

The last days of creation

**The End of the Game:
The Last Word
from Paradise**
by Peter Hill Beard
(Taschen GmbH, €34.75)

Peter Costello

THIS book was first published in 1965 and quickly established itself as a classic work on Africa. Peter Beard was then a young New York photographer, enchanted with what he saw in Africa: not just the wilderness and its animals, but also the tribes of Africa, including that latest tribe of all, the white settlers of Kenya.

He admired the Danish writer Karen Blixen (who also wrote under the family name of Isak Dinesen), author of *Out of Africa* (1937). In 1961 Peter Beard settled in Kenya, on land adjoining the farm of Karen Blixen. Thus began a special relationship, not only with

Blixen, but with the wildlife and people of the continent. In this book Beard documents the history and vanishing future of African Wildlife.

Nostalgia

Baroness Blixen belonged to an earlier generation, whose passing Peter Beard records as well: "Cape to Cairo" Grogan, A J Hunter, Teddy Roosevelt and many others from the so called "pioneering days". But what he wrote was not mere nostalgia. For the 1960s it was a warning of what was happening in Africa, the interacting destruction of man and beast. For the future of both in Africa belongs to a respect for what older generations would have called nature, or more simply, creation.

The "end of the game" was not only the end of the

primeval sport enjoyed by the earlier hunters; it was the end of the game they hunted, the great beasts of savannah and jungle. The slaughter of the elephant herds for their ivory is especially moving here. But the greed that lay behind that – promoted largely by Chinese interests – proved damaging to more than the animals.

Flowers

Since the 1960s the empty, vain promises of post-colonialism and of globalisation have brought little comfort to the peoples of Africa, racked by disease, fear and famine; though hostesses in these islands can enjoy flowers flown in from Kenya, the

profits go not to the growers and pickers, but the men in between. Africa would be better off forgetting about the wider world and feeding

itself by respecting the land itself.

Peter Beard is a great artist, one of the 20th century's finest photographers. But there is nothing pretty about his work. It is often stark, brutal, terrible to look at. Yet there is also a finesse in catching the fleeting moment that reminds one of Cartier-Bresson, a humanity akin to that of Sébastien Salgado or Eugene Smith.

This edition has some additions, even more hard hitting, but remains much as it was originally. But as the first edition has long been an expensive collector's item, this fresh edition brings an important book before a new generation, one which may be more prepared to accept Beard's vision. In these awesome pages we are truly witnesses, on the continent where mankind was born, of the last days of creation, perhaps even the first last days of the world.

