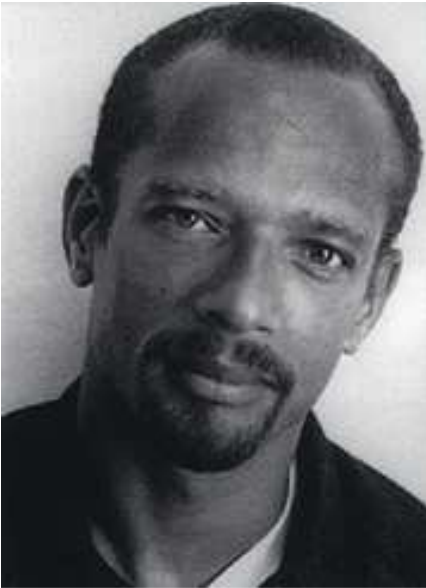


Fred D'Aguiar visits the English Department

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British-Guyanese author Fred D'Aguiar once wrote that “the future is just more of the past waiting to happen” (*The Longest Memory*, 1994). This quotation about the repetitive nature of history seems particularly befitting to describe the talk that he gave on 26 October 2009 in the context of Bénédicte Ledent's course on “Black British Literature”. Indeed, not only did the event, organised under the auspices of CEREP (Centre d'Enseignement et de Recherche en Etudes Postcoloniales) and ABB (Association Belgo-Britannique), mark D'Aguiar's third visit to the University of Liège, but, even more significantly, the writer chose to address questions pertaining to the circularity of time and to the imaginative reworking of the past.

Some of the most prominent themes of D'Aguiar's novels, poems and plays include Britain's involvement in the slave trade, and the impact of slavery on contemporary societies in Europe and the Americas. At first sight, the author's cyclical view of history may thus appear to be somewhat pessimistic. Such a conclusion could also have been drawn when he reminded the students during his lecture that, despite the election of Barack Obama, American society was by no means deracialised. However, far from being fatalistic, D'Aguiar argued that it is precisely circularity, and more specifically the possibility of “curving” the Western concept of linear time through literature, that allows writers such as himself to transmute history into an imaginative space, in order to retrieve memory and ultimately initiate a form of metaphorical healing in the present.

D'Aguiar concluded his talk by reading a piece from his latest collection of poems, *Continental Shelf* (2009). In the Q&A session that followed, he lucidly answered some questions about his work, and even participated in a little exercise in self-categorisation – an activity of which most authors are notoriously wary. Describing himself as “a black writer”, he pragmatically added that “if you don't theorise yourself, you will be theorised [by others]”. If only all writers were so helpful, we students and critics might be spared a few sleepless nights...

