stop to the next rude town.

Since 1990 Gary Esarey has worked for Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington as director of the foreign language media center. In this job he deals mostly with technologies in support of foreign language instruction. His background includes years of work in English as a Second Language (ESL), language lab technology, program administration and a doctorate in linguistics from the University of Pittsburgh.

For many years Esarey taught English in the USA, Thailand and Singapore, and authored or co-authored several textbooks in ESL. Apart from teaching, he served as an administrator of language programs at the University of Pittsburgh and the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia before coming to Whitman.

Though for years suppressed below the level of daily preoccupation, poetry, according to Esarey, is an old habit, an old wound, an old vice, long neglected. Recently indulged, this addiction has been abetted by Esarey's return to the West, though southeast Washington is not exactly the West of his childhood. He admits to being born in Tacoma and, worse, never having got over it. It was a hard school.

Walla Walla, Esarey has said, is like coming home to somebody else's childhood, a little bit like Esarey's own. In Walla Walla he luxuriates in the amenities of the small town West: ranch and farm, unpopulated hills, flight to the mountains, flight to the city, everywhere earth in the foreground.

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