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BOOK REVIEW

A pictorial essay of Tsavo today

THE END OF THE GAME: The Last Word From Paradise — by PETER H. BEARD
Collins, London 1978 — Price in Kenya Sh. 210.

By ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN

THE End of the Game is Peter Beard's fourth book and his most controversial — ironically not because of what he says but for not stating in his own words any significance of 164 photographs of dead elephants. Furthermore, the macabre aspect of the book, against which readers may rebel, overshadows its real value, the fact that it is technically Beard's finest production. The layout, the quality of the paper, the type faces used and the actual printing add up to the presentation of a superbly integrated book.

Once before Peter Beard wrote an end of the game, but that was back in 1965 and it was his very first book (he has described it to me as a "juvenile attempt"). Although he is mildly embarrassed by the original production, he has remained steadfastly obstinate about his feelings towards the changes in Africa which he began to witness some 20 years ago, changes which prompted him to write in the first place. His obstinacy has led to the new *End of the Game* which is much more than a revised edition of the first one. Completely rewritten, and given a new layout with countless different photographs, etchings and drawings, it emerges as a variant document on the same theme.

The book is divided into six chapters, first discussing European exploration of Mount Kenya and the building of the Uganda Railway (highlighted by excerpts from Patterson's own diary), then turning towards the author's own safaris in Kenya since the mid-1950s and his recollections of famous European explorers, hunters, conservationists and various prominent people who had been influential in the making of modern-day Kenya.

The final chapter, entitled "Nor Dread Nor Hope Attend", consists of 39 pages of photographs of elephant carcases taken in and around Tsavo National Park, which the well-known ecologist Harvey Croze described as "good powerful pictorial stuff but lousy ecology", because they perpetuate "the myth that Tsavo National Park has been rendered a desert through mismanagement".

The epilogue, only one page in length, was written by Dr. Richard Laws, the Director of the British Antartic Survey, who was formerly Director of the Tsavo Research Project. Among several provocative statements in the epilogue is the following, "the entire ecology of the elephant is now seen to be more similar to that of man than to any other animal".

Since I am not an ecologist myself but was asked to review this book, on my last trip to England I went to visit Dr. Richard Laws, who is considered by scientists to be one of the leading authorities on elephant behaviour. My main purpose was to ask him to clarify the above quoted statement, and he reiterated that he sees many likenesses between the ecology of primitive man and that of the elephant: both are able to live in many different types of habitat and extensively modify their habitat; their diets can vary widely; their life-spans are comparable and both have a long childhood; their social organisation is analogous (with family units, matriarchs, bachelor groups, home ranges and territorial imperatives); and, curiously, the two suffer from similar stress-induced diseases.

As for the major controversy over Tsavo, it dates back to the prediction Dr. Laws made in 1969, that Tsavo would experience a severe drought in the early 1970s which in turn would lead to further destruction of the woody vegetation which the elephant needs for certain nutrients. The disaster did occur, but the crucial statement in hindsight is what could have been done, if anything, to prevent the consequent elephant deaths. Dr. Laws believes that if he had been able to pursue his research he would probably have recommended some form of scientific cropping of elephant to lower their number in the park and to retain a suitable amount of woody vegetation.

According to Dr. Laws, in situations where compression has occurred, resulting in high elephant densities and habitat change, cropping as a management tool is necessary and sustained cropping after the initial cropping will almost certainly be necessary (assuming that poaching is under control).

Peter Beard's pictorial essay of Tsavo today does indeed suggest that Tsavo has suffered from the lack of a management policy. But, having included in *The End of the Game* a detailed history of the Tsavo area up to contemporary times, one wonders why he did not *write* a final chapter on it. Many readers will feel that in not doing so Beard has "copped out". If he wanted to challenge his readers "to reflect upon our defeat", he should have *said* something *himself*, rather than relying on the words of a scientist in an epilogue, and, as that, a scientist whose views, like those of Alastair Graham's, whatever their merit, have not been widely accepted in East Africa. But who knows? Perhaps Peter Beard will write a final chapter on Tsavo in the end.

Frankly, I do not think that Beard as a writer has any lasting literary value. Although *The End of the Game* is very readable, the author is not a contributor of style, and the chapters of his text could do with more linking together — the effect is disunited despite the theme of ruination, "the end of nature's processes, patterns, cycles, balances".

On the other hand, I believe there is brilliance in the layout and design of all of Peter Beard's books. An inveterate photographer, he has taken literally thousands of pictures from Lake Rudolf in the north to Tsavo in the south of Kenya. His fascination of death pervades much of his subject matter, but whether this repels or intrigues you, it must be accepted that there is meritorious artistry in the whole.

The use of photographs is unique: Beard will go to almost any length to personalise a photograph — sometimes he writes a message across one, adds a few intricate doodles, or asks some noted authority to add his own special touch. Often Beard rounds the corners of old pictures to make them appear to have come out of a late 19th-century scrapbook. Besides using his own photographs, he also reproduces samples of old photographs from his private collection.

Until 1977 when his Africana memorabilia was destroyed by fire, he had one of the finest collections of old books, engravings, maps, etchings and water-colours dealing with the African continent. It was a collector's dream with not just first editions of some of the rarest books but also including personal effects from many of the most famous characters across the pages of African history. Particularly in reproducing in his books the old letters from African explorers, the excerpts from diaries, the old photographs, Beard has given much of interest to the general reader.

Furthermore, whether he knows it or not, he has therein contributed original sources for future academics studying East Africa. Beard slips these tidbitsa into the margins, or the middle of pages — wherever they fit best, but he does not leave them at that; he balances them in such a way as to give a kind of rhythm which seems to flow as you thumb through his books, especially noticeable in this latest production.

Moreover, there is always a contemporary feeling to Beard's books, despite however much he may dwell on the past. He commissions original works from such artists as Richard Lindner and Andy Warhol (a Charles Addams cartoon heralds the list of Acknowledgements in *The End of the Game)* and obtains contributions from such celebrities as Jacqueline Onassis.

The end result is a very personalised presentation, easily recognisable as a Peter Beard creation. Assembling the divergent bits and pieces appeals to Beard himself, and the emergent concoction is primarily for his own amusement, and if his readers don't like it, the loss is theirs — not his. In no way does Beard play down to his audience.

The End of the Game epitomises this personalised conception of what a book should be, and in this respect is a unique contribution. Few authors can demand from their publishers the finest quality of paper, printing by Rapoport of New York City (one of the world's finest printers), a text fully integrated with photographs, etchings and drawings, but in such an achievement Beard can rest assured that if for no other reason, his mastery of the art of layout will warrant his books becoming collectors' items themselves, and, without doubt, *The End of the Game* is the most outstanding.