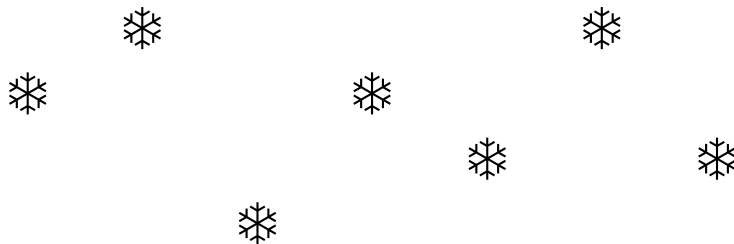

DELETED SCENE



Stereotypes

FOR A DIFFERENT TAKE ON WEATHER'S ROLE IN MAKING the snowbelt a distinctive place, I queried Amazon.com for books with *Lake Effect* in the title, ordered a dozen of them, and blocked out time for some cloudy-day reading. Although the experiment—what else would you call it?—proved worthwhile, there were several disappointments, mostly from authors who capitalized on the salience of *lake effect* in ways I had not anticipated. For instance, Laura Treacy Bentley's *Lake Effect*, a small book of poems focused on West Virginia, Western Maryland, and Ireland, is rich in water imagery but silent on lake-effect snow.¹ Equally maddening were two mysteries titled *Lake Effect*.² In William Jasperson's whodunit the lake is merely a big pond in Vermont, while in Wally Reutiman's thriller a recently retired Air Force colonel who lives on a lake a little more

than an hour beyond metropolitan Minneapolis investigates an apparent accident that turns out to be a murder—no meteorological references whatever, and no snow. Similarly snowless misappropriations of *lake effect* for a book title include Rich Cohen’s coming-of-age novel, apparently based on his own high-school years in an affluent lakeside suburb north of Chicago and his college years in New Orleans, and Mike Savage’s murder mystery involving a conspiracy to pipe Lake Superior water down to Arizona.³ It’s true, of course, that the Great Lakes’ reputation as the world’s largest readily accessible supply of fresh water makes them attractive to entrepreneurs eager to profit from unplanned growth and poor conservation outside the region.

Although these writers and poets flagrantly exploited *lake effect* as a catchphrase for anything remotely tied to an inland body of water, my greatest disappointment was the collection’s sole meteorological work, *Snowbelt: North America, Snow, Great Lakes, Lake-Effect Snow*.⁴ Priced at \$46, it was a 100-page collection of photocopied Wikipedia entries, free for the taking online. Amazon let me return it for a full refund, and within a year it disappeared from their website.

Two of the other three nonfiction books I bought inspired further distrust of book titles. Most surprising was *Lake Effect: Along Superior’s Shores*, by nature writer Erika Alin, who offers an engaging exploration of the human and biological landscape of an area she rarely visited in winter.⁵

Wary that I might have missed something, I queried Google Books and confirmed that *snow* appears only twice: first to describe the “snow-white heads” of adult ring-bill gulls, and again to place the first tapping of sugar maples “in early spring, usually before the snow had melted.” In the aptly titled *Lake Effect: A Deckhand’s Journey on the Great Lakes Freighters* Richard Hill recounts his experiences from the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he was in his late teens and early twenties.⁶ Though he mentions snow falling on his ship a few times, his focus there is ice, which is far more troublesome for mariners.

Nancy Nichols’s *Lake Effect: Two Sisters and a Town’s Toxic Legacy* also uses a subtitle to warn unwary buyers⁷ Its author is a cancer survivor who grew up in Waukegan, Illinois, a classic rust-belt city on Lake Michigan. She attributes her sister’s cancer as well as her own to local industries, now long closed, that left a legacy of PCBs in the harbor and other pollutants in local landfills. In her search for connections, Nichols mentions *lake effect* three times, once to describe toxins in coho salmon taken from the lake (“It was a lake effect like no other, the result of a series of disastrous intersections between man and nature whose consequences are still felt today.”), once again as a metaphor for poisons that started showing up in local wildlife (“The lake effect was real, and it was creating a storm like no other.”), and in a more meteorologically meaningful way in the preface, where she lays out a referent for *disastrous* and *storm*: “Lake Michigan is known

for its deep, cold waters and for the powerful snows it brews. Known as the ‘lake effect,’ snow that piles up as far away as Buffalo can be traced to the bitter cold air that drives across the lake gathering speed and humidity”—a nicely concise summary of the real lake effect even though Waukegan, north of Chicago on the lake’s west shore, is not in a major snowbelt.

The other three books better reflect what I had hoped to find. As a fan of detective fiction, I was especially grateful for *The Lake Effect*, by Les Roberts, a veteran of the genre and creator of the Milan Jacovich series, about a meat-and-potatoes private eye in Cleveland, Ohio.⁸ As a return favor for a local mob boss, Jacovich agrees to provide security for the shy but idealistic Barbara Corns, who is challenging the veteran mayor of Lake Erie Shores, an affluent suburb 50 miles east of Cleveland in Lake County, in the November election. Winter’s approach affords an opportunity to spike an intricate but believable plot with multiple mentions of lake-effect snow and even the politics of snow removal, as when Barbara’s campaign manager assesses her grim political future by speculating that “when Lake County has one of their famous lake-effect snows and nobody can get out of the driveway, the new mayor will find that she can’t even get the salt trucks out to de-ice the roads [and] the citizens will scream—rightly—and it’s Barbara who’s going to take the hits.” With Roberts writing in the first person, Jacovich precedes his hunch about an approaching storm—“I’d lived in the

area long enough to know that this was going to be a pisser”—with a quick take on the local climate:

The lake effect is that weather condition peculiar to only a few places in the world, including Cleveland, occurring when a mass of cold air moves across a large body of water, sucks up the moisture, and then deposits it over the first available land mass in the form of rain or snow. Lake County, in the southeastern corner of Lake Erie, is particularly vulnerable, part of what is commonly referred to as the Snow Belt.

Later, he recounts, “It wasn’t quite what we call a whiteout, when the snow is so thick that you can’t see twenty feet in front of you, but the short trip from Mentor to Painesville through the blizzard on a snow-slick freeway was difficult enough.” And a few pages further, “The snowfall had diminished from a full-fledged blizzard to big fluffy half dollar-size flakes.” On the next page Jacovich opines that

. . . perhaps the lake effect isn’t only a climatic condition. Maybe it’s what happens to people when they know they’re going to get snowed on for months at a time without even a peek at the sun, when every morning getting out of your driveway is an adventure, getting to work is like cross-country skiing, and opening your heating bill every month is courting a coronary.

I know people who share this feeling, and the weather often proves them right.

Another prolific genre specialist is romance writer Leigh Michaels, who also adopted the three-word title *The Lake*

Effect for one of her more than 80 novels.⁹ I had never read a Harlequin Romance, so this was a new experience. The intended audience is young and middle-aged females, and the writing is unadorned and engaging, with some kissing, an emphasis on relationships, and one brief sex scene that leaves the details to the reader's imagination. The story is about a young (mid-to-late 20s) female attorney (Alex) at a Minneapolis law firm and her more senior (early-to-mid 30s) colleague (Kane), who apparently torpedoed a profitable merger by advising the client to drop the deal. He's been away from the office for a month or so, apparently sulking, up in Duluth (on Lake Superior), where Alex was sent on a two-fold mission: to sort through an involved local probate case and convince Kane to return to the firm. The story takes place during Duluth's short summer, and involves fog and lake breezes, but no snow. Kane introduces Alex to the warm-season lake effect early on, as "natural heating and air conditioning."

"The lake stores heat all summer and releases it slowly in the winter. And the breeze coming off the water in the summer is cooler than the surrounding air." (Kane, p. 35)

As the plot progresses, recurrent references recast the lake effect as a mysterious local force.

"That's the lake effect. All the fresh air around here builds appetites." (Kane, p. 56)

"We'd raid the garden when we were hungry—which I seem to recall was most of the time. The lake effect, you know." (Kane, p. 68)

“The lake effect. The sound of water drains all the tension away.” (Kane, p. 87)

“I’m a little worried about you, Kane. This is the first time I’ve ever seen you look so startled about anything. Is that the lake effect, too?” (Alex, p. 119)

“I should have warned you. That’s the lake effect.” (Kane, referring to Alex’s problem with tangled hair, p. 154)

“Of course you realize that’s probably just the lake effect at work.” (Kane, in the second to last paragraph, after Alex says, “I do love you, you know,” p. 189)

You get the idea.

My final example is *Lake Effect Snow*, published by Bold Strokes Books, which specializes in LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) literature.¹⁰ Identified on the spine as romance/intrigue fiction, it’s a first novel by C. P. Rowlands, who published a second book with Bold Strokes and has another underway.¹¹ A female FBI agent (Sarah Moore) is assigned to protect a famous female journalist (Annie Booker), recently injured in an attack in Iraq and the target of an online death threat. Sarah and Annie develop a mutual attraction as the story unfolds, largely in the vicinity of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Annie has family and an impressive home in the outer suburbs. It’s a decent read although the title seems a stretch insofar as Milwaukee is on the wrong side of Lake Michigan for a major snowbelt. Although Rowlands mentions snow only a

few times, almost in passing, she gets the fundamentals right, including the effects of distance and variable winds.

“. . . What’s lake effect?” Sarah asked. (p. 111)

Annie laughed. “I’m sorry. That just popped out. That’s something people on the Great Lakes say when the lakes snow on them. It often comes as a surprise.”

“The *lakes* snow on them? How does that work?”

“The wind changes direction suddenly, and all the land around the lake gets snow, usually a sizeable amount. If you drive inland, even as little as five miles, it’s not snowing, and sometimes the sun’s out. It’s unexpected. Sort of like my life right now, right?” (p. 112)

Later on, Rowlands carefully distinguishes lake-effect snow from a synoptic blizzard.

“Is this, what did you call it, lake effect snow?” Sarah asked.

Rebecca and Annie laughed. “No, this is the real deal. A good old-fashioned blizzard out of the northwest. If it was lake effect, it would be coming in from the lake,” Annie explained. “This has been predicted for two days. I saw it on the news in New York City.” (p. 141)

As Rowlands implies, we all know what a blizzard is—or think we do—while most people who haven’t lived near the Great Lakes know little or nothing about lake-effect snow. And even though the phenomenon has been around for eons, snowbelt residents didn’t have a name for it until *lake effect* gained a foothold in the meteorological literature around 1970, thanks to satellite imagery and radar. The

term enriched regional vocabularies a bit later, after local TV stations recognized the importance of weather reporting and encouraged weathercasters to publicize, perhaps even celebrate, our whimsical winter weather.¹² It's not surprising *Lake Effect* did not appear on a novel's title page until 1993, when Leigh Michaels published her twentieth Harlequin Romance.

¹ Laura Treacy Bentley, *Lake Effect* (Huron, OH: Blue Dog Publishing, 2006). At least the place of publication is named after a Great Lake.

² William Jaspersen, *Lake Effect: A Peter Boone Mystery* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996); and Wally Reutiman, *Lake Effect* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press of St. Cloud, 2006).

³ Rich Cohen, *Lake Effect* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); and Mike Savage, *Lake Effect: A Lake Superior Murder Mystery* (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2002).

⁴ Lambert M. Surhone, Miriam T. Timpledon, and Susan F. Marseken, eds., *Snowbelt: North America, Snow, Great Lakes, Lake-Effect Snow*, (Betascript Publishing, 2010). Betascript is an imprint of VDM Publishing, a German firm notorious for selling free Wikipedia content as expensive paperback books. VDM even has its own Wikipedia entry, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VDM_Publishing.

⁵ Erika Alin, *Lake Effect: Along Superior's Shores* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), quotations on 12 and 94.

⁶ Richard Hill, *Lake Effect: A Deckhand's Journey on the Great Lakes Freighters* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI: Gale Force Press, 2008), esp. 113ff, 146, and 150. After working as a deckhand, Hill spent a dozen years in retailing before completing a three-year program at the Great Lakes Maritime Academy, to prepare to qualify as a more-highly paid mate—a career he chose not to follow because he disliked the increased use of automation on the larger ships as well as having to take orders and be away from his family.

⁷ Nancy A. Nichols, *Lake Effect: Two Sisters and a Town's Toxic Legacy* (Washington, DC; Island Press / Shearwater Books, 2008), quotations on 20, 53, and ix, respectively.

⁸ Les Roberts, *The Lake Effect* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), quotations on 216–17, 256, 271, 276, and 277.

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⁹ Leigh Michaels, *The Lake Effect* (New York: Harlequin Books, 1993), quotations on 35, 56, 68, 87, 119, 154, and 189.

¹⁰ C. P. Rowlands, *Lake Effect Snow* (Valley Falls, NY: Bold Strokes Books, 2008), quotations on 111–12 and 141.

¹¹ Cathy Rowlands (CP Rowlands) on MySpace, <http://www.myspace.com/cprohlands>.

¹² For discussion of the rise of television weathercasting, see Robert Henson, *Weather on the Air: A History of Broadcast Meteorology* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 2010); and Mark Monmonier, “Weather Channels and Web Sites,” chap. 10 in *Air Apparent: How Meteorologists Learned to Map, Predict, and Dramatize Weather* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).