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During the heatwave that struck India this spring, birds were reported to fall out of the sky, unable to fly as they were severely dehydrated and mentally confused by the warm air. Birds falling from the sky is a Biblical metaphor, while the reports of the Indian heatwave reminds me of American science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *Ministry for the Future*, which opens with the story of scorching heat hitting India.

The climate crisis is no longer fiction. It's not waiting to happen in in some distant future – the crisis is here and now. The message from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear and cannot be misunderstood: humanity has less than three years to halt the rise of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere if our grandchildren are to have a livable future on this planet. Emissions must peak 2025 and then fall sharply if we are to keep global warming at a “safe” level of 1.5 degrees or at least well under 2 degrees. That means that exploitation and development of all new gas and oil fields must stop today, and no new coal fired power stations may be built.

But this will not happen.

British newspaper The Guardian reveals 195 “carbon bombs”, i.e. oil and gas projects planned by the fossil fuel industry, that if they go ahead will generate emissions that will drive global temperature way past all internationally agreed thresholds. I fear that many of these “carbob bombs” inevitably will be brought to explode. One recent example is Shell's new gas field “Jackdaw” in the North Sea, where exploitation was given green light by the British government.

Despite the Paris Agreement and other international pledges to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses, we are still on our way towards additional global warming of more than 2 degrees or even more than 3 degrees, which would push conditions past any point earlier experienced by human society and pose enormous risks to human life as we hitherto have known it. We who live today are in a unique position historically. Unlike the previous great civilization before us we *know* that our industrial civilization will fall. And it will probably happen not over centuries, but much more rapidly. Yet we do nothing. We continue to sit on our hands and let business run as usual. Our leaders meet at conferences, agree on lofty resolutions full of promises and then go home and give the green light to another fossil fuel project because “that's what the economy needs, and jobs must be secured, and blah, blah blah ...”

We pretend to listen to science. But the bleak message from the scientists go in through one ear and out via the other.

Our political leaders are to blame for their inaction, and the CEO's of the fossil industry are to blame for their greed and short-sightedness but responsibility also falls on you and me. Some of us hoped that the global Covid-pandemic would be a game-changer – but when societies opened up again we hurried to resume our old ways of living. Long queues at airports are a reminder of this. We seem to think that flying on holiday is our God given right. We are not yet ready to change our lifestyle, which is based on fossil consumption.

Is it at all possible to write fiction in the midst of a climate crisis that, if we continue like now, probably will lead to dire consequences for human society as we know it? Or is it plain barbarism, as Adorno remarked in 1949, referring to poetry writing after Auschwitz?

I have been asking myself that question for a long time now.

I've followed climate science and the debate about climate since the 1990's. The climate crisis is old news by now. We have known that carbon dioxide traps heat since the American scientist Eunice Newton Foote showed just that in 1856, and in 1896-97 the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius calculated that a doubling of carbon dioxide will rise the mean temperature by about 3 degrees. Svante Arrhenius is related to Greta Thunberg, by the way. Unlike Greta, he thought global warming would be a good thing.

In a famous speech in the United Nations then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher warned the world of climate warming. But realizing what cuts in global emissions would require – *socialism!!!* – Thatcher backed off. Instead of getting modest cuts in emissions the world got a radical growth – more than half the carbon dioxide that has been added to the atmosphere since the birth of Industrialism in the middle of the 18th century was emitted during the last 30 years. My generation had much of the political and economical influence of the world during this period. We have let down our grandchildren, probably deprived them and their children of a livable world.

How do you write a novel about my generation's betrayal of our own children?

Stories are not like trained circus animals that can be made to do the tricks its master orders. They appear when they want, when the tide is right, were they find their own openings. I don't like to sound like some one with a romantic notion of writing. I do surely not believe in inspiration as the min driver of an artist. Writing is first and foremost hard work, and a good writer has to be dedicated, stubborn, determined, and on a set of well developed muscles in

the part of the body we use to sit on. But more than 50 years of writing has taught me that my literary ideas evolve slowly, it takes time to discover them. Sometimes I think that it's not the writer who discovers his or her ideas; it's the ideas who discover their writer. We write not the stories we want to write, but the stories we have to write.

And discovering these stories takes time. That's one thing I discovered. Writers need patience.

Building stories and finding the right language to tell them takes time. The really good books tell their stories in magical ways, between the lines. Such a novel shows trust in its reader, letting her or him participate in the storytelling by leaving space between the lines for the reader's imagination to work in.

The novel, as a modern literary form, is interesting when you look at its origins. Yes, it has a long history, but the modern novel rose to prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries, becoming the dominating literary form in the Victorian era in the middle of the 19th century. The rise of fossil fueled industrial civilization happened at the same time. The novel is most certainly a product of the industrialized era, finding its readers foremost among the wives and daughters of the new class of industrialists, middle managers and other social strata that were a product of this entirely society, where coal fired factories and railroads and steamships were the main drivers of the economy. Today, it is obvious that mankind must leave the fossil fueled industrial economy behind and build a new society, based on entirely different economic thinking. Will the novel survive this transformation? Will people still be reading novels in a postindustrial society?

I don't know.

If we will be able to make the transition into a new, resilient society where fossil fuels are replaced with renewables as the driver of the economy, then I think people will still continue to read novels and consume art, music and other forms of culture. If, on the other hand, we do not do anything and let the climate crisis grow, then an ecological collapse and a social collapse will be unavoidable. If this happens our grandchildren and their children may not have the time and resources to devote themselves to literature; they will be busy just surviving in a hot world.

I think the world is at a threshold right now. We have lived through a worldwide pandemic we never thought would hit us even if it was foretold by epidemiologists. I must, of course, mention the war now raging in Europe, another catastrophe foretold but not really believed.

And we have the climate crisis looming in the background, the most deadly threat to the world as we know it.

I fear there is too much to write about.

The world needs stories: the black and brutal ones, but also the stories that will give the reader hope, trust and meaning. The world needs poems, those that we can sing, and the others that make us cry.

Whatever will happen in the future, people will write. Perhaps not novels like today's, and maybe other kinds of poems that we can't imagine today, but text will be written, because human beings need stories, poetry, hope and consolation. And that is what literature gives them.