

CECIL DAY LEWIS

WEATHER SIGNS

(Translated from the *Georgics* of Virgil, Book I)

So that we might be able to predict from manifest signs
 These things—heatwaves and rain and winds that bring cold
 weather,
 The Father himself laid down what the moon's phases should
 mean,
 The cue for the south wind's dropping, the sign that often
 noted
 Should warn a farmer to keep his cattle nearer the shippoon.
 At once, when winds are rising,
 The sea begins to fret and heave, and a harsh crackling
 Is heard from timbered heights, or a noise that carries far
 Comes confused from the beaches, and corpses moan
 crescendo.
 At such a time are the waves in no temper to bear your
 curved ship—
 A time when gulls are blown back off the deepsea flying
 Swift and screeching inland, a time when cormorants
 Play on dry land, and the heron
 Leaves his haunt in the fens to flap high over cloud.
 Another gale-warning often is given by shooting stars
 That streak downsky and blaze a trail through the night's
 blackness
 Leaving a long white wake:
 Often light chaff and fallen leaves eddy in the air,
 Or feathers play tig skimming along the skin of water.
 But when lightning appears from the quarter of the grim
 north wind,
 When it thunders to south or west, then all the countryside
 Is aswim with flooded ditches and all the sailors at sea
 Close-reef their dripping sails. No, rain need never take us
 Unawares: for the airy cranes have flown to low-lying valleys

To escape the rain as it rises, or else a calf has looked up
At the sky and snuffed the wind with apprehensive nostrils,
Or the tittering swallow has flitted around and around the
lake,
And frogs in the mud have croaked away at their old
complaint.
Often too from her underground workings the emmet,
wearing
A narrow path, bears out her eggs; a giant rainbow
Bends down to drink; rook-armies desert their feeding-
ground
In a long column, wing-tip to wing-tip, their wings whirring.
Now seabirds after their kind, and birds that about Caÿster's
Asian waterflats grub in the fresh pools, zestfully fling
Showers of spray over their shoulders,
Now ducking their heads in the creek, scampering now at
the wavelets,
Making a bustle and frivolous pantomime of washing.
Then the truculent raven full-throated calls for rain
As she stalks alone on the dry sand.
Even at night can girls, spinning their wool, be sure
That a storm approaches, for then they behold in the
burning lamp
The oil sputter and crumbly mould collect on the wick.

No less easy it is to foretell after rainy weather
Sun and unclouded skies, and by sure indications to know
them.
Then, neither do star-rays look blurred nor will the moon
rise
As though she owed her light to the beams of her brother
sun,
Nor lank and fleecy clouds be drawn across the heaven:
Kingfishers then, the pets of the Sea-goddess, will not preen
their
Plumage along the shore in the warm sun, nor will gross
Swine remember to root and toss with their snouts the bed-
straw.

Rather do mists hang low and couch along the plain,
And the little owl, perched on a gable, watching the sun go
down

Keeps at her crazy night-call.

Aloft on the lucid air Nisus, changed to a merlin
Appears, and Scylla pays for that purple hair she stole:
Wherever in flight she parts the thin air with her lark's wing,
Look!—her enemy, cruel, down the wind loudly whistling
Nisus follows her close; when Nisus zooms upwind,
Frantic in flight she parts the thin air with her lark's wing,
Then rooks, the guttural talkers, three times or four repeat
A clear cool note, and often up there in the treetop cradles,
Charmed by some unfamiliar sweet impulse we cannot
guess at,

Gossip among the leaves: they love, when rain is over,
To visit again their baby brood, their darling nests.
It's not, to my belief, that God has given them
A special instinct, or Fate a wider foreknowledge of things;
But, when the weather's changing, when the wet atmos-
phere

Shifts and a sky dripping from the south wind condenses
What was rare just now and rarefies what was condensed,
New images possess their mind, impulses move
Their heart other than moved them while the wind was
herding the clouds.

Thus, the countryside over, begins that bird-chorale,
Beasts rejoice, and rooks caw in their exultation.

J. MACLARYN-ROSS

A BIT OF A SMASH

Absolute fact, I knew damn all about it; I'd been on a blind in Fenner's with some of the boys and I was on my way back when a blasted pi dog ran out in the road and I swerved the car a bit to avoid it. I don't remember the crash or anything, I must have hit into them and driven straight on to the bungalow without stopping. I was so damn tight I don't remember anything, but these fellows were coming out of Fenner's, the two of 'em, and they saw it all right and this bastard Krishnaswami recognised me: I'd a big open Vauxhall is those days and I was driving with the hood down.

The night-watchman from Spinner's saw it too and he came across and there were these coolies pretty badly smashed about, one of them had a broken leg and God knows what, and Krishnaswami was shouting that he'd seen me and knew who I was. Mind you, he was properly sewn-up himself, and the other bloke with him was so bad that the station inspector refused to accept his evidence. But Krishnaswami had got the number of my car, so after they'd carted the two coolies off to hospital, the inspector came down to the bungalow to see me.

At that time I shared quarters with a chap called Stanton, he was with the company too, a damn decent chap, and when the peon told him this inspector was out there asking for me, he came into my room and there I was, of course, dead to the world. So Stanton went out and told the inspector I was asleep and could he come back later and the inspector said all right. When he'd gone Stanton woke me up and told me about it. Honest, it came like a bolt from the ruddy blue: I couldn't remember a thing.

"Accident?" I said. "What the hell are you talking about? I haven't had any accident."