

JAMES BLOUET

Is this Seat Taken?



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First edition

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*“Try as much as possible to be wholly alive... you will be
dead soon enough.”*

*— William Saroyan, The Daring Young Man on the
Flying Trapeze (1934)*

Wherever you go, you meet a
part of your story.

—Eudora Welty,
The Art of Fiction No.47,
The Paris Review
(1972)

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Preface

As it should be, this collection is inspired by the passage of time experienced in an airport. A swift layover, I wandered through a stream of travelers and wondered if I might find a book of poetry on a store's shelf. I chose the wrong store and found no books at all; still, such a spark was enough to leap into an idea. What poems could be found in every airport to help with every moment? Thus begins a collection inspired by you, for you, in an offering to be carried during any journey.

1

Loudspeaker

It's another one of those messages
Loud and muffled
Pouring from the speakers in the sky
Calling on some poor soul
Hopefully not you
But always asking for a name terribly pronounced
So it may be you
Even though you don't know it
And so you ponder whether you should be
Walking to help desk A, B, or C
And instead, you place your headphones back on
And let the muffled flow of controlled chaos
Usher itself into an oblivion unknown to you
Until it's your turn to wander in a certain direction

Is This Seat Taken?

It's not enough to sit here
Patiently waiting
And looking at the leaning sky
Not enough anymore for blue light
To refract across a tundra
Break free from its corona
To enter corneas along the plains.

When the first buses and trains
Grew common enough to cry out,
Stretch, and develop stations,
The distraction in a stranger's hand
Was merely a daily newspaper.

Now this blue light pours from
Slim metal boxes and the person
Approaching tries to say something

But the ears are blocked with music
And the eyes are drawn to the rectangle
And so nothing must be said
And we move through minutes
And though it's the same world
And we're so close
And we could start with a simple icebreaker
And brighten our days
And learn a brief name
We don't
And then we stand
And we're gone
And there's nothing left to say

Missed Connection

You're running, wheels whirl behind you
A steady cacophony of footsteps ahead and
You see the paths open and close
As you weave and worry and rush
To a gate that's just a little too far away
And when you do arrive
Just a little out of breath with sweat
From exertion or stress threatening to bloom
You find the doors closed
And so you walk, head slightly lowered
To a desk with a helpful face
Who you briefly offer your frustration to
Until you settle into the truth
That's there's another flight
And a different seat and another stranger
Who you'll complain to about the wild journeys
We place ourselves on

And so, for now, you're as close as you can be
To the briefest peace while you seethe
And settle into a still-warm chair where you slowly
Open to a new page.

We Must Be Strangers

We must be strangers
But you know what?
Honeymoon-huggers!
Innocent and overflowing with bubbles,
Holding on to each other just a little too much.
If only every heart opened like yours.

We must be strangers
But you know what?
Reading your paper
While standing in line
So focused on the words
You forget to move and the line
Flows around you slowly
As you stagnate in your own world.
If only every soul held such focus.

We must be strangers
But you know what?
We could both be anything:
Heavy-headed with invisible baggage;
Light-hearted or quite heaven-sent;
Hellbent; hungry; tired; retired;
Returning/departing: to knowns and unknowns.

We must be strangers
But you know what?

Pocket Money

Supply and demand

Says we'll pay for commodities
Like a \$25 gin and tonic

We grin and bear it

Fair well to \$5 more on a chip bag
Slip back into the sad cycle of consumer

Goods and I wish you would

Know where that came from
But it's okay, you can get some candy,

Or keychains, and we change our future

With a little money for a memory
That'll swing while we walk,

Clang when we rush,

Rust, in time,
Settle somewhere hidden

Until we find it in a box, pull it out, smile,
Remembering the demands of the time
And the supplies that we had while there.

80% Looking Up

If 0% of life is being born
And 100% of life is being dead
It's unlikely you're below the 10%

Or above the 90%
We'll say there's 80% who can fly
And of those, maybe a lucky 1%

Found this page in its longing.

As the worlds swirl around you:
Passersby: alone, grouped, thronged, walking,
rolling, strolling;
There's another world out there.

Full of ground, soil, wells, huts, roofs, shanties,
2-strokes, hopes and dreams.

And that world, a world we whirl across,

Maintains 80% of the population

A rough 6.5 billion

6,500,000,000

Who have never stepped foot on a plane

Or seen the sunrise above the clouds

Felt the rush of air roaring past the massive silver
bullet

As it lunges across tarmac and climbs into the blazing
blue

But nonetheless

There they are

80% looking up

At contrails marking exes to places

They'll never go.

Where the Longest Line Leads

A matter of taste

Taste matters

We only taste matter when millions of buds

Brush upon a liquid or solid

And isn't it odd we return to sugars

And lovers that quench us for seconds?

What dissipates, disintegrates, dissolves?

Could we solve any problems

With just one more slow sip

Of coffee in the corner of a shop

Unrushed and unreasoned?

Not bothered by seasons of change

That flutter by like hundreds of travelers

Making their way from terminal to terminal

And gate to gate

Terminally late or early or heading to a gate

We can only imagine.

The line expands from a single counter
Machine ticking and typing
Receipts printing names and desires
Clocks ticking steady till names
Spoken out signify something's ready and
Just around the bend,
past the next gate
There are three restaurants
Two delis
A bar and a bakery and
every single one
Serves coffee

To one or two

While bundles, groups, burdens of people
Line up in a jumbled impatient mess
Beneath a glowing green sign
Begging for stardust presence
To deliver a couple bucks.

Omaha

On any given day

Standing beneath a bright television screen
Filled with hundreds of arrivals, departures,
Times and destinations, there's only a single al-
phabetical

Discovery your eyes seek and it's easy to meander,
To wonder if there's a day, a week, a year, that
might lead

Your path to Alberta, San Juan, or Valencia.

Walking past a gate, A37, for instance,

A flight bound for Omaha,

Makes you wonder who's sitting there

With their travel pillows,

Roller bags, headphones, headaches,

Smiles, and somber stares stifling the distant wall.

To wander and wonder of the lives

We accelerate through one second at a time

Breathing softly into the shoulders of loved ones
No matter where we're headed
There's an emptiness for curiosity to spill into.
If there's not, you can always change your flight
Ditch your life for a week
Dance beneath the same old sky
In a brand new town
Surrounded by songs heard only by those
Brave enough to break free and listen.

Little Lungs

Before you see the blue or pink hat
Stripes or polka dots blaring across a shirt or dress
You hear the cacophony brewing
Simmering in the shh, shh, shh
Of mom or dad.
If you're close enough
You notice the rhythmic jiggle of hands in armpits
Then shoulder-rocking
As the attempts grow more futile
The bottle appears
The pacifier can only do so much when the going
gets tough
(Look at our peaceful leaders trading peace talks)

If you're not close enough to see
Then this is a surprise
Leaping blindly toward you in the echo of a screech

A tremor, tremendous in its force, compelled by
such

Small creatures these cries ignite the air around us

And headphones go on,

Volumes go up,

Neighbors cringe,

Parents walk the aisle, cooing, praying, and what
keeps

Returning to the mind of a fellow traveler must
resemble

The five stages of grief

As we slowly accept and step out of our own worlds

And enter the deafening and embarrassed shoes

Of the parents who wish with all their hearts for a
moment

Of respite in the roar of pressurized cabin and
reeling engine

And are stuck with the pained eardrums of a child

Who has yet to look through the window with awe

And yet to discover the secret of sucking a hard
candy

Not yet trained to suck it up and endure the miser-
able

Like the rest of us raging in our chairs

Wishing someone could get a handle on the situa-
tion.

A Passing Word

Never been there?

Bad day, hair-do won't do

Hock a sin on the side of the street

Moccasin raised ready to beat

Anger bubbles

An undulation

Racing pulse inhibited hope

Could be just one small word and a smile

Our world is shaped by the energy we make

Look behind you!

Check out that wake!

All that dies in the past

Change a single letter

Now it lies

Let it rest

Lest you relive the dead-end spiral

A passing word to a stranger may be worth the

while.

Between the Noise

Easy to slip away beneath a burden

Headphones settle over cranium blues

Eyelids drawn shut like the curtain

In the cabin of first class

First glass free plus free refills

Turbulence spills your free tea

Woe is me now urgently

Dab napkins 'til the steward

Comes back with more

The seat belt sign is on

Still the music blares, dispels

The whine of landing gear

All rattle in wheels weaving down the aisle

Zipper swerve round wide turns silently

What happens when the music stops

What world sneaks in above the endless hum

Of conversations and announcements and musics
and

Laughter,

whirring machines,

singing wheelchairs,

Hurling energy everywhere,

You remain within the safety of headphones

Where you delicately adjust to life

Between the noise

Where no one bothers you

And you never miss a thing

You Must Mean Business

Don't look now

Beneath the scarlet rouse

For what you find might seize

A sizable influx—

In come the ravenous

parasites of our time.

Agree we need more

Heed freedom

Feed heathen

Ease Eden from oblivion

To a world we could be living in.

Spend money on the honey

Let the bees leave on sabbatical.

Chase life in its glory.

Though saving receipts to expense later

Is a gift in itself...

Mainly progress prowls

In the shadows of poetic virtue.
That first time the phone rang
Receipts were analyzed
Funds returned
It's not something one forgets.
Then again, there's the backpack-bearing
Bedraggled walker of mountains
Hitchhikers delight
Penny well-spent
Work-exchange dance by chance
That still flitters the heart
In its foray with Fate.

Not before 8am

Clocks care little when you look at them
Bodies rise and fall like planes
Steadily gaining momentum
Launching into orbit to find a level in the strato-
sphere
Functional enough for the rest of us
There's a song somewhere
Heavy-headed clanging inside an ill-wound motor
Starlight, moonshine, sun-glazed coffee and
prayer
In its darkest form for the dream
That the BAC stays high or somehow,
Miraculously drops back to the freshened zero
Of once upon a time
We ordered fruit and muffins
As the sun broke through the deafening dark
And while the light-shift splintered in fertile re-

fractions

Great, blinding florescent bulbs sent pale waves

Into so many pupils

And the great world slowed

Until the man behind the bar,

Chatting to a coworker over coffee

Pauses the conversation to inform the newest
customer

About the timeline one must reach before

Reaching for a bottle.

Family Vacation

You're not at the beach yet
Not yet there with the kids
And their melting icecreams
Cries of annoyance about sand
Wind, Sun, Heat, the things you came for
The things that count of course
Are the moments between
When that kind stranger
Whose kids are playing close by
Offers yours to join in
And so it begins
All those bags, the extra wheels
The lines and the Ipads,
Headphones, tired groans,
They slip away and the peace
Oh the peace between the moments
Explores the depths a sweet breath offers

To the mothers and fathers
Who plan, prep, pack, push,
Until the portrait photo updates
And the memories pour down like warm rain
Which the kids complain about
Before running through it with rampant grins
And it's so close but already gone
These glimpses of the timeless
Begging for their chance beyond
The waiting movement of one more flight.

15

Turbulence

(ditto)

28

16

Looks Lovely

(free spirits)

17

Trading Faces

(making faces with a baby)

18

You Can't Check That

(types of baggage)

That's a lot of Horses

The jet engine: not typically measured in horse power—

Can still be described in such a manner.

Of course, the size of the plane matters,
And the company in the metallic belly.

But a 737 will poetically require
40,000 horses to thunder through

The clouds (a minimum) of 30,000 feet
For what plane people call a medium-haul flight

Which translates to 20,000 seconds
Each of which we hurtle through the roar

Of hooves hammering the sky

And after 10,000 hours

Doing anything you can almost become an expert
And that's where the learning really begins

If you're clever enough to love the joys
Of never giving up.

20

Laden

(heavy packers)

21

Is That All?

(light travelers)

35

22

Chatter

A thousand conversations happening at once
Why not start your own?

Wikipedia Says

List of firsts in aviation

2 languages

- Article
- Talk
- Read
- Edit
- View history

Tools

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

-
-
-
-
-

Appearance

hide

Text

- Small
- Standard
- Large

Width

- Standard
- Wide

Color (beta)

- Automatic
- Light
- Dark

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Period drawing of Montgolfier hot air balloon that made the first confirmed flight by man in 1783

This is a list of firsts in aviation. For a comprehen-

sive list of women's records, see Women in aviation.

First person to fly

[edit]

The first flight (including gliding) by a person is unknown. A number have been suggested:



1920 Stained glass window of the monk Eilmer of Malmesbury holding his wings (early 11th century)

- In **559 A.D.**, several prisoners of Emperor Wenxuan of Northern Qi, including Yuan Huangtou of Ye, were said to have been forced to launch themselves with a kite from a tower, as an experiment. Only Yuan Huangtou survived, only to be executed later.^[1]
- In the **9th century**, the Andalusian Abbas ibn Firnas attempted a short gliding flight with wings covered with feathers from the Tower of Cordoba but was injured while landing.^[2]
- In the **early 11th century**, Eilmer of Malmesbury, an English Benedictine monk, attempted a gliding flight using wings. He is recorded as travelling a modest distance before breaking his legs on landing.^[3]
- In **1390** according to some Chinese accounts Wan Hu experimented with a flying chair powered by 47 rockets. The chair supposedly flew briefly, then exploded, killing its creator.
- In c. **1509**, the Italian alchemist and abbot of Tongland, John Damian, is said to have made an

attempt at human-powered flight off the walls of Stirling Castle in the Kingdom of Scotland, if a satirical account in two poems by the poet William Dunbar is based on facts.^[4]

- Between **1630 and 1632**, Hezarfen Ahmed Çelebi is said to have glided over the Bosphorus strait from the Galata Tower to the Üsküdar district in Istanbul.^{[5][6]}
- In **1633** his brother Lagari Hasan Çelebi may have survived a flight on a 7-winged rocket powered by gunpowder from Sarayburnu, the point below Topkapı Palace in Istanbul.^{[7][8]}

None of these historical accounts are adequately supported by corroborating evidence nor have any been widely accepted. The first confirmed human flight was accomplished by Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier in a tethered Montgolfier balloon in 1783.

Lighter than air (aerostats)

[edit]

- **First animals to fly in a balloon:** a sheep called *Montauciel*, along with a duck and a rooster were sent on a balloon flight by the Montgolfier brothers on September 19, 1783^{[9][10]}
- **First manned flight:** Étienne Montgolfier went

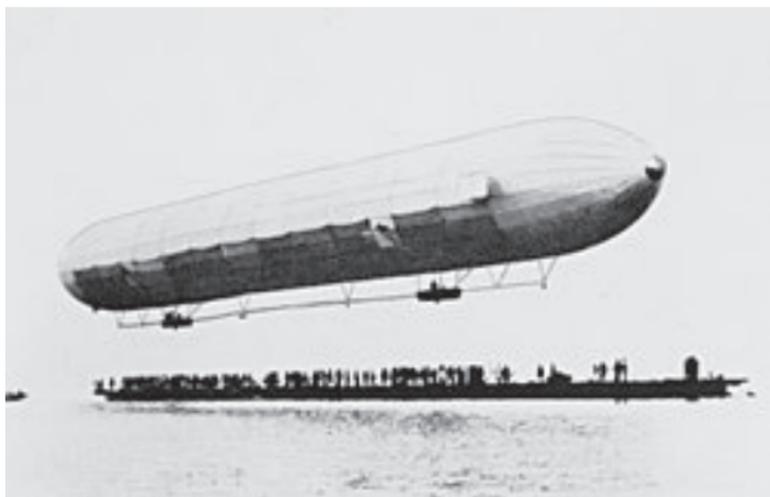
aloft in a tethered Montgolfier hot air balloon on October 15, 1783.^[11]

- **First manned free flight in an untethered balloon:** Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier and Marquis d'Arlandes flew in a Montgolfier hot air balloon from the Château de la Muette to the Butte-aux-Cailles, Paris, on November 21, 1783.^{[12][13]}
- **First manned gas balloon flight:** Professor Jacques Charles and Nicolas-Louis Robert flew from Paris to Nesles-la-Vallée in a hydrogen-filled balloon on December 1, 1783.^[14]
- **First women to fly:** The Marchioness and Countess of Montalembert, the Countess of Podenas and Miss de Lagarde ascended in a tethered balloon over Paris, on May 20, 1784.^[15]
- **First woman in free flight in an untethered balloon:** Élisabeth Thible flew over Lyon singing arias on June 4, 1784, in order to entertain Gustav III of Sweden.^[16]
- **First flight in a steerable balloon (or airship):** On July 15, 1784, the Robert brothers (Les Frères Robert) flew for 45 minutes from Saint-Cloud to Meudon with M. Collin-Hullin and Louis Philippe II, the Duke of Chartres, in an elongated balloon designed by Jacques Charles, following Jean Baptiste Meusnier's suggestions (1783–85), but the oars did not work.^[14]

- **First primitive airmail:** John Jeffries dropped four letters from a balloon over London on November 30, 1784.^[17]
- **First flight across the English Channel:** was made by Jean-Pierre Blanchard and John Jeffries in a balloon on January 7, 1785.^[18]
- **First aviation disaster:** Occurred in Tullamore, County Offaly, Ireland, when a hot air balloon caused a fire that burned down about 100 houses on May 10, 1785.^[19]
- **First known fatalities in an air crash:** Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier and Pierre Romain died when their Rozière balloon deflated and crashed near Wimereux in Pas-de-Calais, on June 15, 1785.^[20]
- **First blood chit equivalent carried by an airman:** by Jean-Pierre Blanchard (who did not speak English) on the first balloon flight in America, on January 9, 1793.^[21]
- **First jump from a balloon with a parachute (claimed):** Jean-Pierre Blanchard claimed to have used a parachute in 1793 to escape his hot air balloon when it ruptured,^[citation needed] but there were no witnesses.
- **First jump from a balloon with a parachute (observed):** Andre Jacques Garnerin in Paris in 1797.^[22]
- **First balloon ascent on horseback.** Pierre Testu-

Brissy ascended from Belleville Park in Paris.^[23]

- **First woman to jump from a balloon with a parachute:** Jeanne Geneviève Labrosse jumped from an altitude of 3,000 ft (900 m) on October 12, 1799.^[citation needed]
- **First woman to pilot her own balloon:** Sophie Blanchard flew solo from the garden of the Cloister of the Jacobins in Toulouse on August 18, 1805.^[citation needed]
- **First woman to be killed in an aviation accident:** Sophie Blanchard was killed when her hydrogen balloon ignited on July 6, 1819.^[24]



Zeppelin LZ 1, first rigid airship to fly, 1900

- **First successful steerable powered balloon:** The Giffard dirigible was developed and flown by Henri Giffard, from the Paris Hippodrome to Trappes on September 24, 1852.^[25]
- **First balloon mail service:** passed vital information over Prussian lines during the 1870–71 Siege of Paris.^[26]
- **First flight in an airship powered by an internal combustion engine:** was made by Alberto Santos Dumont in 1898.^[27]
- **First flight of a rigid airship:** was made by the Zeppelin LZ 1 from Lake Constance (the *Bodensee*) on July 2, 1900.
- **First woman to pilot a powered aircraft:** Rose Isabel Spencer, in Stanley Spencer's Airship Number 1, at Crystal Palace, London on July 14, 1902.^{[28][29]}
- **First trans-Atlantic rigid airship flight:** was made by the R34 from RAF East Fortune to Mineola, New York from July 2 to July 6, 1919.^[30]
^[31] This flight carried the **first trans-Atlantic stowaways:** William Ballantyne and his tabby cat, Wopsie.^[32] Wopsie and two homing pigeons were the **first animals to cross the Atlantic in an aircraft,**^[33] with Wopsie being the first quadruped known to have flown across a major

body of water.^[citation needed]

- **First helium-filled rigid airship to fly:** was the USS *Shenandoah* on August 20, 1923, although it did not make a powered flight until September 24, 1923.^[34]



The *Breitling Orbiter 3* in which the first non-stop balloon circumnavigation was achieved in 1999

- **First people to reach the stratosphere:** were Auguste Piccard and Paul Kipfer, who ascended to the height of 51,000 ft (15,500 m) in a hydrogen balloon on May 27, 1931.^[35]