

## Can Poems Promote a Paradigm Shift?

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Since the early 1970s the academic world has been aware that there are three key drivers to the environmental damage that mankind inflicts upon his environment:

- Technology
- Affluence
- Population

Despite this invaluable, elegant, and simple insight that was provided fifty years ago through the IPAT equation, in the intervening years the modern world has chosen to relentlessly pursue a Growth paradigm with regard to all these three key-drivers of climate and ecological collapse. We have permeated this damaging mantra, almost without exception, throughout an increasingly challenged world; squandering our ecological capital in the process. No self-respecting financial manager would behave so recklessly with his financial capital. No risk manager would dice with death in this fashion. Even as we pass ever more climate tipping points, we continue to press our foot down on these three key-drivers. We are already locked into 2 degrees of warming above pre-industrial levels. That in itself is excessively dangerous, and if our behavior patterns do not change massively, the end result is likely to escalate to 3-4 degrees, with much of the planet becoming uninhabitable.

In September 2020, a lone climate activist put together a little booklet of poems, with a plea to the UK parliament to lead the world by example and to aspire to Degrowth; it starts with an invocation:

*Perhaps these poems can inspire  
A culture change to light a fire  
In every heart and every mind  
Letting a new truth unwind*

*Once everybody feels the same  
Hope is shared as well as blame*

*The first poem:*

### **2020 VISION**

*2020. The year of vision  
The time to make the big decision  
To open our eyes and see the signs  
The downside of our grand designs*

*In hindsight, we've been in denial  
Walked blind into our greatest trial  
Our dreams have led us to the brink  
There's so little time to stop and think*

*What we want and what we need  
Are poles apart, like gift and greed  
What we think and what we do  
Are crucial now, the debt is due*

*Today we're rich, tomorrow poor  
Nature can't give us any more  
Better preserve what we have left  
Before we leave the world bereft*

### **How do we reconnect with reality?**

For a paradigm shift to happen we need a massive shift in thinking and perceptions. Einstein once described the type of trap that we are now in:

*"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them."*

Most of us fall into the trap of predicting a future that is an extrapolation of past experiences. As Climate and Ecological collapse escalates, we are now in a scenario in which we have no previous experience. Fairly reliable weather patterns are replaced by powerful extremes of drought or excessive rainfall and winds. This jeopardizes intensive agriculture, biodiversity, and many mitigation efforts such as planting forests.

The mainstream media continue to lull us into believing that some technical fix can be found, and treating the matter as though it is far less important than COVID. Only those who sign-up to free sources like 'Climate News Network', 'Inside Climate News', and 'Carbon Brief' will get a true sense of the ecological collapse that is now escalating so rapidly.

Technology is a key driver in environmental damage and needs to be used selectively. In some ways the revolution in technology has orchestrated the decline in our common sense with regard to our environment. Our concrete structures shield us from the weather, so we are less aware of the dramatic changes taking place; they make us feel invincible, and distance us from reality. Our numerous sources of entertainment constantly distract and divert us from the plight of wildlife. Clever animation films serve to warp our perception, by humanizing wild animals and further weakening our connection with nature. Each generation grows up in a world further removed from reality. Therefore it is not surprising that our collective expectations have become so unrealistic. Many of us spend much of our days in the virtual reality provided by electronic communication. This next poem tries to highlight this disconnect:

### **CONCRETE TOMB**

*Now we live in concrete boxes  
Safe and sound from birds and foxes  
The only nature children see  
Is what's presented on TV*

*Remember when you were a child?  
You spent your days outside, half-wild  
We did things in a different way  
In touch with nature every day*

*Now nature has to fight for space  
As concrete cities grow apace  
In every block the children hide  
It isn't safe to go outside*

*Unless we change, it will get worse  
Our box a tomb, our car a hearse  
Nature gone, and in its place  
The remnants of a once-proud race*

## The Sixth Mass Extinction

Experts agree that with the standard of living that most of the people in the developed world expect nowadays, the Earth, even as it was before we depleted it of its resources, could only sustain a fraction of the number of humans currently around. Our wanton pursuit of Growth shows no sign of abating. We continue to increase the CO2 levels, dangerous feedback loops are getting underway as ice melts and droughts exacerbate fires. We are continuing with a suicidal Growth paradigm that is reducing our chances of survival, this means that a complete crash and wipe-out is becoming increasingly likely.

There is copious evidence of our unrealistic thinking in demographic forecasts and many intellectual tracts which all assume a future where money will continue to have purchasing power, and the population continues to grow until it tails off through falling fertility rates. Although these perceptions are widespread, this does not make them into a realistic expectation of how climate and ecological collapse will play out. In fact, it is a shocking failure by our intellectuals that they can afford these illusions any credit. What will happen is that food and water supplies will fail because of increasingly unreliable weather patterns; when that happens money loses its purchasing power. In that scenario the only things that will continue to hold significant value are necessities like food, water, and fuel.

We are not exempt from the Sixth Mass Extinction, in fact, we are very much the next on the hit-list, possibly even this decade. We would be wise to assume sooner rather than later because we need to feel the fear that is commensurate with that danger in order to find the motivation for the paradigm shift in thinking that will be required to take any significant steps to alter our destiny. Mark Twain wisely pointed out that *"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."*

### SHARE MY STRENGTH

*Emotions bind us and empower  
Fear can motivate and inspire  
If you could only feel my shame  
You'd know that we are all to blame*

*Share with me the sense of guilt  
And you will share the strength I've built  
Death is not my greatest fear  
But losing all that we hold dear*

*For so many decades we've denied  
Our part in this great mortal tide  
The sixth extinction underway  
We cause dying every day*

*Find the courage to share my fear  
Guilt admitted is conscience clear  
Then perhaps we'll have a chance  
To start to learn a different dance*

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The author has been a climate activist for eighteen months. She is a retired software developer living in Oxfordshire in the UK. Her poems are intended to be thought-provoking and educational. All the poems and some prose are available on her website <https://poemsforparliament.uk>. The booklet of poems may soon be available on Amazon.

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The [MAHB Blog](#) is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to [joan@mahbonline.org](mailto:joan@mahbonline.org)