

WRITING THE
CLIMATE

**GIGANTIC
CINEMA**
**A Weather
Anthology**
*Edited by
Alice Oswald &
Paul Keegan*

CLIMATE
READING GROUP

This idiosyncratic (and somewhat addictive) anthology takes weather as its subject in the broadest sense, ranging from Homeric poetry to scientific texts, philosophy and translations from indigenous languages to diary entries and letters. Although individual authors aren't foregrounded, they include, 'bareheaded' and 'hatless', luminaries such as Ted Hughes, Anne Carson, Dorothy Wordsworth, Apollinaire and Sappho.

The title is taken from Virginia Woolf's essay *On Being Ill* (1926), talking about the weather – 'One should not let this gigantic cinema play perpetually to an empty house.' This appears near the beginning of the anthology, and we hear her again halfway through (as Orlando, witnessing the Great Frost on the River Thames). As if perhaps to make up for the fact that most of the writing included is by men, Woolf also has the last word, with an entry from her diary on 30th June 1927, written after watching a solar eclipse on the Yorkshire moors above Richmond.

Here's a taste from the editors' preface:

Weather has no plot. It is all mutability and vicissitude, and so is this anthology. It is structured as a notional 'omniform' day, containing all weathers – and its three hundred entries...in their various voices prompting and curtailing each other, are a loud part of that day's noise. What we are offering is an impression of weather as non-stop interruption, although even that impression will be interrupted by others in the pages that follow.

...to dispense with writing 'about' weather, writing that knows what it's talking about... writing that is 'like' weather, that has the sovereignty of sheer event. As if the weather were writing itself... So that even the most discursive of texts ...have a way of speaking – telegraphic, visceral – that 'buffets' us, indicating an outdoor world moving behind the language.

...weather as a name for the shock and luck of encountering language or reacting to the elements, weather as an affliction of thought or a gift of an idea, weather as impossible excess or interruption or distraction or simple outsideness – all these visions of a force beyond our control are wonderfully liberating.

...To concentrate on something as erratic as the weather has an immediate and disturbing effect on the imagination... patterns and forces, things that are invisible, ephemeral, sudden, catastrophic, seasonal and endless: air's manifold appearances... the perceivable, the particular, the local over the global, the 'now' of raindrops... weather is what we stand to lose.

If you don't have time to read the entire anthology, do try and read the fascinating preface and dip into some of these entries, signified by number rather than name in the book:

48 Michael Taussig

49 Ted Hughes

72 Nan Shepherd

126 Osip Mandelstam

134 Elizabeth Bishop

253 Virginia Woolf

Is immersing yourself in the weather, 'the now of raindrops', so thoroughly and deeply 'wonderfully liberating', as the editors suggest?

If 'weather is what we stand to lose', doesn't concentrating on it have 'an immediate and disturbing effect on the imagination'?

How these days do we talk about the weather?

Is weather impervious to identity – class, race, gender? How do these intersect with the way we think about the climate crisis?

Bring your thoughts on a few of your own favourites to the session and we'll make our own idiosyncratic assemblage of responses to this stirring and elemental anthology.

I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday 14th September at 6 – 7.30pm.

Be well.