

LAST STAND

Theodore's tendency to overreact to the slightest provocation or wrong word had become a serious problem even in a town notorious for brawling and bad language. It had also earned him a criminal record, which for a man possessed of a profound sense of reason and justice was deeply upsetting. However, as far as he was concerned he had been fully justified. A formerly diligent and hard working copy-editor, he considered the deformation of language a crime and was convinced that the shrinking of vocabulary and the saturation of speech with idiocies and acronyms was a sure sign of species' regression. It was when the Strategy Officer had announced in a seminar that the company's new values were "internationally sustainable quality forward planning and creatively innovative solutions," that Theodore could no longer contain himself. He leapt from his chair and tried to empty the waste-bin into the manager's mouth. The result - a six months suspended sentence and anger management classes. Two years had passed, and things hadn't got any better. He was bitter, unemployed, and the frequency of what can only be described as rabid fits had markedly increased.

He had been walking along a busy street assiduously avoiding eye-contact with market researchers, missionaries and charity workers. His 'leave me alone' stare was normally enough to repel people, but the hemp clad activist was smart, rounded on him, and in an enthusiastic and friendly manner tried to talk to Theodore about sustainability. Theodore couldn't help himself, and yet again, his reaction was out of all proportion to the imagined offence. All the well-meaning young man had asked about, was his attitude towards global warming and impending ecological disaster, but all Theodore heard was that one word, which was enough to set him off. The veins on his neck and temples had immediately begun to throb, his body convulsed and he frothed at the mouth.

What Theodore wished for more than anything in the world was for the connection between his brain and his mouth to be coherent and consistent. He possessed a vivid imagination and he pictured himself replying as if he was a toga clad orator in ancient Athens. With breath-taking turns of phrase, he argued that the concept of sustainability was meaningless. It was akin to an article of blind faith or a religious shibboleth, a verbal sticking

plaster whose function, was to camouflage the real reason for environmental degradation – the enduring conceit that nature was somehow external to our species being, and was there to be controlled, conquered and made profitable. In a rhetorical master class, he accused capital of being the enemy of all living things and passionately railed against the grotesque transformation of nature’s resources into commodities. What could be more perverse he claimed than selling trees, DNA, body parts, water and air as if they were disposable trinkets. With his arms spinning in impossible gestural arcs he pointed to graphs and statistics that proved the absurdity of believing that capitalism could ever be sustainable. It was an economic system, he maintained, that for three hundred years had been defined by wave upon wave of creative destruction, of endless cycles of boom, slump and crisis. It was a spectacular performance, and the audience unanimously rose to applaud his brilliantly incisive analysis.

Except that’s not what he said, and that’s not what happened. Instead to the consternation of the small crowd, that thankfully included two off-duty paramedics, all he managed to utter through a shower of drooling spittle was: “Fucking sustainability, I’ll give you fucking sustainability.” It had happened again, and in a moment of terrifying irony, after grunting the phrases “cognitive apocalypse” and “the abandonment of thought”, Theodore dropped to his knees and barked like a rabid dog. It was a premonition.

*

Theodore sat in his three by two metre cell and peered through the small aperture at a solitary tree that stood forlornly in an otherwise empty and charred landscape. At ten credits for ten minutes it was an expensive luxury but he had learnt how to bypass the slot machine. That he had been proved right about the end of civilisation gave him little comfort. Still, even if there was nobody to talk to, he had his nature window, and even if the tree was plastic, at least it was green.

