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Foyle Young Poets of the Year

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Fiona Sampson discusses Emma Lindley's 'The Weather Forecast For My Family'.

In a collaboration with the Poetry Society's Young Poets of the Year Award **Books for Keeps** is publishing some of the poems submitted by young poets for this award. Here we publish 'The Weather Forecast For My Family' by 13-year-old **Emma Lindley** from Rotherham. The poet, **Fiona Sampson**, adds a commentary. <!--break-->

The Weather Forecast For My Family

Emma Lindley

Laura will be cloudy during the morning when she

has to get up for school but sunny spells break

through later when she meets her mates.

Thunderstorms will gather as dad gets up in a bad

mood. The storms will continue throughout the day as

mum finds him more jobs to do.

Mum will be sunny and fair with the odd cloud in the

sky when her children start to argue.

Emma will be mostly sunny with the occasional light

shower when she has to do her homework.

The outlook for the family is changeable.

Commentary

This poem is great fun! It makes us laugh with recognition and nod thoughtfully, too. After all, most families experience stormy internal weather sometimes; and this can be merely boring, a nuisance or downright scary, depending on how things go. Emma Lindley's poem ends with a veiled threat 'The outlook for the family is changeable' which reminds us just how important what she's writing about is.

Although it's only five stanzas long, 'The Weather Forecast For My Family' throws up lots of questions. We find ourselves asking, why is it a poem? One reason is that it compresses a whole lot of material, beautifully and through a

single extended metaphor, into half a page. In **Anna Karenina**, which starts with the famous sentence 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way?', Tolstoy takes 600 pages to prove a similar point. Another reason this is not only a poem but a successful one is that it follows in the technical footsteps of poets such as Walt Whitman and, writing now, American C K Williams and Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson, in using lines so long that they look like little paragraphs.

Finally, this is a poem which stands out in competition because it does what it does with such control. Emma hasn't only found something different to say about each family member, she's very convincingly used the exact diction of the weather forecast: 'sunny spells break through later?', 'the occasional light shower?'. You really do feel all the tension of her skit on the forecasting genre. It's in the third stanza, 'Mum will be sunny? the odd cloud in the sky?', that we realise that Emma has taken an old set of clichés we use in talking about our emotions and brought them to life with this skit.

Fiona Sampson has published ten books, including four collections of poetry, philosophy of language and books on writing in health care. Her most recent book is a verse-novel, **The Distance Between Us** (Seren, 2005). She has won many awards and been translated into more than a dozen languages; her books in translation include **The Self on the Page** (Hebrew, 2002), **Travel Diary** (Macedonian, 2003) and two volumes in Romanian. She is Editor of **Poetry Review**; and of **Orient Express**, a journal of contemporary writing from Enlargement Europe.

How to enter the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2005

Any writer between the ages of 11 and 17 can enter by sending their poem or poems on A4 paper with their name, address, school and date of birth clearly written on the reverse of every sheet to **Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2005, The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX**. Poems can also be sent by email to **fyp@poetrysociety.org.uk**. Poets can enter as many poems as they choose, of any length and on any theme. However, poems which may find publication in **Books for Keeps** should not exceed 22 lines. The 15 overall winners will be invited to attend the prize-winners' writing course at the Arvon Centre, Lumb Bank in February 2006.

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