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## **‘Poor worm, thou art infected!’: Seduction and colonisation in Further Education**

### **Abstract**

An island enveloped by artful storms, a product of detritus, pilgrims and marauders washed up on an inhospitable shore, Further Education stands, simultaneously occupied and alive yet relentlessly manufactured as barren and devoid of noble life. A land of artifice and artefact, a landscape of devils and saviours, further education has been colonised and recolonised, fashioned and refashioned, simulated and simulacremated. This chapter focuses on the very processes of seduction, the tyranny of novelty and the sorcery of leadership that has tamed a hostile land, that has employed language and love and passion and guile to seduce both savages and the outcasts into their own colonisation.

### **With rotten lungs**

How many beleaguered souls have found themselves tossed on industrial seas and, plucked from the raging waves of unfulfilled existence, been flotsam’d upon colleges with no drowning marks upon them? How many wide-chopp’d rascals cast from the hell of indentur’d servitude, racked with old cramps, washed up on the littered shores of further education? How many have found a refuge within teaching, within a potential paradise of learning, teaching, community? How many souls found promis’d salvation in the solemn temples of professional practice, the cloud capp’d tow’rs of changing lives, the solemn temples of crafted pedagogy? Yet how many didst find the visions of FE melted into air, into thin air, that the promises and potential dissolved, an insubstantial pageant fading into base corporatisation and colonised dreams of what was? How many now canst remember the time before they came to their cell? How distant in the dark backward abysm of time the nostalgia of the mythical silver book and trust and autonomy and collegiality? Fie, tis but an apparition. For these shores of devils and saviours are colonised lands, with nary a free soul. At once the magic of visioning, the conjuration of wondrous sights of what could be; at another, the arts of seduction and love; thrice, the lure of intoxication. For the island may breathe upon the jetsam’d most sweetly but it is with rotten lungs intended to make vassals of all.

### **Hell is empty**

Tomes to fill a multitude of caverns have been writ on the tempestuous force of managerialist aggression within FE. Battered, enleathered pages filled with tales of destruction, of brutalist principals raising storms to impoverish professionalism, to crush the collectivist ideals of freckled whelps, to grind unions [aside] not honor’d with a human shape and capable of all ill [thunder and lightning] into the dust. Force remains potent within further education, a necessary art to free Caliban from the Sycorax of the past, to free those disproportion’d in manners and shape from pedagogic bedevilment, the torment of past practice that didst make students howl, howls that did penetrate the breasts of an ever-angry inspectorate. Hell is empty and all the devils are within colleges. Little wonder, then, that principals will create direful spectacles to pound those found base and brutal.

Yet let us remember that tempests are not the first acts of colonisation. The first acts are not dreadful thunder-claps or Jove’s lightning; nor are the first acts cramps, side-stitches or pinches as thick as honeycomb; nay, [enter cherubic spirits bringing in a banquet] the first act is love. When Prospero first arrived did he not strok’st and make much of Caliban? Did he not proffer water with berries and teach him how to name the sun and the moon, did he not give him tongue where before was but monstrous barking? Did he not, after all, acknowledge this thing of darkness his? And Caliban, in return, didst love his new master and render his knowledge of the topography of the land, of fresh springs and barrenness. As with Prospero,

colonisers do not arrive on the island in a blaze of brimstone scattering a pox. Rather, they arrive, their bold head 'bove the contentious waves, with good arms making lusty strokes, with love. They do not rain down brimstone as an inaugural act. Instead, they adorn with garlands of hope. Not cankers but new visions. Not a plague but empowerment. Not autocracy but distributed leadership. Not power but consent. The promises of FE are varied and trip lightly from the tongue of colonisers who arrive with a most majestic vision to charm even the most foul conspiracy. And they do not always arrive in the guise of a sorcerer portending dire deeds. Sometimes, they come as a Fernando, so goodly that good things will strive to dwell't, a spectacle not dire but wondrous. With a consultative art, natives are seduced, a saviour to free them from the torment of the tyranny of past failures and distant 'membered strife.

### **Infecting the worm**

Each new secretary of state dropp'd from heaven in the garb of further education promises that he will be the one to bring real change and stay the dark forces of universities (that foul conspiracy that doth suck the very marrow from education coffers), and bring colleges into a new, gleaming land of plenty. And promises are attended by policy shifts to clarify FE, (poor wretch that are ignorant of what thou art) to free the sector from torment as would lay upon the damn'd. Colonisation, then, arrives in beatific shape, and – rather than rage – seduces, infecting the worm to not seek gratification of its needs but instead to inspire an ever increasing intensity of desire. For what is the Tempest but a play of desire? Miranda and Ferdinand desire each other; Caliban and Ariel desire freedom; Prospero desires reinstatement; Antonio desires absolute power. Desire then, is the ultimate coloniser of further education, sprite-like eluding detection, weaving between the wails of subjugation at the tempests of managerialist excess, of the savagery of cuts and the sores of new contracts. Desire drives employees towards not just riches and security but inclusion, the entering and remaining within a commodified isle. For Bauman, 'the test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them to recast themselves as commodities: that is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting demand and customers' (Bauman, 2007, p 6). Like a Caliban, teachers within FE must continually recreate themselves to become the mirr'r of that which is covete'd, to engage in the endless toil of attaining the perfection of employable, seduced by the promise of (and desire for) gratification.

But to conjure a Caliban, desire needs to be frustrated, it must needs remain elusive and unfulfill'd to seduce the devils into a perpetual promulgation towards the hope of quenching unspeakable organisational desire. Promises must necessarily be broken, visions – most auspicious stars – must be wrought from baseless fabric to seduce the natives into corporate colonisation, not through force but through desire. For what is professionalism but the desire for fulfilment? Tis a garb practitioners enrobe, as Prospero doth put on his magic garment for conjuration and Gonzalo doth marvel at his garments new dyed, as fresh as when first put on in Afric. And it is the very gown that frustrates desire, that createth all else an abhorrence to thine eye, that conjures the fearful art of a Diderot Effect, that foul source of corporate commodification.

### **A gown**

[Patience with your narrator] Denis Diderot, writing over a hundred years after Shakespeare's death, did scribe an essay entitled 'Regrets in Parting with My Old Dressing Gown'. Beginning in his elegant, immaculately appointed study, Diderot cannot help but spy ought but grimness, so distant it now stands from the jumbled, threadbare – yet happy – room it

once was. This direful transmogrification, Diderot ruefully recalls, was conjured by the gift of a dressing gown, an imperious garment that caused him immediately to discard his previous gown, a 'ragged, humble, comfortable old wrapper'. Yet hark, now that his new garb shone in the dingy room, his desk didst of a sudden appear broke and dishevell'd and so a new one was purchased. With the new pair of gown and desk, the tapestries – previously cherished in their dustiness – now chided with threadbareness so were at once replaced in loathness. Similarly all the other old, worn items – the books, the chairs, the engravings – all antique and rott'n, all gone, cast out from his cell. For the dressing gown had dread power and 'forced everything to conform with its own elegant tone'. Where once was harmony and accord, now was discord and disharmony as the old rankl'd with the new. While the dusty, broken-down contents were scruffy – a good dullness – by being consistently so, there was, at least, a unity. The refurbishment rendered no comfort; where once was dishevelled completeness, 'all is now discordant. No more coordination, no more unity, no more beauty'. And thus didst he curse that dressing gown that engender'd the ravages of luxury. 'I was once the absolute master of my old robe. I have become the slave of the new one'. All lost! With the introduction – nay, the colonisation – of the imperious purple robe, that unity was destroyed by a tempest of novelty that created a dissatisfaction and perpetual replacement in an effort to once again achieve harmony.

Alas, poor Diderot, whose plight doth provide the perfect metaphor for the consumerist society (McCracken, 1990). As consumers we seek a Diderot Unity, [star lights appear] the perfect 'product constellation' of complementary goods. The Diderot Effect (wretch'd garment) describes the tempest of introducing a new, disruptive item, that shatters the constellation, rendering all else unsatisfactory. This is the frustration of desire that pulls us ever more certainly towards a consumptive spiral of purchasing more and more goods to a futile attempt to achieve harmony. But enough; whither FE?

### **Prospero's embrace**

Are not the teachers o' th' isle desirous of professional constellation? That complement of theory, practice, experience, innovation, that wouldst ensure security, meaning and fulfilment. And is that constellation (a constellation right apt) not knowable? Is the pathway not seen (if thorny)? Yet, the *fulfilment* of that desire would similarly *end* the desire and potentially plunge colleges into the depths of mediocrity, a hell of its own making. Instead, the constellation is disrupted with new, brave utensils. A new vision. A new policy. A new measure. A new Ofsted framework. A new teaching and learning strategy. A new technology (damn'd engine). Each shift, each interloper, each Prospero, each Fernando, each Antonio shatters the whole, destroys the unity, an infinite loss. Each is a new magic gown, adorned, casting vile shade on that which was once there. All is new! And the prior practices and skills and experiences – artisanally crafted – are rendered antique, threadbare. The new vision [trumpets sound, enter spirits, dancing] engrimes the one that teachers crafted to obsolescence. The new measure of outcomes robs the meaning from meaningfulness.

And so, rather than the force of autocratic tempests enveloping teachers, they are, instead, seduced into the Sisyphean task of permacreation, of continual commodification and re-commodification, to chase the base spectacle of 'employable', of 'secure', of 'professional'. Desires are frustrated by the new, the old rendered worthless and cast out, things we do not love to look on. Where once was the torment of Sycorax, now is the emancipatory embrace of Prospero. Where once was the tortoise Caliban, now is the beauty of Fernando, a thing divine. Practice is simulacrated. Without the raising of a sword, the disruption of the further education constellation seduces with love, honey'd words to gild the lily, to make

frustrated desires sweeter to the tongue. The endless travail, to continually strive for perfection in the reflection of the new – often replaced itself – seduces the haunted souls to commodify and re-commodify, to continually toil in servility to that which is proffered but never offered.

All is turmoil, all is force, all is autocracy go the howls. A plague upon the howling! So much attention is paid to the tempest of FE that too little is saved for seduction, the chief means of corporate colonisation with colleges. This is not Prospero visiting whelps upon Caliban to achieve obedience; this is the cherubim words and strokes that made Caliban dissatisfied with what he knew, that fired his desire to become worthy by showing his new master the qualities o' th' isle that he might remain favoured and secure. Not overwhelm'd was Caliban, not beaten, not pox'd; instead seduced, co-opted into his own colonisation, first by the love of Prosper then made tame by the unearthly liquor poured down his throat by Stephano. In the colonisation of FE, seduction is far more potent than force.

### **Epilogue**

Yet what of Caliban once the invaders have left? What does the colonised do without the perpetual frustration of desire? Does the removal of constellation-smiting leave Caliban dancing up to th' chin in the foul lake of professional autonomy that o'stinks his feet? Does he thrash in the foul lake of mediocrity? Perhaps. Or perhaps a new desire emerges. Perhaps the misshapen knave is left to imagine his own visions of an isle made in his own image, one that emerges from the riches under his feet, an isle free from flotsam and jetsam and apparitions that melt into air. Perhaps once the Prosperos and Fernandos and Stephanos and Antonios are guided by some heavenly power out of this fearful country, then, perchance, might Caliban craft a new practice, rooted, substantial, emergent, and meaningful and make this place Paradise. Ah, perhaps.

Exit

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