

On finding ideas

Fred D'Aguiar

If it is true that we see what we want and not what might be new and strange to our eyes, then only once a thing is seen by us on our terms do we take the leap of the gaze that makes it strange, that makes it look like a thing whose name we do not know. It hurts to think what it costs us to be blind and stay closed off to what we do not know, to think all our eyes are good for is to turn things into safe bits of life kept near at hand to serve us. If I lean in to be up close to something, that is down to my need to feel what that thing is made of and how it wants me to get to grips with it. If I mourn for the way we live, with no care for the rest of life on earth, that we do not stop to think what the young will have to live with once we are done with our smash-and-grab ways of life, then it is in order to make one last try to turn the craft back as it speeds to the brink.

The turn takes much work by all of us who care for life on earth – all life and all earth, not some of the life and parts of the globe. How do we turn a mind? From bleak to hope. From the greed that wants to bring all things to an end for short term gain to the keen gaze that sees all life as linked, not one life as prized and the next as of no use. The nerve to want to save the earth, and all the life on it and in it, has to come from a mind that is tied to a heart, a feel for a thought and no thought that is not felt as it is formed. A nerve that holds up both arms to greet what is strange. A mind that does

not put a price on a thing as the first thought, but wants to know what makes that thing tick and tries to forge links with it as a first way to meet with it on the same ground. This asks for the heart and mind to work as one, for the feel of a thought to be the same in kind and tone as the thought and not split from it.

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Fred D'Aguiar's fifteen books include, poetry, fiction, plays and a memoir. His latest books are, a memoir, *Year of Plagues* (2021) and a collection of poetry, *Letters to America* (2021). His most recent novel, *Children of Paradise* (2015) is based on events at Jonestown, Guyana.

Born in London in 1960 of Guyanese parents, he grew up in Guyana and returned to the UK for his secondary and tertiary education. He trained as a psychiatric nurse and attended the University of Kent. Currently, he is Professor of English at UCLA.

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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