ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Air Fare: Stories Poems & Essays on Flight
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Humankind's fascination with conquering the sky is most likely its greatest technical and psychological challenge, for flight is a great symbol of the ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable frailty. Because human intellect is capable of a variety of cognitions—empathy, identification, adaptation—taking flight is both a cerebral and spiritual challenge. It is also a way of facing mortality. Who does not think of dying when flight attendants pace through those seat-pocket safety cards, or when the wheels of a jumbo jet rumble and shiver moments before the jarring sensation of landing? The forty-five stories, essays, and poems in this collection explore what editor Brown calls "our place in the air."

The compilation begins strongly with Sharon Bryan's short poem, "Flying Blind," in which the speaker reflects on the way flying forces one to cloak oneself from everyday life, usually lived on the ground, "as we rush through the turbulent air / that will eventually / engulf us."

The metaphor of dying is a popular theme of the book, both through facing its possibility and in its actuality. In an excerpt from Ian McEwan's brilliant novel *Enduring Love*, the narrator not only witnesses but feels responsible for the death of a man who is helping him in trying to stop a wayward hot air balloon. When it becomes clear that the balloon is going to blow away, the narrator lets go of his rope, choosing between saving his own life and preventing an accident. It's a classic decision of self-preservation, "us versus me," and is complex on many levels-personal, sociological, philosophical—as McEwan's writing often is.

Editor Brown is a poet and fiction writer who studied English Literature at Oxford University, and was editorial assistant for Hunter S. Thompson in 1997. Taylor has written two poetry collections as well as a chapbook, *Burning*, for which she received the Portlandia Prize. Also the recipient of the Pushcart Prize, she currently teaches literature and writing in Los Angeles.

If anything, their eclectic gathering of work, by writers ranging from those usually

published in the big conglomerates to those just starting out, is a wonderful introduction to good writing, no matter what a reader's interest in flight may be. Included are established writers such as Colson Whitehead, Alain de Botton, and Naomi Shihab Nye as well as up-and-comers like Lisa Goett, Natalie Serber, and Kim Ponders, whose story "How Bluegrass Saved My Life," chronicles the crash and burn of a love affair—as well as of a military jet—between a female Air Force engineer and her commander in the Middle East.

The only difficulty this book presents is its place on the bookshelf—is it meant for flight enthusiasts or readers of solid writing? Fortunately, it serves as a hybridized introduction to anyone looking to take flight, literally and figuratively.