

Chila Woychik

# The Importance of Air

A few months back, my son asked me if I knew what a ramjet was. I didn't, but I figured that anything with "jet" in the word must have something to do with air. "It *flies*?" I said, making the motion of a bird in flight. Since then, I've been subjected to random instances of him waving his arms and saying, "It *flies*?" whenever anything remotely applicable occurs. So when I asked my farmer and the son to name the first thing that came to mind when I mentioned air, Son said, not unpredictably, "It *flies*?" complete with flapping arms. But Farmer, studious fan of fifty shades of esoteric engineering concepts, stated succinctly, "Laptop (Apple Air), Jordan (Air Jordan shoes), and aircraft." Neither mentioned the things I thought they would, namely barometric pressure or air quality or, simply, breathing.

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I've been trying to understand air pressure and sound, how they interfere and interact. Smell and wind, emanations and atmosphere. It's like attempting to unravel some of Dickinson's toughest poems, or unpuzzle the proverbial rocket science, but in this case, aerial shenanigans. Various sites do their best to simplify, but I beg them to *please try harder!*

From what I glean, an important part of animal movement tends to be low sounds (infrasonic), inaudible to the human ear but heard by some animals, sounds brought on by lightning or even volcanoes or hurricanes. Barometric pressure is another factor which motivates animals to move or eat more or find a sheltered place to stay. They know when something's happening in the heavens; they can sense the changes. It even affects us: more childbirths occur during times of atmospheric change, men's sperm counts tend to be lower, we suffer more aches and pains, moods and migraines—all this when the barometer fluctuates, all when the pressure changes from high (clear) to low (cloudy or rainy or stormy), or vice versa.

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It's an Easter morning full of atmosphere. Midwest churches pulse with song and a peerless dawn sun. The breath of life has returned: air in a dead man's lungs, this miracle or madness, this revolution in ingenuity. Where goes Easter without air? Will the same old songs be sung—some of them good—or has someone finally gotten creative? (My farmer used to sing louder.) Speaking of creativity, where are the triangle-headed purple-faced humans who procreate by having sex with their eyeballs? Variation is the creed of God, for she's big enough to swallow diversity as surely as she gulps down breath and spews it out again for us to breathe in.

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*Loricifera* are small multicellular animals that live in the depths of the Mediterranean Sea. They thrive in the mud of that harsh and extreme place, happily going about their daily business without taking advantage of a single oxygen molecule, presumably even after they've played a game or two of ocean floor hockey. Similar to mud dragons and penis worms, one must wonder how they reproduce—no gasping allowed, no sudden intakes of air; just lay there and flap those tendrils all sexy-like.

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The darn heifer got out. Six-hundred-pounds of Dolly stood in front of me, tame enough to let us pet her, let us feed her by hand, but she got out and I wasn't happy. I'd have to wrangle her in by myself. Ten year old Son simply wasn't big or strong enough at the time, and the farmer was doing his work thing in town. So I stood straddle-legged, for firm footing. Grabbed each of her ears, for control. Began pulling her toward me, for dominance. But she wasn't about to be had, so she lowered her head and drove it between my spread legs, splaying me out on top of her, backwards. She ran ten feet or so before I slipped off her slippery hide and crumbled to the concrete driveway, scraped, bruised, and air knocked out of me. Son ran up and hunkered over me, laughing ridiculously loud and long. My air gone, and his too unpalatable.

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Ours is the only planet we know of that can sustain life. Were the others once inhabited too, but human stupidity led to annihilation, as will surely happen to ours? Then coldness (like Mars) or excessive heat (like Venus), a complete collapse of the atmosphere.

Say it ain't so while tossing that plastic bottle in the trash.

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My current adventures include navigating muddy pocked dipsy rural roads heaved by winter's deep freezing and spring's inevitable thaw, and the farm fields are heaving scent. It's a thing called geosmin. When it rains or the ground is disturbed, the geosmin bacteria are released into the air giving it that beautiful earthy tang we smell after rain or in early spring, even while digging in the garden. The smell of thawing earth. Musty and slightly sweet. It's what happens here about mid-March.

We know spring is upon us when the watery ditch noises drown out the grinding of the diesel truck's engine. It's loud, that endless roar of a castanet army. Spring peepers have thawed and are glad to be chirruping the world again.

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Assuredly, fast is what this world has become, swirling globe of texture, sound, and air. Full, jammed, breathless. But that pink house is odd. You can set your course by it, a chop of rainbow along a horizon of corn.

Chila Woychik, German-born, has lived in the American Midwest most of her life. Her essay collection *Singing the Land: A Rural Chronology* is forthcoming from Shanti Arts Publishing (2020). She fell in love with Jeeps at age ten, and has an abiding interest in European chocolates. Visit [chilawoychik.com](http://chilawoychik.com).