CHAPTER 2

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

LOOKING BACK AT THIS ARTICLE

This chapter offers the second analyses exploring the work of Camus in the learning context. When this was published as an article (Curzon-Hobson, 2003) it was the first time that this type of analysis had been completed for Exile. My premise was that Exile and the Kingdom could and should be read as an attempt by Camus to explicate in full his conceptualisation (and the practices) of the empowering and transforming relationship. These stories reveal the very fleeting and precarious nature of moments of insight and empowerment. I argued that the way these experiences and their contexts were described would be useful for people interested in education. The environments described by Camus are not educational in a formal sense but aspects of them seem very similar to those experienced by teachers – contexts of power, hope, care and fear. They involve individuals confronting one another’s differences in terms of language, religion and culture, and they dealt with tension and disharmony over privileged knowledge, perceived authority, relations of power, and conflicting perceptions of ignorance, pride and egotism. In showing us the challenges and conflicts inherent in these sorts of contexts – contexts that teachers readily find themselves within – I suggested these stories by Camus could provide teachers with an original, specifically existential insight into the nature of educational moments in which trust and transformation was both won and lost.

In 2008 Peter Roberts published an article which explored in much greater detail the character of Daru, compared to what is here. The later timing of course meant this article was not considered in the original text below. Roberts’s article on The Guest focused on the ‘ethical dilemmas’ faced by Daru (Roberts, 2008b).

THE PRECIPICE BETWEEN EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

The title, Exile and the Kingdom, signals the dichotomy Camus uses to scrutinise the divergence between solidarity and existential isolation. Camus, following in the footsteps of Martin Buber (1947, p. 98), affirmed
the position that one’s own freedom can only ever be won alongside the
promotion of another’s. Caring community is needed so that each individual
can bring forth the potentiality of the other (Buber, 1966, p. 25).

The ability to transform through new perceptions and understanding
requires others to question, create and juxtapose the actions and ideals of the
individual. Where one pole of this relation is staid or objectifying then the
relation cannot grow because each cannot aid the other to perceive and test
out empowering possibilities. Camus perceived this relation in the following
way:

Moderation, on the one hand, is nothing but pure tension. It smiles,
no doubt, and our Convulsionists, dedicated to elaborate apocalypses,
despise it. But its smile shines brightly at the climax of an interminable
effort…Moderation is not the opposite of rebellion. Rebellion in itself is
moderation, and it demands, defends, and re-creates throughout history
and its eternal disturbances. (Camus, 1956, p. 301)

Thus the title Exile and the Kingdom confronts the reader; it suggests
that one’s own potentiality is dependent upon others. It is the nature of the
relation that one forges with others, and indeed oneself and the world, which
determines whether one will be exiled by and from others, or enjoy the
kingdom of humankind. The choice of the word exile is therefore important
because it denotes a separation from one’s homeland and the certainty of
never returning to how things once were. It is a separation from others
through a punishment handed down by a community for the benefit of this
bond. Thus exile is a thoroughly relational term. It is about separation,
disjuncture and alienation. It connotes feelings of betrayal or allegiance to
the limits that have been set, and it is an enduring sentence – one that aims to
haunt the loneliness of its subject.

The kingdom on the other hand is St Francis-like; something that has been
promised to all and belongs to all. In Christian terms it is a reward for an
arduous life of love, forgiveness and sympathy. It is relational; the kingdom
could never be realised without individuals constructing a community and
this community also being connected through God. Kingdom in this and the
political sense is a place of belonging and community founded on the values
of care, love and respect.

It denotes a place of belonging, citizenship and community of values,
language and customs. In both senses of kingdom there exists a desire to
rebel from that which objectifies the individual and his or her relations in
the world. Instead, through solidarity and the attributes of trust and care,