



# THE NATURAL COURSE OF THINGS

*Young Poets For A Greener Future*

2025 Competition Winning Poems

**THEPOETRYSOCIETY**



ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY





# Poetry, engineering and the environment

One day, I came into work to find young poets everywhere. It was refreshing to hear their views, not always flattering, on how my generation is handling climate change. Six Rotherham schools took part in workshops with professional poets, organised by The Poetry Society, for a school's competition on *Imagining A Greener Future*. In addition, young poets from all over the world had their own competition, *Earthlings, Building: An Ecopoetry Writing Challenge*. The schools attended a showcase event to present the results at AESSEAL's Factory for the Future, in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Our factory, also the headquarters of the AES Engineering group, brings together cutting-edge robotics, AI and highly skilled staff, to make advanced mechanical seals for global industry. We're trying to help manufacturers work more cleanly and more efficiently and encourage them to invest in the environment. We're also reaching out to the young people who will inherit the task of cleaning up the planet. This short volume brings together the best entries from both these competitions. Hopefully, it will help us remember and take a little time for reflection.

Chris Rea

Managing Director and Founder,  
AES Engineering Ltd



# Welcome to the poems

We hope you'll enjoy this anthology of poems by young people which reimagines our relationship with the natural world.

The first section presents poems written by 12- and 13-year-olds in Rotherham schools, who were challenged to picture a greener future.

'A hundred years from now / Wow that's a long way / But hear me out...'

Isabelle Stevens grabs our attention right from the start in her chatty envisioning of a future where hairless hamsters have evolved on a warming planet, but with achievable adjustments 'the world might / Just be a bit more / Breathable'. The second section selects poems from poets aged 8- 25 who responded to a challenge posed by poet Caleb Parkin on The Poetry Society's Young Poets Network, to consider how we could better co-exist in the world we share with non-human animals.

As Zain Rishi says in his poem: 'We'll do better'.

The Poetry Society has been thrilled to partner with engineering firm AESSEAL to create these opportunities for young people to voice their feelings about climate anxiety through poetry, and to share them with you here.

Judith Palmer

Director, The Poetry Society



# Poems



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# SCHOOLS' COMPETITION

These poems were selected from entries from Year 8 students at five Rotherham and Sheffield schools, who received funded poetry workshops with local poet-facilitators. With thanks to poets Matt Abbott and Cassandra Parkin, who led the school workshops.

ST BERNARD'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

WALES HIGH SCHOOL

RAWMARSH COMMUNITY SCHOOL

CLIFTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

THRYBERGH ACADEMY



# The Future <sup>1</sup>

*Isabelle Stevens, Winner*

A hundred years from now  
Wow that's a long way  
But hear me out  
What would the aliens want to say?

They might be mimes who seem  
More normal  
And dogs that like to keep a  
Tiny journal.

The Antarctic might not be there  
And hamsters might not  
Have hair.

But if we be more  
Sustainable  
There might still be  
Kids who like to eat  
Bibble.

If we say goodbye  
To the horrible  
Vehicles  
Then the world might  
Just be a bit more  
Breathable.



# Poland's Mountainous Regions

*Abigail Skorupinski, Runner-up*

The cool mid-summer breeze rebelled against the everlasting trees causing a soft rustle,  
My hands delicately touched the grass as if it was a luxury,  
Rocks literally stand in arranged rows like soldiers,  
At the mountains peak, the incredible views melted my heart with a singular touch,  
An artistic masterpiece,  
It was a sloth resting its head on the earth's surface,  
Seeming quite nervous,  
Resting,  
Living,  
Breathing,  
Laying,  
Sleeping,  
I rested my lazy head which balanced itself against the grass,  
My eyes concentrated on the sky as I closed my droopy eyes.



# I Live Near A Lake

*Evie Denver, Runner-up*

I live near a lake  
The water splashes in the breeze  
Splish splash  
It slowly rises each day  
I stare at the water that speaks  
I can't swim through the cold  
So I sit isolated and alone  
I try to enjoy the silence while the sun  
Gets hotter and hotter  
Soon my feet glide on the water  
I really wish I could see the ground  
Touch the soft grass that blows gently  
But the water shifts on top of the  
Broken plants

# The Weeping Willow

*Jasmine Wilson, Highly Commended*

Wind.

Nippy, autumn wind.

The willow tree, perched past my drive,

A tranquil place

That only I can find.

Roots sprouting from concrete,

Its bark rough to the touch,

And there slumbers that same solitary bench,

With its aged wood and metallic rust,

So ancient it could be gone with a single gust.

The weeping willow, a home to life,

Hidden deep inside its labyrinth of holes

Shelters a generation of mice.

With their pink, sniffy noses,

And spanning wide-brimmed ears,

That same mouse from my childhood scuttles past,

The one that soothes my fears.

The weeping willow,

Handcrafted by mother nature, like a piece of fine art,

Its kaleidoscope of ever changing colours,

Those that embed deep in my heart.

There's conflict and arguing,  
And the villain often wins,  
So I have to find comfort in the smallest little things.  
There's fighting and screaming,  
And mortgages way overdue to pay,  
But that's an adult thing,  
And I am still a kid today.

Therefore the weeping willow,  
Still standing tall and broad,  
It's always there for me,  
The only love I can afford.



# Hot and Hellish

*Robyn Pariya Levick, Highly Commended*

The future is lonely, filled with strife,  
I still can't believe this is life,  
We're surviving, not living, it's just not fair,  
Our hot-hellish world, it's too much to bear,  
We're ruined, we're alone,  
We don't have a home,  
Our planet will end,  
And we shall atone.  
We're on fire, it's dry,  
Smoke blankets the sky,  
This is the last generation.  
We cannot survive.

# Life In 100 Years' Time

*Godspower Osunde, Highly Commended*

The trees made out of plastic  
The moon made of stone  
Cars swiftly gliding in the air  
War turning into sky war  
Humans living in space  
The animals extincting  
As I look up an alien ship comes down  
Battle everywhere  
As I turned it was a disaster  
Seeing robotic animals everywhere  
Everything made out of metal

# The Climbing Tree

*Lilah Hawkins, Commended*

Birds chirp in the trees above  
Leaves rustle all around;  
The fresh air is amazing  
Bark high above the ground:  
The leaves I feel as I climb higher  
The floor far below my feet;  
The tree is like an elephant  
And giraffe that's out of reach;  
It's super tall but also wise  
Calm and stretching out;  
Using branches I'm climbing  
On the wood I'm balancing;  
For the leaves I'm reaching;  
The quietness is deafening  
The calm and peace all mine.



# Peak District

*Grace Watson, Commended*

Birds whistling in the sky  
The smell of sweet flowers glides through the air  
Small waves of grass mimic waves on the sea  
A fox sprints through the waves of grass  
like a crisp orange flash.  
The mysterious beast leaves no trace of its passing  
Watches over you scared, yet steady  
It is nervous yet it doesn't show  
You cannot ever know  
It is impossible to tell.  
This place is comforting  
All the secrets, memories kept here in the ground  
Hidden yet will stay forever  
This place is my hideaway  
My escape from reality  
My escape from the city  
My escape from the streets filled with people  
My escape from the fake man-made world we live in.

# My Home

*Lema Alikuzai, Commended*

I used to live  
on the most perfect ice.  
Its cold and smooth surface  
was far more than enough to suffice.

Now I gaze at passersby.  
Behind a glass wall is where I lie.  
No longer is there much crisp air;  
this heat and warmth  
leaves me in despair.

I try my best  
to keep my cool,  
yet I will never forget:  
the memories I cherish so dearly,  
like a rare jewel.

The way the icy water splashed against my fur.  
The prey I was able to so easily lure.  
If feeling homesick was a disease,  
times like this'd be my only cure.

Take me back to my home.  
The place where I truly belong.  
Here I feel alone,  
Even though I try to be strong.

My home; a place I will always miss.

My home; a place of true bliss.

My home; once a place of joy.

My home; the ruins of what humans have destroyed.

A place where I felt truly alive,

A place where I truly could thrive.

A place that'll never return to its original state,

A place that is always up for debate.

A place with an undecided fate.

It's never too late to change.

Save my home, a regular climate you'll gain.

Please, don't go down the wrong lane.

Please, save me from this pain.

My home isn't something to entertain.

Wake up please, this isn't a game.

To you, it's just a biome.

To me, the ice is perfect; and the ice is my home.



# YOUNG POETS' NETWORK COMPETITION

These poems were selected from entries to a challenge set by poet Caleb Parkin on Young Poets' Network, The Poetry Society's online network for writers aged 5-25.



# On Confronting the Natural Course of Things

*Zain Rishi, Winner, 25, Edinburgh*

## I. Then

In the end, we still had children, just in places  
we'd one day be buried / In our dreams, we saw dryads  
build a forest that was thriving / In our food were the worms  
we returned to the soil / In the rivers were the builders  
we befriended for our future / In the morning, we cut wood  
til our shoulders kept on shaking / In the day, we gave up  
and left it to the builders / In the night, we went gazing  
at the headlights in the cosmos / In the dark, we told  
stories, imagined the world before our coping.

## II. Now

Keep little things, like bottle caps, and decorate  
what's now darkness / Keep an eye on your little friends  
when the rivers run faster / Keep a map of the places  
your people are still kicking / Keep kicking / Keep calm  
in solar storms / Keep the little ones even calmer / Keep a diary  
then another, something must survive this / Keep a model  
of the world so your children don't lose wonder / Keep planting  
yourselves, and the forest while you're at it / Keep a hole  
below every door, let them in / Keep them with you.

### III. And Then

We'll do better / We'll do it tomorrow / We'll plug the dams  
when they start to buckle / We'll guard the wetlands  
that we starved before our crisis / We'll consider the lilies  
then forget they stopped growing / We will hold  
each other / We will learn to let go / We will bury you  
by the old oak, where we will sink to our knees, the sky  
stung pink, the trees curled like toes, because you carried us  
here, before we carried you too / We will tell our children  
stories / We will tell them gods are smaller than us  
and have teeth.

# Let the Night Be Dark

*Maggie Wang, Runner-up, 23, USA*

*- Robert Frost*

Not pitch, like ink from the overflowing pen or asphalt  
still wet on pliant ground—no, I mean  
let it be dark like the sea is dark, full of shiny, glittering, glowing  
things, sea walnuts, crystal jellies, parchment worms,  
firefly squid, eyelight fish, let it be dark  
like the marvel of an ocean floor, dark  
with Northern Lights and Perseids, Quadrantids and comets  
passing once in a lifetime, a mere blip in the brightness  
of the universe, let the night be dark like it would be  
on another planet tangoing around another sun, dark  
like the great gaping stomach of the moon or the gaps  
between constellations, which are merely filled with stars  
you cannot see, yes, let the night sparkle the way your eyes do  
right after you close them, with those little flashes,  
which, by the way, are called phosphenes, let us  
turn out the street lamps now, let the wires in the lightbulbs  
lay to rest our fear of dazzling night, radiant,  
luminous, lustrous, shimmering night.

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*Luke Worthy, Runner-up, 25, South Yorkshire*

I, mosquito in the corner      CCTV lens, flitty      anticipatory wings  
brittle, slime-glazed

minor Goddess in KFC toilets

air waxen with chip oil                      *light,*  
queen.  
*Swarm tonite?*

*Turn the light on babe!*      enter red-faced man, buffet on legs  
automatic strip LEDs flicker                  we mosquitos kiki-ing above  
descend      whizzing in glitchy trajectories  
                 shuttling our eggs to the sink  
                 I slip out  
my proboscis, gore his cheek                  funnel-straw blood that tastes hormonal  
I-I-I-I  
catherine wheel of bug    contort spindly legs  
         shape of an unsuccessful graph                  pygmy tightrope in crisis    too full  
to feast,    too full to want                  bumping into the mirror's lagoon,  
trying to enter the poem    the refracted self  
what am I                  without hunger                  without a pierceable world

# The Hare, My Nervous Tenant

*Sylvie Jane Lewis, Commended, 23, Dorset*

I

She made an unusual houseguest, shivering  
like a hangover as I headed to the door.

All legs, all wide eyes, all all-hearing ears.  
Any time I fancied a party or pub she'd start:

there will be hunters there in smug grins,  
in pint glasses. Stay with me, she'd say,

and fear the hunter. I held her in my lap,  
a shallow nest, her heart a steady omen.

Hares are not like rabbits, she told me.  
We do not burrow, you see. And I need

a place to hide.



## II

I never charged her rent, of course.  
In this job market a creature of her nerves

was doomed. Each day she raced around  
the garden borders: exhilarated, contained.

After my shifts, we'd binge *Countryfile* and  
*Love is Blind*, to better understand our

respective species. I stopped going out altogether,  
sure that a hunter would follow me home.

Hares are not like rabbits, she told me.  
Our flesh is darkly bloody; the gentry love  
to feast upon us.

### III

One night, as a witch moon shone  
she told me how she missed the fields.

The orange skies. The birds who scream for  
they are living and can do anything.

Let's go and hear the birds, I said. Naturally,  
she protested one hundred times. Trembled,

fearing the hunter with no name. I took her  
in my arms. Hares are not like rabbits,

I told her. We are not born naked.  
We went out into the world covered

by the coats we were born with.

# five haikus for an urban utopia

*Liam “Lee” Balmeo, Commended, 15, USA*

emerald pathways paint  
the piercing concrete canyons—  
finches soar above.

playground-turned-gardens  
house squirrels, falcons, saplings  
in its profound palms.

hummingbirds drink the  
runoff rain collected from  
a skyscraper’s lips.

deer graze by the streets  
where asphalt touches jade to  
balance grey and green.

passionflower vines  
climb the margins of buildings,  
reaching for the light.

# Semi-feral

*Jonah Corren, Commended, 25, Devon*

Ponies decorate the surface like little ornaments.  
They are given this word: *wild*,  
excising them from their cousins tucked  
into comfy stables and hand-fed sugar and oats.  
*Wild* contains uncivility and freedom  
in a way which makes them the same. Something truly  
*wild* must, in our imagining, be elusive, wary of us.  
This landscape has *wild* scrawled over its outcrops of rock  
and swathes of luminous gorse. When you enter,  
the *wild* envelops you so completely  
that you wonder, briefly, if you've stepped  
onto an alien planet. The sight of it  
on the horizon is, even the hundredth time,  
like the first glimpse of the sea after a life locked in land.  
But look closer. The roads meander through these hills  
like rivers, but they are not rivers. The stone crosses  
are as snug as the stone tors, but they were driven into place  
by pairs of weathered hands. And the ponies:  
they were bred for service. Even removed from their task  
by generations and set loose on the heathland  
like a search party, you can get close enough still  
to stroke their wiry backs, and feel the warmth  
from their muzzles. Pliability is like a barbed blade.  
Once it's worked in, to tease it away  
just means finishing the job.  
What is the difference between *wild* and abandoned?  
How do you tell which is which? Walk up to it  
with slow, deliberate paces. Hold out your empty palm.

# Vines wrap

*Emma Rowley, Commended, 23, Surrey*

around my house once  
a year. Dad  
will ask  
mum to  
get out  
the pruning  
shears. She  
always says  
she can't  
find them.  
Shed's a  
blooming mess!  
Apparently.  
So every  
year, Dad  
goes out  
to B&Q,  
and buys  
new ones.  
Vows to  
never again.  
Meanwhile,  
every year,  
mum rescues  
earthworms,  
one by one,  
puts them  
in pots.  
I used  
to get my  
hands dirty,  
putting food  
in the soil.  
Chocolate,  
Haribo,  
Starbursts.  
Now I  
just watch  
the earth  
close up  
around them.

# life is hiding in the shadows

*Leena Tageldin, Commended, 17, Berkshire*

life is hiding in the shadows  
and i haven't written a normal poem in so long,  
one that hasn't been ripped out of arteries and  
twisted into an ungodly shape. (i) in the afternoon,  
i will have lunch with a bowerbird, and he will trade  
his pile of bottle caps for a pound of my flesh. (ii)  
we will discuss repainting the garage door, and how  
my body is half words, half water. a toast to anatomy,  
and how much blue spans the surface of the earth.  
he is a microcosm of it. (iii) in the evening, i will  
take him to see my windowsill, stone strangled by  
deformed beams of light, and (iv) he will say that  
there is not enough colour in the smell of leather  
and ash. (v) i will ask him how long he thinks we  
have left until core swallows concrete, as he peels  
paint off the wall to build neptune on the face of  
my carpet. (vi) perhaps there is a god, and we are  
pressed beneath his thumb so that we cannot fly away.



# Note to a house fly

*Haven/Yoojoo Cha, Commended, 17, South Korea*

We all search for a window where there  
is a mirror. There is a mirror somewhere  
in those crochet eyes of yours that I imagine  
unraveling into a red tangle. In the way you  
cling to a reflection that, from the side, is  
a Rorschach wherein I see two lovers  
or conjoined twins, depending on the angle.  
In how you crawl up the doorknob while I  
stand under the showerhead like it's not  
really a doorknob, but a crystal ball.

Another example: I used to see a mammogram,  
a hooded eye, and the left side of my mother's  
face on the bathroom walls. This was when  
I believed you were an omen somehow, like  
grout between tiles or the hair I mistook  
for a crack. But of course, that too is a mirror,  
like how a doorknob is just a doorknob,  
and the fly on its surface is just a keyhole  
in the shape of a fly.

# My(cology) Breakup Poem

*Lucas Sheridan-Warburton, Commended, 24, Edinburgh*

Dear  
the mushroom in the shower,  
I am sorry that our time together ended so soon  
and so abruptly. When I think of it, whilst our closeness was  
unexpected, we both wanted the same things. The sudden intimacy of it,  
though – you between the cold tiles, me in the cubicle’s steam – it just wasn’t  
going to work out. I’m sorry, I should have handled our parting better, handled you better:  
I can see now that getting your cap detached from your stalk at 7am must have been a real punch to the  
gills. But please don’t be angry – I was topless and scared and now you know what that feels like. I admit  
I regret shrieking when I touched you and chucking you out the window. It really wasn’t personal and

I’m sad  
that’s your  
lasting memory  
of me. Maybe  
in another place  
or some other time  
our relationship could  
have really bloomed.  
You and I just have  
such different lives and  
I couldn’t see a way  
for us to be together.  
I want you to know  
I still think of you  
everyday, normally  
when I’m sudsing  
my armpits. I thought  
you would like that.  
Your mouldy brothers  
send their love. From  
the human in the shower x

# THE POETRY SOCIETY

in collaboration with



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