

A Poem on our Proud History of Welcoming Strangers

'In [the eleventh year of Elizabeth], one Cartwright brought a slave from Russia, and would scourge him cruelly, for which he was questioned, and it was resolved, that England was too pure an air for slaves to breath in ... '

(John Lilburne, 1645)

Now in the sixty-fifth year
Of the second Elizabeth, it should be noted
That the title to the air is disputed
And the slave, most likely,
Deported.

As for the orphaned boy
Who touched this shore, aged nine,
Fleeing the latest war –
Why he may fill his lungs
With English air, home, school – ten years or so –
But when he is nineteen may be required
To cough it up, sobbing,
As they put him on the plane,
Since freedom to breathe
Our freedom is no longer guaranteed.