

Can Poems Promote a Paradigm Shift?

poemsforparliament.uk



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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*

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.

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