

**POEMS AND PROSE FROM THE WRITING WORKSHOPS HELD AT
THE MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE, OXFORD, SPRING TERM 2013**

These poems and prose-pieces are the outcomes from a series of writing workshops hosted by Museum to coincide with the 'Atmospheres' exhibition. Participants were introduced to the exhibition by the Acting Director of the Museum, Dr Stephen Johnston; the workshop leader, Lesley Saunders, provided lots of examples of poetry and prose by other writers that had the weather as a theme, and gave the participants some brief writing exercises. The poems and prose published here reflect the different ways in which participants responded to some of the wonderful objects in the exhibition or in the museum more generally, or else to the broader idea of 'creating an atmosphere'.

Anaesthetic

It was a special design, and so the sponge
soaked up drops of ether
as the man quiet as a mouse slept on.

By the tense faces we have a picture
like a barometer, a rose-red wound
round his knee, the first of its sort.

Roz Oates

c. 1850. This 'Hooper's Type Anaesthetic Apparatus' design was invented by William Squire of Oxford Street and was used for the first amputation of a leg.

Measuring the wind

This nineteenth-century pterodactyl
was chained to its post, forced to spin
but not fly. It stretched out its thin wings,
cupped claws grabbing the air.
Feeding off winds, it gulped down gusts,
regurgitating data for its master.

Out in all weathers, it was battered by storms.
Dirty-white lichen flecked its grey cups
as its joints stiffened. Ageing fast, it turned
more slowly, croaking its name to the wind:
Ane – ane, mo – mo, mo – mo, mo – meter.

Deborah Mason

Anger Management

(In the voice of the spark-generator in the lower gallery)

No, he has returned, come to wind me up again –
Millions of fleas, charging, argh, up my behind!
Stop it, man! It itches so bad I will explode!
I may appear Cupid's but I assure you I'm Zeus!
My arrow needs one million volts to shoot,
So keep turning, science boy,
Just
Keep
Turning

Peter Koopmans

Three Untitled Pieces

1.

Made by J. Lancaster & Son Birmingham

It takes a photo – captures an
image
instant flashes, broken into segments
the squeeze box, squeezey bit
brought back and forth
playing undisrupted music
to the momentary flashes captured
to memory – to be viewed at a later date-
but for now – the music,
simultaneously composed,
unrhythmically rhymed
chimes into the ether, vibrations of
past times – fading away...

Thank you for such an invention
not to mention the creative
poetical potential of such an
object!

Amarjit Barn

2.

The sun basking lion
warm and strong
angry and unforgiving
the delightful Australian
sun-splashing oceans
cooling down
The scary sunspots
cancer clinics

The heat that protects
The heat that rejects
The fears that project

Amarjit Barn

3.

An early spring morning at the turn of another decade (Unterach Am Attersee, Austria) and all the birds in the village were chirping awaiting the streams of sunshine they would get that day. It's too personal to even utter, too personal a dream – too near a pulsating heart nerve dream beat.

Yet if it is never uttered, by thought or deed, perhaps it will ne'er manifest or perhaps that's the big test – the biggest test yet.

Yet the sun, when it finally comes, shines though the clouds with a promise of delivering more tantalising warm heat than it actually does. I hope not all relationships are like this....

Yet it is often said 'A forward spring hath a short summer'. Surely I would love a longer summer going into perhaps a monsoon Indian summer or the longest hot hot summer ever or perhaps that's asking for too much and a clear four seasoned year-fairly predictable, yet clearly defined – not like these global warming confusing times – would better suit me. Ha! Like I can choose....!

Amarjit Barn

Whatever the Weather

I went over the same sentence for the fourth, perhaps fifth, time without understanding.

A storm was brewing; that apprehension must have been tapping at my consciousness for some time. The room had become gloomy, air seemed to press around my eyes. Out of habit I glanced up at Admiral Fitzroy's weather glass. True to the Third Rule, the dark brown substance had risen to the surface and clustered there like a small leaf.

I rose, went to the window. The forsythia by the gate was thrashing, shedding its yellow cargo. Now rain swept in from the sea; in no time it stained, overran the harbour road, peppered like shot against the glass. A woman, inadequately dressed for such an eventuality, ran past, her paisley shawl, already soaked, held tight to her head. When she turned back to study the number on my gate post, I saw that it was Maria.

Manda Joyce

Untitled (to be continued)

The rain fell horizontally, the train propelled not by mechanical but as if by a driving force – the destination Lisbon, Lisboa.

The title of the book 'Night Train to Lisbon', casually glanced at in the station book store, had caused him to abandon his plans and take him instead to St Pancras International where he had boarded the first available train for Paris.

Now, some six hours later, as the train left the Gare de Lyon, he felt foolish. This was not some novel, some romantic brush with destiny but his own, real, life.

He would be expected not only at home that night but at a meeting in Kensington Gore at 4 o'clock that afternoon.

Kensington Gore, what a strange, slightly absurd name he thought – mixing the gentility and urbane character of its stuccoed villas and mews with visions of an urban blood bath.

Why should it not rain in a Paris suburb (or for that matter Lisbon) on a cold February afternoon any more or less than it would in North London? And, leaving that aside, was the sudden prospect of a cloudless blue sky in one of his favourite cities anywhere near adequate excuse or explanation for what he was doing?

What was he doing? It was now getting dark, as the leaves hurled by an ever-increasing wind against the windows of the train, spurred him and the train along.

The train of course had some reason to be doing what it was doing – it was its job, after all, to take passengers south through France and then Spain to its eventual destination in Portugal. How many people would get on and off as the journey went on, as the train travelled through the night?

How many of these people would have a legitimate, sensible reason for their journey (however long or short) rather than a sudden, unexplained need to do the unexpected and the inexplicable?

The carriage in which he was sitting, hemmed in by a disagreeable looking middle-aged man reading a newspaper to his left and a youth to his right, legs twitching involuntarily to the all too audible sounds coming from his I-POD, and a bickering mother and two small children in the seats opposite, was brightly lit and completely soulless.

There were no separate compartments or corridors, the only food or drink available not from an elegantly arranged and softly-lit dining car but from a trolley pushed by an uninterested Algerian between the protruding legs of the passengers and their badly stowed luggage or, from what he remembered with a smile, Virgin Trains had before they discontinued the service called the 'retail shop' some distance down the train...

Nicholas Doggett