

LADY DENMAN CUP COMPETITION 2017

Inspired by the Climate Change Campaign *For the love of...*



Schedule

Inspired by the Climate Change Campaign *For the Love of*, the Lady Denman Cup Competition 2017 invited WI members to write a piece of poetry about what they love that could be lost to climate change. Entries could be written in any poetical style but must not have used more than 500 words.

The NFWI received 139 entries from 59 federations:

First	Susan Herbert	Suffolk East Federation
Second	Susan Read	Isle of Ely Federation
Third	Cassandra Parkin	East Yorkshire Federation
Highly Commended	Anne Grigg	Middlesex Federation
Highly Commended	Kay Kennedy-Hardy	Cumbria Westmorland Federation
Highly Commended	Sharon Champion	Clwyd-Denbigh Federation

The Judges reported *‘This year we were very pleased to see such a variety of themes and approaches as members offered their responses to the challenge of reflecting upon how climate change might affect their experiences of the world, noting especially what losses would touch their feelings most acutely.*

There were many people who dealt with the widest possible scope of things they would miss, while others recounted one by one the small things currently threatened by global warming. Perhaps, most inspiring was the widespread urgency many writers felt to halt the worsening conditions so that future generations might enjoy the same pleasures in the natural world that they had known themselves. Some recurrent motifs included observations on the declining numbers of wildfowl; the threats to water supplies (through both drought and super-abundant rainfall); the loss of really marked changes in the seasons; the scarcity of some natural phenomena, like snowfalls, and harvesting and sowing patterns.

Many members plainly sought to offer a hopeful message, usually through a stimulating (occasionally rousing!) call to action to prevent further destruction; others saw little cause for optimism. Virtually all the entrants however saw the matter as one for deliberation, retrenchment, and something about which a constructive response of some sort is required. This, in spite of the adverse effects noted in many of the poems, is a positive message, as it emphasizes the benefits of community support and community engagement with the issues that affect the global community.

As a group, the entries provided us with diverse and often enlightened, entertaining reading. We would like to congratulate this year’s winners, and to express our thanks for being invited to read another delightful series of poems from WI members from across the UK.’

The NFWI Science and Leisure Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the judges; John Ballam, Director of the Undergraduate Diploma in Creative Writing, Kellogg College, Oxford and Jeremy Hughes, fellow tutor of Diploma of Creative Writing course and Chair of Examiners at Oxford University for undertaking the challenging task of judging this year’s entries.

FIRST PLACE

Susan Herbert

Henley WI, Suffolk East Federation

Tollesbury Wick

The mud flats glisten
Wild geese whiffle down the cold winds.
Ice crackles in the channels leading to the sea.
A charm of goldfinches flits along the shore,
wings sparkling gold like swift embers.
Out where the horizon should be, flat sea and cloudless sky are one.
A barge with brick red sails lies suspended between worlds,
unmoving in the pale haze.
Somewhere in the marshes a curlew calls,
Wigeon whistle to each other of the Arctic spring
and the Brent geese bark.

The tide turns.
The coast breathes, the birds rise and fall across the beach with the tide.
Walking, feeding, walking on, like a slow dance,
Spread out across the flat ooze, separate, searching;
Then death stoops low across the water, Sparrow hawk!
The calm shatters, the birds rise up as one,
In a whirl of wings, a confusion of cries,
the air is filled with movement.
The hawk passes, the birds drift down again.
Restless now, moving with the tide until;
at some unseen signal they leave for safe fields
and shingle spits, to preen and sleep.
And as they sleep, dreaming of a bright moon and a falling, tide,
the mirage sea-sky catches fire with sunset.

This is a kind of loosely-made free verse poem, divided into two uneven stanzas. Some of the lines are very short (three syllables), others are very long (15). The lines are also unrhymed. The poem's narrative centres on the description of a particular place as a portrayal of the natural world. It is a vivid recounting of some definite images and it awakens a sense of awe in the narrator which is communicated very effectively. Inside it, there is the plea that this is the sort of fragile eco-system placed at risk, and just the kind of thing that the narrator fears losing (though she keeps herself out of the sequence of narration, letting the loss remain more than just her own).

SECOND PLACE

Susan Read

Sutton WI, Isle of Ely Federation

I will miss a proper winter...

It's started already, you know,
It's rare that we see any snow.
I remember when I was a child
And the winters were stormy and wild.
When you woke to a strange eerie light,
And the world was a picture in white.
All silent with few muffled sounds,
A snow carpet protecting the ground.
When you jumped up and drew back the blind
There in amazement you'd find
Leaves, cobwebs, swirls etched on the pane,
Jack Frost had been busy again.

I will miss wearing warm winter clothes,
Dressed in wool from my head to my toes.
Bundled up to go out for some fun,
Off to play 'neath a watery sun.
Where the lawn's like a new ironed sheet
Making tracks with your welly clad feet.
Building igloos and snowmen and dens,
Rolling snowballs to throw at your friends.
Climbing hills with toboggan in tow,
Swooshing down in a flurry of snow.
Then home to the warm kitchen fire,
Wet clothes hanging to drip on the dryer.
Snuggle down on a warm cosy rug
With soup in your favourite mug.
As night falls bathed and well fed,
Hot brick in the foot of your bed.
Peep through the curtains to spy
Moon and stars in a bright navy sky.
Ready to sleep with a stretch and a yawn
Soft eiderdown to snuggle up warm.
Think of more winter days and their fun,
Never dreaming, one day there'll be none.

There is a great deal to enjoy in this poem, from its chatty opening which addresses the reader, 'It's started already, you know', to the final unembellished declaration that 'one day there'll be none'. The poem blends old fashioned notions of what a poem should be with memorable and contemporary expression, here capturing childhood delight: There in amazement you'd find, Leaves, cobwebs, swirls etched on the pane, Jack Frost had been busy again. There are memorable images – 'the lawn's like a new ironed sheet' – and many individual features to celebrate, including the games and the joy of simple pleasures such as 'soup in your favourite mug' and a 'Hot brick in the foot of your bed'. The 'Moon and stars in a bright navy sky' is a good example of an image made so simply. Although there are occasional moments which fall flat, for example the cliché 'A snow carpet protecting the ground', overall the poem sustains its joy in regular rhythms, full rhyme and an ability to blend the old and new.

THIRD PLACE

Cassandra Parkin

North Cave WI, East Yorkshire Federation

Two degrees

The delicate spears
Of bluebells, their scent like sweet
Mist beneath the hedge

Bees tucked in foxgloves
Drowsing in the sun as I
Pass by the churchyard

The neon yell of
Rapeseed, sandpaper pollen
Sharpening my throat

The squabble of rooks
Fat on stolen juniper
In their trees, and, yes,

Even those pigeons
(Who are having, let's face it
Way more sex than me)

Two degrees more, and
All these things I love become
All the things I miss

The title 'Two Degrees' puts a number on how much the climate is changing and the poem enumerates in simple terms what is being missed by the narrator: bluebells, bees, fields of rape, rooks and pigeons. But there is so much more here because of metaphor. The bluebells' 'sweet/Mist', 'the neon yell of /Rapeseed' and its 'sandpaper pollen/Sharpening my throat' which transform the experience to something memorable for the reader also. The pigeons '(Who are having, let's face it/Way more sex than me)' create an unexpectedly humorous aside which also serves to illustrate the fecundity of the natural world. The final stanza demonstratively declares: 'All these things I love become/All the things I miss'.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Anne Grigg

Ashford WI, Middlesex Federation

FOR THE LOVE OF

For the love of green meadows
Studded with spring flowers
For the love of rushing rivers
Tumbling over rocks.

For the love of heather moorland
Tarns and bogs
The call of the curlew
The kestrel hovering above.

For the love of domestic gardens
English roses and lilies
Dew on cobwebs
Glistening at dawn.

Daffodils and snowdrops
Waking up in spring
Flowers in all seasons
Subtly changing over.

Turbulent weather, flash floods
Hurricanes world wide
Droughts and earthquakes
Temperature extremes.

Will we have to turn to cacti
And arid dry gardens
Gravel and rocks
Succulents and plants for drought.

Should we heed the wakeup call
Cut down car emissions
Fossil burning fuels
Cows that burp too much!

But what about China
Its factories belching out
And countries' disregard to protocols
To encourage their trade.

Is this too much to handle
Will the plant be harmed
Will our children blame us
For not doing enough.

Will our epitaph be
'We had such a wonderful world
But mankind wasted it
And nature could not compete'.

This is a long poem made of ten unrhymed quatrains. They share a generally consistent three-beat line throughout. There is a deliberate and rich tonality throughout, at times appreciative and wondering, at times fearful and angry. It moves through several types of diction – elevated and religious-seeming, to earthy and amusing. It offers no solutions and leaves its point open-ended, providing no random closure to its mood, and no place to seek comfort except in a fuller awareness of the problem. It echoes the mature work of Ted Hughes, and the early style of Seamus Heaney.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Kay Kennedy-Hardy

Cumberland & Westmorland WI, Suffolk East Federation

It's amazing!
It's like a huge, white sheet on the ground
It's amazing!
The Library Gardens lawn is a winter wonderland
We are eight year olds
We have no idea how to organise.
But we do.
Two teams.
One for the head,
One for the body.
Two teams, but some boys always throw snowballs.
Two teams
Start with a small snowball and roll.
Learn fast that it has to be turned or it won't make a ball.
Eight-year-old enthusiasm keeps us pushing,
As the ball gets bigger
It gets heavy.
Take turns pushing the body,
Then the head,
Both continue to grow.
You can see where we have been,
Winding paths of green where we have taken the snow.
We push the body into the middle.
We push the head into the middle.
Eight-year-old chests heaving.
Breath pluming into the air.
Cheeks rosy, rosy red with cold, fingers red and numb,
Toes frozen in wellingtons.
Eight year olds.
Two large snowballs.
All gather around the head and lift.
It's difficult; it's awkward, but it works.
We have a body with a head on it.
Eight year olds.
We didn't come prepared,
No carrot in pocket, no lumps of coal.
Somebody has a scarf, on it goes.
We run to the bushes to find twigs and unearth cold stones.
Now our snowman has twig arms.
Stone eyes.
Twig nose.
Stone smile.
The stones keep falling out; we put them back.
Stone buttons down his front.
He's amazing!
In my mind he's dazzling white, glinting in the winter sun.
Reality is he's mud splattered with grass sticking out of him.
I'm eight.
He's amazing!

I'm not eight anymore...
My grandson is.
We sit in the Library Gardens.

It's winter.
It's cold.
Our breath plumes, the grass is green.
The snow no longer comes.
How can I teach my grandson to make a snowman with no snow?
So, I tell him the story of my snowman.
He's amazed!

Apart from not having a title... this is a very engaging way to illustrate climate change. As the poem progresses, so does the building of the snowman. The reader is rewarded because they have to work out what is happening. Before it is identified as a 'snowman' it is just parts – 'body', 'head' – which have to be added to with twigs and 'cold stones'. There is a sense of achievement for the eight-year-olds who have made its 'Stone eyes./Twig nose./Stone smile': 'He's amazing!' The final stanza shows that this event happened many years ago and that the narrator is now in the same place – the Library gardens – with their eight-year-old grandson. There is no snow to build a snowman and the telling of the story amazes the child because it seems fabulous and unreal. The repetition throughout the poem helps to stress how wonderful it is to build a man of snow. It serves as a neat metaphor for the state of the world – (hu)man is melting.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Sharon Champion

Castlemill & Pontfadog WI, Clwyd-Denbigh Federation

STILL THERE

Yes. She is still there,
The house of my dawning,
On the soft edge of the island cove.
My second womb
Safe and sustaining.

She is still there,
The house of my growing,
Resolute against the soaking storms.
My training ground
Steadfast and secure.

She is still there,
The house of my waning,
But, afar, ice caps are melting.
Each daily, slow tsunami
Challenging her ownership of sand and land.
Her sense is shifting.
Canute-like she defies,
Stubborn yet succumbing.

Yes. She is still there,
Though not the house of my dying;
She is already drowned.

This poem begins as if it is answering a question followed by the personification of a home next to the sea, 'Yes. She is still there', which intrigues the reader to continue to discover the pronoun's identity and where 'there' is. Each section cohesively develops the notion of the house as being the touchstone in the narrator's life, 'my dawning', 'growing' and 'waning'. The final section defeats the reader's expectation by declaring 'Though not the house of my dying' because 'She is already drowned'.