

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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Put Weather In

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Comments

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Put Weather In

March 9, 2016

It can't make sense everywhere. I assume it has a temperate climate bias. Or, to be more precise, a four-season climate bias, yet it's arguably one of the most lasting pieces of colloquial insight bequeathed to us from the recent past: "March comes in like a lion and goes out like lamb." Or vice versa. That's the allure of the phrase, I think, its seesaw mechanics. Pay attention to this one month, this little adage promises us, and you too can predict the weather. It's tempting to make weather simple. The weather in any given place is distillable to a few features, to northeasters and lake-effect snow and Santa Ana winds. Where I live, any given day is likely to be ruined by wind, first and foremost from the northwest, straight out the arctic, and second from dead south, straight out the furnaces of hell.

I have wanted few things more than to be a weather connoisseur. Not to hide behind complaints and clichés but to distinguish between gradations of northwest winds. To really know a hundred of types of rain.

Or to have special insight about what's coming. To have a trick knee that could forecast blizzards. ("Is there going to be a blizzard tomorrow?" a checker in a small town grocery store asked me once. I didn't know, I confessed. "The old people say there is. They feel it in their bones." We got 10 inches.) To predict precisely the first frost of fall by the blooming of goldenrod in the ditch. To know the rain is coming because, as a man once told me, "the martins are hunting the mosquitoes close to the ground."

My calendar almanac does this another way, by including the names for Ojibwe moons—names which sound poetic simply because they connect more directly the world of things with the bodies and hearts of people: Snowshoe Breaking Moon (March), Maple Sap Moon (April), Wild Rice Moon (August), Little Spirit Moon (December).

Perhaps I'm gaining in the weather department. Not long ago, we got a wind from mere degrees north of due west, a direction from which we hardly ever get wind. Not a biting or vindictive wind, not lashing or blustery, raising the voices of trees and dropping them suddenly, as in a violent argument. A continuous but respectful wind out of the west, like slipping into a pool that is exactly your body temperature, like a stranger who seems familiar with your town ahead of time, who respects it without being asked to, even though he's just passing through.

"Put weather in." So read a quote I posted on a writing bulletin board when I was a high school teacher. Which is a way to say pay attention. Which is a way to say distinguish. Which is a way to say be a connoisseur.

Online, someone hypothesizes that there's religious imagery to "in like a lamb, out like a lion," since Christ is both lamb of God and lion of Judah. And so he is. And so he is the God of March.