

Plotting a politics of care

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I promised myself that I would think about revising my 2011 book, *The Courageous State*, this week, but instead of considering a plan yesterday, I found myself thinking about the plot. The first is, of course, connected with the works of non-fiction, and the second with fiction. I am not, however, sure that the distinction is as clear as that.

I ended up thinking about plots for three reasons.

Firstly, I have been reading a lot of poetry of late, and have always enjoyed it. As a result, I revisited Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*, partly because I like her poems and partly because it is a short, highly structured yet readable guide to both writing and reading poetry. I stress that I have never written any successful poetry, and doubt I ever will, given that I do not have the time available to dedicate to the task. But, as a reader of poetry, the book remains worthwhile. In the context of my thinking, the connection emerged. As a genre, poetry also seeks, in many cases, because generalisation about poetry is hard, to create succinct plot narratives. Thinking about that led me back to *The Courageous State*.

Secondly, I wondered, what narrative would I need to weave through a revised *Courageous State* if I were to revisit the book or write a successor to it? That, in turn, made me think about what the narratives within so much of political economy might be, and how they could be shortened to the point where meaning was not lost, substance was recognised, and the foundations for claims could be clearly established. This is something I expect to come back to later this week. I have been working on these.

Thirdly, I returned to something I have talked about before on this blog, which is a scene from Willie Russell's film *Educating Rita*, where a relatively young Julie Walters plays the eponymous hairdresser who decides to attend her local university to study English, where she forms an intense relationship with her professor, played by Michael Caine. Both delivered extraordinary performances. Despite that, I cannot find a clip of the particular exchange I want from the film that plays properly on YouTube, but I did find this alternative instead, which is also well delivered and in the Liverpudlian accent used in the film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvy1PdP6IRY?si=JoNNSAv52T0Kw1jd>

You could write long essays interpreting that one scene, but I pull out two particular points. One is that Rita has reached an understanding that there must be a better song to sing, which is what every creator of a political economy narrative also desires, and that she has no alternative but to pursue it, which is necessarily the case if a political economy narrative is to succeed.

So, in that case, it is to narrative, and to plot, that I have turned.

And, unlike poetry, this is something I do know a little about. I wrote fiction for more than a decade, and sold it rather successfully, making five-figure sums in some years. I am not going to share my pseudonym or provide links, not that there is anything to hide; perhaps unsurprisingly, this was financial fiction. But I did learn the importance of plotting whilst pursuing that sub-career of mine, and when considering how a politics of care might be delivered, which is a question about which I am asked very often at present, I think that is an important issue to which I need to pay attention.

There will be more on this subject soon.