

The sense of an ending

Fred D'Aguiar

We are not at the end of all things, just at our end, it seems. Earth and those left on it will have a life when we are gone. Germs will be left to roam free; no bleach to drive them back. Ants, too, free of our nerve sprays and last meals. The cockroach and some fish as well. We have killed and will continue to kill more of the rest of life on earth as we live out the last days of our lives, and most of those creatures have not even been named by us. What can be worse than to kill a life and not take the time to give it a name? I do not mean that the thing can be named and then killed. I mean that the mind that is in a mood to kill, and kills with ease, does not take time to get to know the life it takes. I also mean that despite the pains that we go to in our gaze at life on earth we still take the route of wiping out all life forms. That is cause for grief. The earth is scarred by what we have done to it. The pits deep in hills, the oil spills, the spent rods of nukes. For that I grieve as well. What I do not shed a tear for is the fact of our end. We came here to take care of the place that took care of us, and what did we do? We broke it. We smashed the gift that it gave to us, of a place to live in and be with and thrive for as long as we had life in us. That is a crime. In a court we would be put to death or locked up for life. Not left to sing as the ship of our life on earth sinks for good. Not with some of us geared to the craft of songs that say what we did wrong and why we did it with eyes wide. To stare at a life and take it, in the knowledge that it is the last of its kind. To

know that we have reached a point of no return in our path and still head at full speed down that road to our death. That takes a mind locked in a death wish that does not give a damn.

What is to be done with the fact that how I see and feel are tied to where I live and what I do? The life of the life-denying beast thrives off me. I say something that is meant to stop the beast in its tracks and the beast stops, takes the block of the thing that is in its path, and eats the good and the bad that the thing has wrapped up in it. The thing in the path of the beast had a job to do – to stop that beast. Once held, it starts to work on the beast who holds it, and, the hope is, stop that beast. But the beast just does its thing, which is it takes up and folds and eats and gains from what is sent to beat it – changing the thing from bad for it to a plus for it – and moves on.

Fred D’Aguiar

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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