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## Experience, Knowledge, and Appreciation in the Implicit Aesthetics of Weather Lore

Mădălina Diaconu

### Abstract<sup>[1]</sup>

Weather sayings are empirical rules for the prediction of weather and have been studied, so far, only by paremiologists and meteorologists. The author argues that they also present interest for environmental aesthetics, and that their aesthetic dimension is not confined to their stylistic qualities and versified form but is mainly based on the experience that underlies them. The analyses of weather lore in English, French, and German emphasize that this pre-modern, expert knowledge produced and still can bring enjoyment and, conversely, that the sources of this aesthetic enjoyment are to a large extent cognitive, even if not scientific by modern standards. These sources are specified in the paper as the intuition of a cosmic order behind a complex realm of phenomena; perceptual discrimination and descriptive accuracy, completed by aesthetic qualifications; imagination; a holistic worldview; and, finally, wisdom.

### Key Words

environment, meteorology, proverbs, weather, weather wisdom

### 1. Introduction

"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it," is a well-known weather saying. All irony set aside, this is also true regarding environmental aesthetics, which seldom explicitly addresses meteorological issues. In order to unveil the aesthetic dimension of weather, one can refer to its artistic representations in landscape painting, literature, photography, or film, and can also resort to ethnographic and scientific material, such as weather lore; meteorological treatises of popularization; the visual material provided by research in the field of meteorology and climatology; databases; and competitions for weather photography run by professional associations of meteorologists; and so on. The following considerations are restricted to weather lore, in the attempt to distill its multilayered relevance for environmental aesthetics.

As weather wisdom, weather rules or farmer's rules (*Bauernregeln*, *dictons météorologiques*) are known predictive sayings that provided, long before the rise of modern meteorology, useful recommendations for those human activities that were strongly dependent on weather conditions, such as farming, sailing, animal breeding, traveling, and even military campaigns. It goes without saying that weather lore makes sense in cultures located in climates that have intensive and irregular weather dynamics, in particular, and are likely to have less relevance at the equator. Such sayings have been collected since early modernity in anthologies of weather proverbs, superstitions, and signs in different languages and have been investigated, so far, by paremiologists, ethnographers, and meteorologists who focused on their validity, authorship and circulation but overlooked their implicit aesthetics.<sup>[2]</sup>

Descriptions of evanescent formations in the sky were indeed mainly motivated by the intention to predict their short- or long-term evolution for practical purposes yet they often cannot be denied a certain aesthetic gratification as a side-effect. Given their mixture of pragmatic-cognitive intentions and contemplative-emotional effects, weather sayings deserve to be considered particularly salient cases for reopening the discussion on the relation between cognitive and non-cognitive aspects in environmental aesthetics. In the following, we argue that weather lore entails no less than five different kinds of knowledge: inferential-predictive, perceptual, imaginative, a general worldview, and practical wisdom. Against Allen Carlson's claim that any appropriate aesthetic appreciation would require a reliable understanding of the object and thus prioritizes the scientific knowledge among the possible guides for the aesthetic experience of nature, weather lore brings strong evidence for the legitimacy of a cognitive pluralism in the field of the environmental aesthetics or, as Thomas Heyd put it, that "aesthetic appreciation should benefit from a great many diverse stories."<sup>[3],[4]</sup>

According to Heyd, knowing the etiology of nature is neither necessary nor sufficient for the aesthetic experience. The generalizations of scientific knowledge and its abstract categories may even impede an aesthetic attitude toward nature. On the contrary, its aesthetic appreciation can be enhanced by "artistic stories" and traditional knowledge, for example, mythologies of aboriginal peoples or "any cultural resource" that makes details in the landscape become perceptually salient and stimulate imagination.<sup>[5]</sup> However, Heyd's exemplifications regard landscapes exclusively, without making any reference to skyscapes, whereas the few papers that tackle the issue of

a celestial or meteorological aesthetics take their examples from literature and art.<sup>[6]</sup> The inherent aesthetic dimension of weather sayings still remains concealed to their users and to aestheticians.

## 2. Literary form and historic dissemination

Regarding their form and genre, the so-called weather signs belong to proverbs and sayings; some paremiologists avoid calling them proverbs because, aiming to enable prognostics, they commonly have only one distinct meaning and avoid figurative uses of language, such as metaphors. Some editors indistinctively characterize weather lore as proverbs, sayings, superstitions, and signs.<sup>[7]</sup> Others distinguish between proverbs on weather or based upon analogies with weather, that is, *dictons météorologiques* (related to the calendar with its fixed or mobile celebrations) and *dictons de la croyance* (some of which refer to stars, meteors, elements, and atmospheric events).<sup>[8]</sup>

Geoparemiologists and meteorologists emphasize the specific difficulties encountered by any study of weather sayings. One of these concerns the different age of weather sayings, some of which may date back to antiquity, the Middle Ages, or early modernity. Moreover, they are spread in various cultures all over the world; historians found examples of weather sayings in *Mahabharata*, Ancient China, and native American lore, and they are mentioned by Aristotle (*On Meteors*) and Theophrastus (*Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works in Odors and Weather Signs*), let alone in the Bible, the translation of which enabled their dissemination in many languages. After Albertus Magnus had quoted farmer rules in the thirteenth century, their first anthology was published in German, by Leonhard Reynmann (or Reymann), in 1505.<sup>[9]</sup> Also most weather sayings that are known today in France stem from the sixteenth century; their transmission was enabled by Guiot Marchant's *Compost et calendrier des bergiers* (first edited in 1491), followed by the *almanacs des Postes* and the *almanac Vermot*. The large circulation of weather rules, thanks to intergenerational oral transmission and farmers' almanacs, enabled them to exert a strong influence on the premodern weather experience and the corresponding weather discourse. In particular, the almanacs effaced, to a large extent, the initial interregional differences. This also explains the current imprecise localization of weather sayings that complicates, or sometimes even makes impossible, the verification of their validity by means of modern meteorology.

Other meteorologists complain that in the sayings that predict the weather throughout the year, the time of the year these refer to, mostly indicated by the saint's feasts, is frequently unclear. The reasons for this imprecision are calendar reforms, where the transition to the Gregorian calendar in 1582 makes it necessary to reconstruct whether a farmer rule was established before or after this reform; the mobile date of some religious celebrations; saints whose feasts were later removed from calendars; homonymous saints, who are celebrated on different days and, respectively, several celebrations for the same saint; and, last but not least, the decision of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to change some saints' days.<sup>[10]</sup>

Finally, paremiological approaches focus on peculiarities of the old language or dialectal forms, and derive the aesthetic expressivity of weather lore from its rhymed form and rhythmicity, repetitions, assonances, and contrasts.<sup>[11]</sup> Stylistic analyses interpret repetitions and correspondences as a means to emphasize natural recurrences and analogies. These are assigned the production of a reassuring effect in an unstable world in which survival was considerably dependent on the uncontrollable dynamics of weather. Nevertheless, particular weather sayings must have been appreciated with an aesthetic disinterest, so to speak, merely for their ludic function, as a piece of imagination, or for triggering a sense of wonder toward the beauty of nature and of each new day, rather than being taken seriously, as some contemporary meteorologists do. <sup>[12],[13]</sup>

## 3. Order and causality

Whoever looks up the site of the World Meteorological Organization can find no reference to weather sayings, even if its members occasionally quote some for rhetorical purposes. This absence can hardly surprise, given that the meteorological science has, for a long time, relegated weather sayings to mere superstitions, emphasized their predictive shortcomings, and criticized their imprecision, their ambiguity, and even their contradictions. However, weather wisdom was occasionally rehabilitated in recent meteorological treatises of popularization and given credit for its micrological precision. In other words, it provides practical hints about the local and short-term evolution of weather in regions for which scientific predictions remain too general, for example, in the Alps.<sup>[14]</sup> A small number of meteorologists, who confessed their fascination for weather sayings, even attempted to verify and measure the accuracy of selected weather rules by comparing them with statistics of weather parameters from the last century, in spite of the aforementioned deficits of knowledge regarding their origin, concerning where, with what purpose, and for which interval of time they were

initially formulated.<sup>[15]</sup> Their investigations concluded that the predictions of weather lore range from mere superstitions and false beliefs about natural causality to excellent observations related to the atmospheric condition and specified these differences according to different categories of rules, details that, however, lie beyond the scope of the present paper.<sup>[16]</sup>

For an aesthetic approach, it suffices to underline that not only paremiologists, who find scientists' critiques of weather sayings boring, but also meteorologists explicitly praise the long, observational experience that underlies weather rules. This wisdom of entire generations goes along with a keen sense of observation of natural phenomena and a constant, intensive interest in atmospheric processes that makes their experience far superior to the capacity of weather predictions of the average urban population, who mostly act in line with the motto, "first the weathercast, then the look at the sky."<sup>[17]</sup> This is one of the reasons for our claim that weather lore should not merely present an historic and meteorological interest. Its study may well help disrupt the common passivity in the knowledge of weather and foster the rehabilitation of first-hand experience, including aesthetic perceptual engagement. One way of achieving these goals is to underscore their origin in experience and the positive impact of their knowledge on the aesthetic experience.

Both the strong cognitivist line in the environmental aesthetics and the aesthetics of science emphasize the beauty of knowledge, in a very general meaning, as intellectual beauty. This is based on the power of natural regularities to provide a frame of comprehension, in particular to "illuminate nature as being ordered and doing so give it meaning, significance, and beauty."<sup>[18]</sup> In our particular case, the very level of causal inferences with their binary form "if A then B," may be said to entail an aesthetic component, insofar as it establishes correspondences, unifies, and conveys meaning to a complex worlds of appearances, even if the regularities established are not doubled by an explanatory knowledge of the causes of atmospheric phenomena. The case of weather lore demonstrates that knowledge, as such, does not necessarily oppose or annihilate aesthetic enjoyment, in particular if one adopts a broad concept of knowledge. In any case, the representation of order and causality weather sayings are based upon lacks the abstraction and mathematical formalization of modern meteorological models and, as I will show later, it has to be understood on the background of a holistic worldview.<sup>[19]</sup>

#### **4. Perceptual discrimination and accuracy of description**

If it is true that aesthetics should find the way back to the initial meaning of a theory of perception (Gr. *aisthesis*, sensation), then weather sayings bring irrefutable evidence for a specific perceptual-aesthetic expertise that is expressed verbally. In this respect they are no less aesthetic than, for example, the descriptions of skylines in the realistic literature of the nineteenth century. Given the strong cognitive bias of weather proverbs, and the striking absence of aesthetic investigations in this field, one may begin by examining the possibility of carefully transferring theories from the aesthetics of science to weather lore. Particularly valuable in this respect is Wolfgang Krohn's systematic approach to the aesthetics of science.<sup>[20]</sup> Krohn himself subscribes to the definition of aesthetics as *aisthesis*. According to him, the aesthetic dimensions of science refer to the cultivation of perceptual discrimination, without or with the aid of special instruments; the design of experiments; and conceptual formalization. Thus aesthetic aspects permeate the research process, the structure, formulation, and presentation of the research results, and the styles of different scientific disciplines. It is worth mentioning that Krohn spares no critique regarding the invention and use of observation devices, since these not only enlarge the spectrum of the perceivable but, one might add, as in modern weather forecasts compared to weather lore, they also bring about a problematic involution of our natural sensorium.

In spite of obvious differences between weather sayings and meteorological prognoses in their instruments of observation, terminology, and the significance of measurements, there is no doubt that both activities require an attentive examination and the effort to translate its results into accurate, verbal descriptions. The detailed description of skylines and weather phenomena represents a basic dimension of the aesthetics of weather rules, if not its most important. Such texts contain "plenty of colorful images or metaphors," and the careful use of words in order to capture subtle differences of colors, hues, patterns, cloud textures, and brightness, presupposes a "keen observation and scrutiny of natural phenomena by experienced people."<sup>[21]</sup> Their descriptive excellence is all the more important nowadays, given that contemporary literature has abandoned meticulous weather depictions and the booming visualization in media forecasts was unfortunately not accompanied by a similar refinement of the *discourse* on weather, with consequences for a certain impoverishment of our everyday aesthetics of weather.

If it is true that “the aesthetic experience of nature – notably of landscape – is a prime means of enriching, increasing our powers of discrimination,” the same correlation makes sense also the other way round.[22] The complexity, subtlety, and concern for descriptive precision encountered in weather proverbs allows us to assign them positive effects for the ae(i)sthetic education, since they can improve observation skills as central prerequisites of any aesthetic experience. From the point of view of aesthetics, there is a mutual enhancement between observation and enjoyment that becomes manifest in contemplation. Related to the weather, this interdependence can eventually extend the characteristics of “beautiful” weather far beyond the clichés regarding “good” weather.[23]

Existing compilations of weather wisdom, especially in English, provide a large number of examples of such a genuine enjoyment experienced in immediate perception. Some sayings acknowledge the physiological law of contrast, like in the experience of heat and cold: “The colder the wind, the warmer the hearth” (E4195).[24] Others suggest that the perceptual dimension of weather is itself conditioned by the universal accessibility of physical atmospheres, that is, weather phenomena, regardless of any differences between humans or even between humans and animals: “A rainbow is big enough for everyone to look at.” (E2881) As for the channels of perception involved, weather sayings focus mostly on visual signs and only occasionally mentions olfactory or acoustic aspects, such as the cracking of furniture before rain.

The descriptions of the colors of the sky and the forms of clouds, in particular, are amazingly diverse. Cumulus clouds cover a “mottled sky,” others make up a “mackerel sky,” but clouds can be also “anvil-shaped,” “soft, undefined and feathery,” large like rocks or fish-shaped, and they may bunch together to form trees that is, a “cloud-tree,” or “water-wagons.” The anonymous authors’ phantasy invented even special denominations of the clouds, such as Noah’s Ark, Prophet Clouds, hen scarts, mackerel scales or mare’s tails. Furthermore, clouds may have a salmon color, a silver lining, a golden glow at sunset, they can be black, brassy-colored, buttermilk, murky white, gray, green, white “like a flock of sheep,” pink, red, rosy or silver. Also, cloudscape may be hard-edged, oily-looking, thin, bright and light or dark and inky, soft-looking or delicate, “greasy,” rolled, tufted, ragged, streaky, heavy, isolated, like locks of wool, as a woolpack, or waved (cirrostratus).

Regarding their textures, weather sayings mention clouds that are fleecy like cotton, woolly, like curly wisps or in blown-back pieces. As expected, weather sayings pay particular attention to the ongoing changes in the cloudscape; these float, fly, drive over the zenith, gather around, sink, open and close, disperse, rise above, bank the moon around, and so on. A similar profusion of descriptive terms for chromatic and textural qualities is applied to the sky itself, which can be black, blazing, in different shades of blue.[25] Carle, salmon-color, “curdled,” dappled, dark, fiery, fleecy, gray, leaden, pink, red, rosy, scaly, transparent, yellow, with or without stars or streaks, and so on. And the examples may be continued regarding the characteristics of rain or wind, the latter being crucial for mariners, and even the colors of the moon.

Nowadays meteorologists provide scientific explanations for some of these inferences that weather sayings established merely inductively, for example, between a red sky at dawn and a coming rain.[26] Still, whoever approaches weather rules with an *aesthetic* interest is, instead, struck by their sharp sense of observation and the evident effort to overcome the difficulties in depicting celestial features by looking for analogies with the terrestrial life-world, which undoubtedly requires a high amount of imagination. Finally, both perception and imagination are powered by a cognitive hedonics. It is well-known that details in a landscape become perceptually salient through knowledge, in general, and that the cultivation of perception is a cause of relish. The more we know, the more we see, and the more we get to see, the more we enjoy that/what we know and see.

## 5. Aesthetic appreciation

If taking note of something in the environment conditions the aesthetic experience and represents a primary source of sensuous enjoyment, this does not *ipso facto* imply the expectation that weather sayings would also mention the subjective effect of atmosphere on its perceivers. The pleasure taken in perception is not the same as enjoying the weather.[27] Still, weather lore now and again qualifies the atmospheric condition as fair, fine, nice, beautiful, good, or right or, on the contrary, as foul, unkind, or ill; under the same category fall expressions like “serene or severe weather,” “threatening clouds,” and the like. As pointed out before, the relevance of weather sayings for everyday aesthetics is not restricted to such evaluations, some of which are explicitly aesthetic. In particular, the appreciations may be relative to human activities. Weather that is right for farming or fishing may neither be fine for wandering or sunbathing nor what Frenchmen call *temps de demoiselle*. [28] Also, if the aesthetic judgments basically translate into words emotional responses to experienced values, the sporadic

appreciations expressed in weather sayings are particularly sober-minded, quite the opposite of Romantic sentimentality. In other words, they correspond to their users' socioeconomic background and to their strenuous physical engagement with the environment, as in the example: "More rain, more rest; fine weather not the best" (E2769). Nevertheless, the depiction of the so-called fine weather generally corresponds to our current clichés and implies moderate parameters of temperature, precipitation, and wind. This continuity between pre-modern, or early modern, and late modern aesthetic subjects, in spite of all other differences between them, allows for claiming a relative autonomy of the aesthetic value of weather and the possibility to escape a chaotic relativism in this field.

Finally, related to the aforementioned pre-Romantic attitude, let us remark on the striking absence of atmospheric values, in the sense of moods one would be attuned to. This means that the constantly growing body of research on the aesthetics of atmosphere that started with Hermann Schmitz and Gernot Böhme<sup>[29]</sup> and that, despite its name, only exceptionally dwells on meteorological atmospheres, appears to have little significance for the aesthetics of weather lore.<sup>[30]</sup> On the contrary, Martin Seel's taxonomy of the aesthetic experience of nature as a place of contemplation, affective correspondences, and imaginative projections is more likely to cope with the experience that produced weather lore, giving its broader frame of interpretation.<sup>[31]</sup> However, it would be premature to conclude that if weather sayings hardly give any hints of being attuned to the atmospheric condition, this experience was absent in premodern times. Instead, we should rather presume that the strongly subjective dimension of moods made them irrelevant to be transmitted from generation to generation as useful rules.

## 6. Metaphysical imagination

Metaphors are rather rare in weather lore, as when thunder is put down to angels who are bowling or moving God's furniture (E3935, E3931). It lies beyond the scope of the present approach to review the long list of definitions of imagination in the history of aesthetics but one cannot ignore the observation made by Ronald W. Hepburn, in "Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination", that the aesthetic experience sometimes looks as if it may keep alive some metaphysical worldview, yet without implying a coherently, precisely, and systematically articulated metaphysical theory.<sup>[32]</sup> A vivid imagination is also at work in the comparisons and metaphors encountered in weather lore. Already mentioned examples refer to earthly analogies for the form and texture of cloud formations. Others associate celestial with worldly and human phenomena regardless of their order of magnitude. The cirrus phenomenon is called a "painter's brush" (E3154); the patch of blue sky after a storm has the size of a handkerchief or of a Dutchman's (Scotchman's) apron, shirt, or jacket (E3131, 3135, 3137); thunder evoke the sound of the train (E3297); snowflakes are *papillons de la saison* (F1162/270); snow recalls maple sugar (F1221/274); and rain makes fields "happy" (E2845); and so on.

However, one may rightly object, such analogies do not transcend the physical realm into the metaphysical one. The case is different when the sun shining during rain is "explained" with reference to "the devil beating his grandmother. He is laughing, and she is crying" (E2864). In other sayings, the simultaneous rain and sunshine suggest witches dancing, fairies baking, or a sailor going to heaven (E2865).<sup>[33]</sup> If imagination means to be able to see through objects to what lies behind them, these poetical fictions about nonhuman entities obviously have their place within a mental framework that is not confined to strict empiricism and thus does not reject metaphysical imagination. But should we speak here rather of imagination or of belief? When, for example, "it rains cats and dogs" or "it rains by planets," did the imagination run the rig or have we lost the thread to old mythological beliefs that fell into oblivion?<sup>[34]</sup> What might be regarded nowadays as scientifically untenable generalizations may prove, on closer inspection, to be rooted in religious beliefs, as when the absurd rule, *Pas de samedi sans soleil*, conceals a cosmic Christianity, namely the naïve Christian belief that the Virgin Mary would need sunshine on Saturday to dry the Holy Child's Sunday diapers (F1224/274).

Needless to say, without proper historical knowledge all the previous examples would fall altogether into the category of fictions produced by imagination. Does this imply that historical knowledge would be indispensable for any proper aesthetic experience? Personally I prefer a weaker form of this statement, namely that historical knowledge sometimes turns out to be a precious asset for the enhancement of the aesthetic experience because it allows modern subjects to reach a deeper poetical level and illuminates associations that, *prima vista*, appear to be nonsensical or unexplainable superstitions. This is undoubtedly similar to how hermeneutics helps better decode art and literature. In addition to this, finding the sacred, irrespective of its name in systems of collective beliefs, behind or rather within physical landscapes fills subjects with awe and prompts a paradoxical union of calm and excitement.<sup>[35]</sup> Such weather sayings that import into

experience legends, myths, and other narratives are definitely inspired by metaphysical imagination and not by dogmatic metaphysical-religious theories.

Correspondingly, in order to enjoy these fantasies, the modern subject does not have to retrieve past religious beliefs and be exposed to certain embarrassment in our present scientific milieu. Quite on the contrary, the aesthetic effect of some weather sayings may derive precisely from the gap between the anonymous author's and the contemporary reader's life-world horizons. In a similar way, myths were degraded into fictions, and fairy-tales were acknowledged as literary genres on the eve of modernity. This de-realization of former religions into possible worlds and aesthetic reality alone allows us to enter and engage ourselves in the aesthetic game of "as if." As Thomas Heyd put it, for the aesthetic experience of nature it is irrelevant whether we believe or not in the existence of gods, heroes, or angels or if we find them credible; such stories can only be considered case-by-case related to their positive or inhibiting effect on the aesthetic experience.<sup>[36]</sup>

## 7. Holistic worldview

Environmental ethics frequently tends to a somewhat simplistic view of the aesthetic experience of nature, regarded mainly as a positive emotional experience. Without denying this dimension of it, the adequate understanding of the experience related to weather lore requires to also take into account the fact that all comparisons and imaginative projections used in it actually form fragments of distinct world views. Isolated successful attempts taken by paremiologists to track the evolution of some weather sayings back to their sources, in Europe mostly to the Bible and Greek-Roman antiquity, confirm the intuition that their background world views differ, to some extent, from ours. This may result in surprising deviations from the modern, standard aesthetic preferences for particular weather events, like in the case of the rainbow. Weather sayings seem namely to disregard the beauty of rainbows and consider them, in the first place, as signs for an inconvenient weather change, which also explains why rainbows are assigned a "bad character" (E2916). Even when one pays attention to the colors that predominate in the iris of the rainbow, predictive interests definitely prevail (E2915).

Still more important are the features of those life-worlds that produced weather sayings. Geoparemiologists assume that weather lore is the creation of a primitive, magical mentality, for which long-term predictions of the weather were possible by getting a sort of insight into the fluidity of time and by becoming aware of analogies and recurrences of natural rhythms.<sup>[37]</sup> Both the correlations between remote phenomena of contrasting scale, for example, plants or insects versus atmospheric macro-systems, and the repetitions, related to the unwritten imperative to live according to natural rhythms, fulfilled a reassuring function in a constantly menacing world.<sup>[38]</sup> One can make for oneself an approximate idea of how this mental framework operated from anthropological studies on the weather worlds of contemporary indigenous communities, whose "sentient landscapes" consist of forces and whose worlds are ruled by the principle of universal interaction.<sup>[39],[40]</sup> The human sensitivity to changes in the weather, called meteoropathy, brings itself irrefutable evidence for the ceaseless exchange between here and there, inside and outside, up and down, and animate and inanimate but, as weather signs, also serve the animals' behavior, the variations of vegetation, and even inanimate objects, such as cracking chairs or humid walls that are supposed to announce rain (E2793, E4036).

Recent research by meteorologists confirmed that some animal species can be trusted as weather prophets in nature: swallows flying low, geese that stand on one foot, hens, cows and bats, even lower species, like earthworms, beetles, spiders or ants, are natural barometers.<sup>[41]</sup> Also, various plant species protect their bloom from precipitations: the anemone, lupine, whitethorn, daisy, marigold, chamomile, dandelion, and some thistles always close their flowers before rain and open them again when the weather improves, and weather sayings, not only in German, took notice of such correspondences.<sup>[42]</sup> If humans decide to extend their awareness to the most delicate reactions of vegetation and unobtrusive animal behavior, they are rewarded with an increased aptitude to predict the evolution of weather but, I would argue, also with a basic perceptual enjoyment and with the feeling of living in a coherent, ordered world, in which what was once called the "Book of Nature" lies open before them.

It certainly would be exaggerated to conclude that this holistic view would assimilate the universe to a work of art. On the contrary, the idea of a harmonious *Weltbild*, in which the microcosm communicates with the macrocosm, is more elementary than the application of the idea of harmony to art. Once again, it would overshoot my target to claim one would be able to reconstruct this world view in terms of a clear and specific metaphysical, whether religious or philosophical, articulation. Yet, be it in a lapidary style – think of "thunder curdles cream" (E3906) –

be it in a more elaborate form – when “thunder in February frightens the maple syrup back into the ground” (E3913) – weather proverbs tell us that distant elements communicate and influence each other, expressing the conviction that the environment is a functional unity and that humans are here at home. It would be false to suspect the authors and transmitters of weather sayings of naïveté only because they abbreviated causal relations. They well knew that it is not the thunder itself that curdled the cream and that no syrup can creep into the earth like a frightened animal but they kept in mind that humans and their works build a link, even if a special one, in a vast chain of being, and anticipated that their liberty depends on their understanding of natural necessity. Eventually, the authors of weather sayings not only knew how to acquire observation skills and refine their causal reasoning but also how to gain wisdom from engaging themselves with the environment.

## 8. Weather wisdom

Indeed, weather lore is also called weather wisdom, even if some paremiologists strictly distinguish between weather sayings and weather proverbs. While weather sayings, in general, contain empirical rules with (allegedly) predictive function and prove a knowledge of nature, some were converted into proverbs and testify to a more specific knowledge of human nature. Both are practical and useful in everyday life, yet, in different respects: weather sayings *sensu stricto* are expedient recommendations for planning physical activities, while weather proverbs primarily guide the social intercourse and are therefore practical in the Aristotelian meaning of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). Typical weather proverbs still widely circulate, whereas weather sayings that express rules for the prediction of the weather in an inferential form have gradually lost in importance, parallel with the development of meteorological forecast, urbanization, industrial farming, and other civilizational processes that have conveyed to humans an enforced autonomy from “nature.”

Maxims, with references to weather, primarily express general truths on the human nature or the course of life, being based upon extrapolations from nature to society and, respectively, life in general. In an apparently similar manner, a number of weather sayings liken physical to human phenomena, as in the following examples: “Thunder without rain is like words without deeds” (E3928) or “An easterly wind is like a boring guest that hasn’t sense enough to leave” (E4237). Both extrapolations operated by weather proverbs, on one hand, and personifications of nature, on the other hand, take for granted the existence of correspondences between different realms but the direction of their analogies is contrary.

The paremiology classifies the weather proverbs according to their topics: God and the world, house and farm, wealth and poverty, friend and enemy, health and disease, joy and pain in love, eating and drinking, ruse and cleverness, good and bad, industry and idleness.<sup>[43]</sup> In the following, selected examples are meant to clarify the meaning of wisdom, considered here as the last cognitive source of the aesthetics of weather lore. Some maxims express general truths about the weather, mostly its variability, such as: “Neither heat nor cold abides always in the sky” (E3124), “If you don’t like the weather, wait five minutes” (E4088), or “In by day and out by night,” for the wind coming and going (E4183). Occasionally, they refer to human attitudes towards weather, for example, “Man is never satisfied with the weather,” (E4087).

Frequently, the knowledge of the context is indispensable in order to determine whether weather proverbs refer to natural phenomena or are used rather metaphorically. Think of “The blacker the sky, the greener the grass” (E3125), “All who travel in the rain get wet” (E2742), “If there were no clouds, we should not enjoy the sun” (E641), or, finally, “After rain comes fair weather” (E2739). A similar French proverb, *Après la pluie, le beau temps* (F1218/274), signifies that bad times cannot be followed but by better ones; weather symbolizes here situations and conditions that escape the individual’s influence. In this case, the weather wisdom recommends to accept the facts as they are, “Take the weather as it comes” (E4093); to manifest flexibility and adaptability, “Puff not against the wind” (E4191); and to develop endurance and patience, in order to overcome unpropitious circumstances and reach one’s goal, “Slow wind also brings the ship to harbor” (E4192). Even if all these examples have a prescriptive form, similar generalizations can be also expressed descriptively, as when “Every sky has its cloud” (E3152) and “Every cloud has a silver lining” (E615) put a situation into perspective: Nothing is perfect but also nothing is desperate. Further on, target-oriented acts are essential, “It’s an ill wind that blows nowhere” (E4188), yet one should avoid aggressing the others; “Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” (E4194), says a proverb that is spread in several languages and cultures.

In spite of its transcultural constants, wisdom is still far from achieving the character of universal knowledge. Weather wisdom, in particular, was identified from a historical and sociological viewpoint as the collective and anonymous product of a rural, pre-capitalist, and



predominantly sedentary society of peasants and animal breeders.[44] As a consequence, it promoted a conservative ethics, in which one feared the powerful people, respected and, at the same time, hated the rich, and was critical towards women.[45] This even misogynous trait of proverbs, in general, may well surprise if one takes into consideration the women's role in their oral dissemination, at least before they were included in almanacs. The importance of the feminine element in weather lore deserves a separate analysis, which would also include the chain of parallels between women, vegetation, and the influence of the moon on the tides, at least in French and other Romance languages. For the present purpose, it suffices to remark that proverbs have exerted a strong influence in Europe for a long time and still benefit from a wide circulation in large parts of the world.

To conclude, the traditional knowledge of meteorological atmospheres, weather lore being one of its expressions, deserves to be rediscovered not only by environmentalists and biologists who are alarmed by climate change and emphasize the utility of indigenous knowledge for scientific research and economic practices, but also by aestheticians.[46] Beyond their relative effectiveness, confirmed by meteorological studies, and in spite of their apparent naïveté, upon closer inspection weather sayings turn out to involve an implicit poetics and wisdom, and a multilayered complexity that surpasses the common places of our small talk about the weather.

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#### Endnotes

[1] The author is indebted to the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions that helped improve the present article.

[2] The following analysis is based upon an anthology for the British, American, and Canadian space (*Weather Wisdom. Proverbs, superstitions, and signs*, ed. Stewart A. Kingsbury, Mildred E. Kingsbury, Wolfgang Mieder, New York: Lang, 1996), completed with French sources (*Dictionnaire de proverbes et dictons*, ed. Florence Montreynaud, Agnès Pierron et François Suzzoni, Paris: Le Robert, 1980) and German anthologies (*Das große Buch der Bauernweisheiten*, ed. Rudolph Eisbrenner, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997; *Die besten Wetter- und Bauernregeln. Alte Volksweisheiten & moderne Meteorologie*, ed. Judith Kumpfmüller, Dorothea Steinbacher, Munich: Heyne, 2006). One may consult also the selection of weather sayings from Romance languages published by the Universitat de Barcelona (<http://stel.ub.edu/paremiolorom/es/meteorolog%C3%ADa>, accessed on 3.01.2017).

[3] Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the environment: the appreciation of nature, art and architecture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

[4] Thomas Heyd, "Aesthetic appreciation and the many stories about nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41, 2 (April 2001), 125-137.

[5] *Ibid.*, 133.

[6] See Yuriko Saito, "The aesthetics of weather," in *The aesthetics of everyday life*, ed. Andrew Smith, Jonathan M. Light (New York: Columbia, 2005), 156-176; Arnold Berleant, "Celestial Aesthetics," in: *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 135-153; Ronald W. Hepburn, "The Aesthetics of Sky and Space," *Environmental Values*, 19 (2010), 273-288; Holmes Rolston III, "Celestial Aesthetics: Over Our Heads and/or in Our Heads," *Theology and Science*, 9, 3 (2011), 273-285.

[7] Kingsbury et al., *op. cit.*

[8] Cf. Montreynaud et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 185-246, 262-277.

[9] Kumpfmüller, Steinbacher, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[10] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 14.

[11] Alain Rey, "Préface" to Montreynaud et al., *op. cit.*, pp. IX-XIX, ref. on p.XV.

[12] Cf. Agnès Pierron, "Présentation," in Montreynaud et al., *op. cit.*, pp.

173-178, ref. on p. 176.

[13] Indeed, some weather sayings hardly dissimulate a certain irony regarding the shortcoming of weather prediction in general. This mistrust is likely to have emerged at the end of Middle Age, in parallel with the foundation of modern science.

[14] See Walter Sönning, Claus G. Keidel, *Wolkenbilder, Wettervorhersage* (Munich: BLV, 2012), Bernhard Michels, *Altes Wetterwissen wieder entdeckt. Bauernregeln, Wolken & Wind. Pflanzen & Tiere* (Munich: BLV, 2015).

[15] See Horst Malberg for Germany (*Bauernregeln aus meteorologischer Sicht*, Berlin: Springer, 1999) and Thomas Wostal for Austria (*Mythos Bauernregeln. Die Wahrheit über Eishellige, Siebenschläfer und Hundstage*, Klagenfurt: Pichler, 2006).

[16] In general, according to Malberg and Wostal, the short-term predictions of farmer rules are more accurate than long-term predictions, which comprise the so-called "Bauern-Praktik" (deduces the evolution of weather for an entire year from the 12 days that follow Christmas) and the „Calendar of 100 years," based upon Moritz Knauer's speculations (17th c.) about cycles of 7 consecutive years, related to 7 planets. See also Kingsbury et al., *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[17] Peter Sloterdijk, „Anthropisches Klima," in *Atmosphären. Dimensionen eines diffusen Phänomens*, ed. Christiane Heibach (Munich: Fink, 2012), pp. 27-38, ref. on p. 28.

[18] Allen Carlson, "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Saim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1975), pp. 119-227, ref. on p. 221. Proponents of the same idea were also mathematicians and physicians, cf. S[ubrahmanyam] Chandrasekhar, *The Pursuit of Science: Its Motivations, Beauty and the Quest for Beauty in Science* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[19] This does not exclude certain aesthetic aspects of meteorology related to motivations, perceptual acuity or the aforementioned intellectual beauty of abstract theories.

[20] Wolfgang Krohn, „Die ästhetischen Dimensionen der Wissenschaft," in *Ästhetik in der Wissenschaft. Interdisziplinärer Diskurs über das Gestalten und Darstellen von Wissen. Sonderheft 7 der Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Wolfgang Krohn (Hamburg: Meiner, 2006), pp. 3-38.

[21] Kingsbury et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

[22] Ronald Hepburn, "Landscape and Metaphysical Imagination," *Environmental Values*, 5 (1996), 191-204, ref. on 195.

[23] See my own study "Longing for Clouds – Does Beautiful Weather Have To Be Fine?" in: *Contemporary Aesthetics* vol. 13 (2015).

[24] The following examples preceded by E are taken from Kingsbury et al., *op. cit.*, those preceded by F indicate the number of the saying and the page in Montreynaud et al., *op. cit.*

[25] "A light, bright blue sky indicates fine weather" (E3130), whereas a deep, clear blue sky or a sea-green one near the horizon announce a shower rain (E3139).

[26] Cf. Malberg, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[27] Cf. Thomas Heyd, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Many Stories about Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41, 2 (2001), 125-137, ref. on 133.

[28] "Ni pluie, ni vent, ni soleil, / Est temps de demoisellë (F1191/272).

[29] See Hermann Schmitz, *Atmosphären* (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 2014), Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (Munich: Fink, 2001), Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), etc.

[30] Christiane Heibach called them also "primary," "physical" or "natural" atmospheres, in order to distinguish them from the "secondary" (social) and the "tertiary" (artificially created) atmospheres (Introduction to *Atmosphären. Dimensionen eines diffuses Phänomens*, ed. cit., pp. 9-24, ref. on p. 11).

[31] Martin Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991).

[32] Hepburn, 1996, *op. cit.*

[33] The classical analysis of this weather phenomenon is still Matti Kuusi's *Regen bei Sonnenschein. Zur Weltgeschichte einer Redensart* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1957).

[34] See the corresponding comments in Kingsbury et al., *op. cit.*: "In Norse mythology both cat and dog were attendants of Odin, the Storm God" (E2792), whereas "it rains by planets" leads back to a "local saying of antiquity referring to rain falling on one field but not on a near or adjoining one" (E2762).

[35] Cf. Hepburn, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

[36] Heyd, *op. cit.*, 135.

[37] Pierron, *op. cit.*, 177.

[38] Pierron mentions the "fonction protectrice, quasi maternelle" of the saying: "Il reproduit le rassurant va-et-vient, le balancement du berceau. Il a vertu d'ancrage, de réconfort, d'insertion" (*ibid.*)

[39] See, for example, Franz Krause, "Seasons as Rhythms on the Kemi River in Finnish Lapland," *Ethnos*, 78, 1, 23-45.

[40] Thomas Heyd, "Sentient landscapes, vulnerability to rapid natural change, and social responsibility," in *Religion and Dangerous Environmental Change. Transdisciplinary Perspectives on the Ethics of Climate and Sustainability*, ed. by Sigurd Bergmann, Dieter Gerten (Münster: Lit, 2010), 73-86.

[41] Cf. Eisbrenner, *op. cit.*, 226-234, Kumpfmüller and Steinbacher, *op. cit.*, p. 17-20.

[42] Eisbrenner, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-239.

[43] Cf. Eisbrenner, *op. cit.*

[44] Cf. Rey, *op. cit.*, XVIII. See also his description of the proverb as "parole du mâle, de l'homme mûr, parole de mari et de chef de famille. Parole de laïc, au moins en France, et souvent parole de propriétaire" (*ibid.*, p. XII).

[45] *Ibid.* For example: "Ciel moutonné, / Femme fardée, / Ne sont pas de longue durée." (F1046/264)

[46] Cf. Igor Krupnik, G. Carleton Ray, "Pacific walruses, indigenous hunters, and climate change: bridging scientific and indigenous knowledge," *Deep Sea Research. Part II: Topical Studies in Oceanography*, 54, 23-26 (Nov.-Dec. 2007), 2946-2957.