

Stages and Stances

—a tale with many parts



Part One: Davinder's Part

In the 1960s Davinder was content to conform to her world.

She had no rightful place in the sun, all rightful spaces were habited and managed by her father and brothers, by the great western energy which made her trains run on time, by the half-angel, half-parent who took up her burdens, by Eurolove Incorporated which cared and dared for her, drafted and declaimed for her.

She thanked God for her benefactors and that he and they forgave her for being stupid, clumsy, unorganised, that there was no health in her. She trusted fate and fantasy, the cool unending rhythms of the stars through the heavens, her dreams of perfection beyond the sky.

God's trains ran on time and she knew her station, knew where to get off.

Content to conform was Davinder in the 1960s.

In the 1970s Davinder reckoned to reform her world.

There were respects in which her master's world could be improved, respects in which she and her friends could have a place in the master's sun. She appealed to the better nature of God the Father, her petitions were heeded, she was full of thanks.

She wore this badge, Davinder is Beautiful. Researched her roots, husbanded her heritage, laid out her language, cultivated collections from her past. Was welcomed and appreciated by her elders and betters, pastors and masters, was full of thanks.

Lo, it was good.

Reckoning to reform was Davinder in the 1970s.

In the 1980s Davinder was despairing and defiant to deform her world. The world was rotten through and through, had been tamed and named by monsters. Was run and over-run by evil. Foul and vicious, twisting and torturing, destroying everything beautiful, it had to be turned upside down.

No new initiatives of any interest to Davinder could be expected of God or gods, from masters of any kind. No speech of theirs could save.

Their patterns, plays and alliterations were poison, the only profit on their language was cursing. Let the world burn, for where else but from combustion and the molten do new worlds take wing?

Exodus: and a final plague on the old order. Despairing and defiant was Davinder in the 1980s.

In the 1990s Davinder turned and toiled to transform her world.

She sighted a new heaven and a new earth without, and a new dreaming and a new reasoning within, and she knew these would only come together at all, in solid but sinuous spirals and circles. She spoke and moved not in anger or in envy but in love, which moves the sun and other stars. Listened to her comrades, did not lecture them. Organised craftily and artfully. Quarried and carved new ways, new words.

She found and forged allies everywhere. Loved even, and especially, the exhausted and broken in her own ranks and files. Relaxed frequently, relented never.

Word and world are hers. Turning and toiling to transform is Davinder in the 1990s.

Part Two: David's Part

In the 1960s David was content to conform to his world.

He had a clear-carved, clean-eyed space in the sun, and the fixed grin of the sun never faded. All roads, codes, goods and tides ran his way, he had the whole world in his velvet-gloved hands, white was light and right, male could neither fail nor stale, west was best.

The world was his privilege and his pride, a reward for his good works, he had talent to manage. People not born to share the sun with David did not merit, with their quaint and savage and sometimes wicked ways, to come close to him. They were distant beneath him, half-devils, half-children, all of them.

God had elected him. Content to conform was David in the 1960s.

In the 1970s David reckoned to reform his world.

He now knew that David/black, David/female, David/worker, David/third world were not in all respects accurate distinctions and, more to the point, not in all respects working in David's best interests. Certain women etc were quite

decent chaps really. He reckoned to groom some of them, and to admit them then to a place in his sun. He counted on their thanking him, rewarding and repaying him.

And he favoured now the foreign – entered ethnic shops and markets, swooned to sitars, dabbled in diversity, consumed contrast and colour, patronised pluralism.

Lo it was good. Reckoning to reform was David in the 1970s.

In the 1980s, David was despairing and defiant to deform his world.

The world was bad, foul, pestilential, there was no health in it. He and his forefathers and brothers had battered and benefited, plundered and profited, were even now, with every step and breath they took, grabbing, grasping, gaining.

The world had to be torn apart, he had to let it burn, for where else but from combustion and the molten do new worlds take wing? His vocation was to be cynic, spy and saboteur, muddler, muckraker and mole.

All must descend into hell. Despairing and defiant to deform was David in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, David turned and toiled to transform his world.

He reached for a new heaven and earth without, and a new heart and mind within. The programme was absolutely thorough change of everything, everywhere. Woman/man, black/white, worker/owner, body/brain, dreaming/reasoning, hearing/speaking, learning/teaching, nature/humankind, all these imbalances were to be dismantled, all these insidious circles and spirals were to be unchained.

He was to let go, let be, give away. Not in spite or in guilt but in love, which moves the sun and other stars. To leave wells and other sources and resources intact, not poisoned. To speak and select with craft, not caprice. To empty himself, if he could manage it, with art.

Neither word nor world are his alone.

Turning and toiling to transform is David in the 1990s.



NOTES

Source: included in a lecture entitled 'Pedagogy of the Oppressor' at the University of London Institute of Education in 1983, and subsequently published in *Daring to be a Teacher*, Trentham Books 1990, pages 23-28.

Also in *Daring to be Teacher*, there was an explanation, in more prosaic and conventional terms, of the conceptual scheme outlined in the story entitled Stages and Stances. This was summarised as follows:

In different situations and milieux we are all of us both oppressor and oppressed — though some of us, of course, are most certainly more the one than the other.

In both main positions we have broadly similar choices of stances or orientations before us. These are between:

- accepting the status quo as unproblematic ('conforming')
- trying to improve it a little for the sake of certain individuals ('reforming')
- trying to smash or deny it ('deforming')
- trying to change it radically and, at the same time, to change ourselves ('transforming').

This conceptual scheme was broadly derived from the writings of Paulo Freire.

The fourfold time-scheme (60s, 70s, 80s, 90s) was a metaphor for referring to four successive stages or orientations, and was not intended to be historically or literally accurate.

Nor was the time-scheme intended to imply that there is typically a simple linear and irreversible progression from one stage to another.
