



PRESS RELEASE: for immediate release

“I thought these poems rose magnificently to a very, very difficult challenge” says writer Ian McEwan in congratulating the winners of SWITCH - a new international green poetry competition



*l to r: David Buckland, Serena Cooke, Lord de Mauley, Jake Reynolds, Mary Anne Clarke*

Cape Farewell, the international climate change art programme, has announced the winners of the first SWITCH green poetry competition. The winners performed their poems at an evening reception on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April at Rich Mix in east London. They received their awards from Lord de Mauley, Resource Management Minister at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and heard a video message of congratulations from writer Ian McEwan.

Ian McEwan, who travelled to the Arctic with Cape Farewell, said:

“It has been a pleasure and a great fascination for me to be reading these poems for the Cape Farewell challenge. It is particularly hard to make good art about climate change, and

it's even harder, the hardest of all, to make good literature out of climate change. Literature pins you down, words carry meanings and you've got to tie yourself to those meanings. . It reminded me of the difficulty I faced when writing *Solar*.

I thought these poems rose magnificently to a very, very difficult challenge. I was struck by the voices of animals migrating and feeling for home, the ravages of consumerism and its vulgarity, and particularly what we would give of ourselves to an alien civilisation – all driving the poets towards a consideration of the specific detail of a world under threat from growing climate change. It has been for me a collegiate process of seeing fellow writers address the very difficult task of taking a huge contested theme and turning it into poetry.”

The SWITCH green poetry challenge was launched by Cape Farewell earlier this year to inspire young people to explore climate change issues through poetry. Developed in partnership with the Poetry Society's Young Poets Network members aged 11-18 were invited to respond to a series of online challenges devised by poet Karen McCarthy Woolf. A series of poetry workshops in collaboration with Apples and Snakes and held at Raine's Foundation School in east London were hosted by performance poets. The winning poems will be published as part of an online anthology on the SWITCH website.

The winners were chosen by Karen McCarthy Woolf from entries from all over the world, including New York and Bangkok. The winning poems by Jamie Uy, 14, from Bangkok, Mary Anne Clark, 17, from south London, Serena Cooke, 16, from Surrey and Jake Reynolds, 17, from Lincoln were singled out for their vitality, urgency and maturity.

Judge Karen McCarthy Woolf said: “Writing about a subject as singularly important as climate change brings with it a unique set of challenges, not least the need to balance a sense of political urgency with a deeper creative sensibility. These young poets have achieved that elusive equilibrium with work that combines talent, technique and integrity to bring a fresh perspective to this pressing issue.” The runners up were: Sylvia Villa, 15, from Kent, Alex Greenberg, 14, from New York, Isobel Sheene, 14, from Surrey, Naomi Hamilton, 16, from Northern Ireland, Amelia Doran, 12, from Norfolk, Sophie Colfer, 18, Oxfordshire, and Jade Cuttle, 17, from North Yorkshire.

Speaking about the response to the competition David Buckland, Founder and Director of Cape Farewell said: “The Cape Farewell programme is about challenging, provoking and inspiring people to think differently about the natural systems we inhabit. It is very exciting to discover so many new, young voices through the SWITCH poetry programme. I congratulate them on being able to tackle the complex issues of the climate challenge with such maturity, skill and poignancy.”

The SWITCH poetry challenges, workshops and website were designed to help encourage young people think about their own creative response to climate change. In curating the site McCarthy Woolf made use of Cape Farewell's impressive archive of artist collaborations. Included on the site are contributions from the musician KT Tunstall, sculptor Anthony Gormley, writer Yann Martel and poet Lemn Sissay – all of whom have participated in one of Cape Farewell's expeditions to places affected by climate change, like the Arctic and Peruvian rainforest.

The SWITCH website will continue to be available to young people as an inspirational resource. Visit [www.capefarewell.com/switch](http://www.capefarewell.com/switch) to find out more.

A new climate change-themed teaching resource, written by Karen McCarthy Woolf for the Poetry Society's *Poetryclass* online educational platform, has been launched to help bring the project alive in the classroom.

The winning poems:

Jamie Uy – No Return Policy

*Welcome to Paradise Limited & Co*

*Est. dawn of time/discovery of Arctic*

*Our Great White Sale best bargains:*

*\$3 for a pair of black-as-coal mining hearts*

*(perfect for energy company galas)*

*\$5 for penguin & choking plastic bottles statue*

*on bloated seal skin by*

*neighborhood-water-bottle-dump*

*\$7 for dicey packs of Gamble the Future cards*

*(aces exempt)*

*\$9 for 5 gallons whitewash of conscience,*

*dirty hands, and oil spills*

*\$11 for Channel no. 2050*

*(greasy cellophane/grocery bag scent)*

*\$13 for fossil fuel magnets to tack on*

*refrigerators back home*

*\$15 for three death metal/hard rock*

*mixtapes by Pollution Apocalypse*

*\$17 for freeze-dried 'not my fault'*

*excuses, water-resistant.*

*Thank you for shopping at Paradise.*

Mary Anne Clark – The Arctic Tern's Prayer

*Tell the air to hold me in the rushing heart of it  
And keep its paths straight  
Away from home let there be a land that  
Flows with fish and flies  
And let it taste like it tasted at home  
Home take this salty scent of home from my head  
Cut away the memory of its last ultraviolet  
Flash beautiful beneath me  
Don't turn me to a twist of salt to fall to  
Sea's saltiness if I look back at my home  
Let me look back just once let me  
Look back*

Serena Cooke – Green Tears

*The winds whisper  
    words of warning for the  
        World  
The Father Tree looks up to the eye of the hurricane  
Circling above him  
Like vultures  
Or mankind  
  
Wires  
Now climb the thick trunk  
Transmitting profit and expenditure statistics to the Queen Ant  
Metallic impulses spit in the spiralling wires*

*Strangling him as they climb*

*Ever higher*

*Ever tighter*

*Fingers of bone and marrow clamped around his oesophagus*

*Starving*

*Please take the weight off me*

*Hear the spitter patter supper*

*Of whispers flying around your head*

*Clouds of doubt*

*The vines of society fingering the air as they make their descent*

*To the rich wealth of the soil and beyond*

*Scratch and tear and itch and bite*

*At the working ants, laughing*

*Laughing at your naivety*

*I belong here*

*Twigs break*

*Branches snap*

*Trunks fall*

*Laughter evaporates*

*I am the forest*

*And I cry*

Jake Reynolds – FAO

*Taken from the fridge, a child's drawing*

*of a family holding hands  
straw-haired, stick-armed, happy-faced  
this is what we looked like*

*An old man's collection of apple stickers  
or faded ID labels  
the Granny Smiths and Pink Ladies  
this is what we were called*

*A sack of rusty copper coins  
engraved with scripture  
and the holy heads of our goddesses  
this is what we treasured*

*The first tooth of a little girl  
wrapped in tissue paper  
enamel sharp as arrow-heads  
this is what we fought with*

*An empty perfume bottle  
fragrant, overbearing lilies  
sweeter than cordial  
this is what we drank*

*A blood-stained handkerchief,  
our plea for resurrection  
mistaken for a heartfelt token  
this is how we loved*

*To whom it may concern,  
the contents of this box  
taken from one family,  
should adequately express  
who we were as humans*

*Successors of our world,  
paint us as myths and legends  
spilling love on our battlefields*

*Create a new history for us,  
for the one we lived  
was one we'd like to forget.*

**-ENDS-**

For images and interviews please contact Sarah Harrison, for Cape Farewell on 07768 372892 or [sarah@sarahharrisonpr.com](mailto:sarah@sarahharrisonpr.com)



#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- Karen McCarthy Woolf's poetry has been exhibited on the London Underground, broadcast on BBC Radio and published in magazines and anthologies; most recently in Poetry Review, Poetry London and *Ten New Poets: Spread the Word* (Bloodaxe)

2012). She was inaugural writer in residence for the November Project in 2012, London's first tidal power station, venue and workshop situated on the River Thames

- SWITCH is part of Cape Farewell's new series of Urban Interventions which include the announcement of Tom Chivers as its first climate change poet  
<http://whatisadrift.tumblr.com/>
- Cape Farewell was created by artist and photographer [David Buckland](#) in 2001. It is an international not-for-profit programme based in the Science Museum's Dana Centre in London and with a [North American foundation](#) based at the MaRS centre in Toronto
- Cape Farewell works in partnership with scientific and cultural institutions to deliver an innovative programme of public engagement – challenging audiences to think differently about climate change and the natural systems we inhabit. The organisation has worked with over 140 world-renowned artists, including Rachel Whiteread, Jarvis Cocker, Ian McEwan, Yann Martel, Sophie Calle, Marcus Brigstocke and Antony Gormley which has resulted in the creation of a broad range of climate focused art. More information can be found by visiting [www.capefarewell.com](http://www.capefarewell.com) or follow Cape Farewell on Twitter @capefarewell
- The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a “more general recognition and appreciation of poetry”. Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has nearly 4,000 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, *Poetry Review*. With innovative education and commissioning programmes, and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages  
[www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk)
- The Young Poets Network offers free online workshops and advice for readers, writers and performers of poetry. It's aimed at young people who have an interest in poetry but may come to the YPN without previous experience or support. Contributing poets have included Jo Shapcott, Benjamin Zephaniah, Matthew Sweeney, Imtiaz Dharker, C.K. Williams, Helen Mort, Luke Kennard, Clare Pollard, Ross Sutherland, Jack Underwood and WN Herbert.  
[www.youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk)