

# Ventriloquising the Voice: Writing in the University

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*In this paper I consider one aspect of how student writing is supported in the university. I focus on the use of the 'writing frame', questioning its status as a vehicle for facilitating student voice, and in the process questioning how that notion is itself understood. I illustrate this by using examples from the story of the 1944 Hollywood film *Gaslight* and show that apparent means of facilitating voice can actually contribute to a state of voicelessness. The paper considers what recovery of voice entails and the role of the 'voice coach' both in the film, and in the classroom. Drawing on the work of Stanley Cavell, his readings of *Gaslight* and of the American writers Thoreau and Emerson, I explore the themes of crisis and transformation in relation to the self and society. Thoreau's notion of the father tongue and his metaphor of the axe are considered in relation to the concept of voice and are shown to be suggestive of a mature relationship to language and of an Emersonian self-reliance that is denied by the mere technical skill and mastery learning of some current approaches to academic writing.*

Until we are capable of serious speech again—i.e., are re-born, are men '[speaking] in a waking moment, to men in their waking moment . . . '—our words do not carry our conviction, we cannot fully back them, because either we are careless of our convictions, or think we haven't any, or imagine they are inexpressible. They are merely unutterable (Cavell, 1981, p. 34).

## **STUDENT WRITING IN THE UNIVERSITY**

In recent years there has been an increase in the variety of methods used by universities to support students' writing at undergraduate and at Masters' levels.<sup>1</sup> This is exemplified by more formal study preparation courses at induction, study skills packs and websites, taught courses on academic writing, and the appointment of tutors whose primary role is to support students with the development of academic and study skills. One particular study skills aid has been the writing frame, now used widely to support students in the preparation of summatively assessed written work. The writing frame is typically designed as a means of offering structured support for students' writing. It often supplies detailed scaffolding for a written task, with regard not only to overall structure and organisation but also to content,

language, style and academic conventions. The increasingly widespread use of writing frames in schools reflects a desire to encourage reluctant or struggling writers, the appeal lying in their potential to develop confidence in relation to basic aspects of genre, with more structured writing and enhanced textual cohesion. In the university, however, the writing frame appears to serve a somewhat different and, so I shall argue, insidious purpose. Rather than being used as a developmental tool, as is the case in schools, it is often ineluctably linked to formal assessment. Assessment can then become a test of the extent to which students have complied with the requirements of the writing frame, in a somewhat simplistic ‘tick-box’ way—not of their ability to understand, argue and think critically in a discipline.

Three recent experiences, all relating to the writing frame, were the starting point for this paper: first, my teaching on an undergraduate course on academic writing; second, my marking of a set of student scripts where the teacher had provided a writing frame; and third, following a discussion of writing frames with colleagues, my watching the 1944 film *Gaslight*. My work develops the arguments of Paul Standish and Naoko Saito on the subject of voice in education, both of whom draw on Stanley Cavell’s development of Emersonian moral perfectionism and his reading of the 1937 Hollywood film, *Stella Dallas* (Saito, 2004; Standish, 2004). Saito’s paper, also rooted in an experience of teaching, addresses the lack of voice in students’ experience in the current Japanese education system. Standish rejects the current politics of voice in education, arguing instead for a finding of voice that resists the pressures of conformism and achieves a kind of self-reliance. My own reference here will be to another film discussed by Cavell, the 1944 George Cukor film *Gaslight*, with a view to exposing what I take to be a certain pathology in what passes for ‘academic writing’. On the face of it, any such comparison may well seem implausible, and I do not underestimate the problems in the analogy I seek to draw, but I propose not to address this matter directly until later in the paper. To begin with, let me set out more fully the educational problems that are my concern.

What then are writing frames like? The writing frame, as a minimum, guides students’ work, perhaps merely giving simple content headings as prompts. More detailed versions, however, direct the structuring of sentences and lexical choices: they provide model sentences, which students select from and fill out according to the demands of the topic in question (see Figures 1–3 below).<sup>2</sup>

Smith's paper			useful		included ...
Her conclusions	would have been	more	convincing	if he/she had	considered
The study	might have been	much more	interesting	if the author had	adopted ...
The findings		far more	persuasive		used .....
			original		

**Figure 1** Offering constructive suggestions.

However, Jones (2003) points out that .....

Many analysts now argue that the strategy of X has not been successful. Jones (2003), for example, argues that .....

Non-government agencies are also very critical of the new policies.

The X theory has been / vigorously / strongly challenged in recent years by a number of writers.

Smith's analysis has been criticised by a number of writers. Jones (1993), for example, points out that .....

Smith's meta-analysis has been subjected to considerable criticism.

The most important of these criticisms is that Smith failed to note that .....

Jones (2003) is probably the best known critic of the X theory. He argues that .....

The latter point has been devastatingly critiqued by Jones (2003).

Critics have also argued that not only do social surveys provide an inaccurate measure of X, but the.....

Critics question the ability of poststructuralist theory to provide .....

More recent arguments against X have been summarised by Smith and Jones (1982):

### **Figure 2 Introducing other people's criticisms.**

An extract from a still more prescriptive version of the writing frame is provided in Figure 3. This is intended to guide a first year, undergraduate writing task relating to a taught module on empirical research methods in education.

#### **Introduction to Research—year 1 Core Module**

This frame provides a structure for your consideration of the issues raised by planning to undertake a piece of small scale empirical research. Following the guidelines below will enable you to meet the module learning outcomes. You should note the headings and detail required against which you will be assessed:

#### **1 Introduction (200 words)**

- 1.1 *Identification of research question(s) or hypothesis*
- 1.2 *Introduce your questions. E.g. 'This small scale study proposes to answer the following question(s):.....'*
- 1.3 *Description of context for the research (national or regional policy/organisational) E.g. 'This research is of current importance in the field of ....because of.....'*

#### **2 Justification of approach to the research (400 words)**

- 2.1 *State your broad approach to the study: is it interpretive or positivist?*
- 2.2 *Situate your research within the field. Answer the following questions: (i) Is this an entirely new field of research? If not, what distinctive approach are your taking (methodologically; with your sample; with data analysis?); (ii) What existing research is there in your field—historical and current? E.g. 'Although research has been carried out in this area over the last ...years (give citations), the most current work is being undertaken by ....(give citations).'*
- 2.3 *Justification of why the research fits into one of the categories—or how it crosses the boundaries E.g. 'Although this research will be of a broadly qualitative nature as it will use ....as its main data collection method, the use of ..... demonstrates that quantitative data will also be considered because.....'*

#### **3 Description of and justification for proposed research method(s) (1000 words)**

- 3.1 *Justification for the choice of research method or methods*
- 3.2 *Describe each method in turn. Answer the following questions (i) What does the literature say are the advantages of your method(s) for the kind of question(s) you are posing? Give citations to texts from the indicative reading list; (ii) What other methods might you have chosen, and why did you reject them?*
- 3.3 *Analysis of any issues of triangulation. What kind of triangulation will you use (methodological triangulation? participant triangulation? triangulation in analysis?) Why?*

**In this section you should also cover:**

- internal validity of the method(s); reliability of the method(s)
- a discussion of population and justification for the size of the sample
- method (s) of sampling (random, purposive, stratified?) Discuss the effect of the sample and sampling method on the data

### **Figure 3 Writing frame for final assessment of BA in Education.**

The remainder of this frame details the requirements for the ‘Description of and justification for proposed research method(s) (1000 words)’, ‘Ethical issues (300 words)’, ‘Data analysis (400 words)’ and ‘Conclusion (200 words)’.

Such tools enable students to articulate ideas in a register that complies with what are taken to be the appropriate academic conventions. Whilst this suggests that the problem is merely one of degree, I argue, in ways that will become apparent, that the most detailed forms of the writing frame increasingly commonly used in the university represent a qualitative shift of a very significant kind. This shift can be explained by a brief reference to issues of form and content in writing. And here is the very root of the problem for the writing frame: that it determines the content of a student’s writing, not enabling the expression of *her* sense of what is important, her ideas, but rather of another’s. What needs to be noticed here is that it is not prescribed formal structure that is itself the problem. Precise formal structure, such as the poetic forms of the sonnet or the haiku, can be the very medium for an intensification and release of thought. What is most problematic about the writing frame, by contrast, is not so much that it establishes *structure*, but that it channels *content* in particular ways that limit the possibilities of thought that a university education should open up.

The creeping orthodoxy of the writing-frames approach in the university might be attributed to two key factors. First, recent years have witnessed a shift, particularly in the United Kingdom, from an elite to a mass higher education system, and in addition a shift to a broader curriculum and accreditation base of foundation degrees –vocationally oriented courses and programmes of professional training and development, roughly equivalent to Associate’s Degree in the United States. These new ‘non-traditional’ university entrants, from culturally, socially and linguistically diverse backgrounds, perhaps need more guidance and support in the development of their formal academic writing. The uneasiness felt by some students may not primarily be the result of lack of confidence or ability with written forms of expression, however, but rather, as Theresa Lillis’ empirical investigations appear to show, a symptom of their view that academic writing imposes on them an inner conflict, even a denial of the self (Lillis, 2003). Given the not insignificant pressures on universities of this new and expanded student population, it is not surprising that the somewhat simplistic response has been the adoption of tools such as writing frames. But what type of learning is engendered by their use? How far does this threaten more authentic academic development?<sup>3</sup> Attention needs to be given to the difference between the writing frame as a particular manifestation of support for student writing and other forms of induction into academic work that open, rather than restrict, the possibilities of thought. The kind of writing that I am arguing for here depends upon acquiring the skills and abilities that realise such possibilities. Second, and perhaps a more compelling point, the prevalence of writing frames within the university reflects the culture of performativity. Students’ work must meet specific assessment criteria understood

in terms of *learning outcomes*. In an education system increasingly driven by market forces, the need to provide a competitive edge in student support comes to seem all the more urgent. Students paying considerable sums of money in tuition fees will very likely be drawn to whatever quick-and-easy technique appears to promise success. Moreover, when the writing frame drives the assessment, the grading of work becomes all the more transparent, in a way that has its appeal for the student-customer.

Thus, writing according to the requirements of the frame can come to epitomise what writing *is*, what academic writing *means*. In equipping students with the power to write in this way, the frame can be understood as facilitating a kind of self-expression, especially amongst those from non-traditional backgrounds. But these modes of expression are channelled and restricted in ways that are of a piece with other contemporary forms of what is supposed to be student-centeredness: the reductiveness and bad faith of learning styles; the ready-made identities of personalisation; and the ostentatious exercise of superficial forms of choice. To give greater substance to this sense of cultural and educational malaise, let us now turn from the writing frame in university education to consider what is commonly understood by the idea of student voice, and then to relate this to some ways in which the question of voice has been pursued in philosophy.

## VOICE IN EDUCATION AND IN PHILOSOPHY

My concern here is not with the connotations of student participation in current educational discourse where voice is synonymous with the opinions of the customer, with feedback—for example, participation in classroom discussion and in quality assurance procedures. Nor is my concern primarily with the current discourses of voice in education that emphasise individual student self-expression, the voice of the hitherto silenced learner, as is evidenced in the proliferation of such writing tasks as completing a learning biography, developing and maintaining a personal development portfolio, and keeping a reflective learning diary. Self-expression, often euphemistically termed ‘reflective practice’, has become something of a mantra. But it can tend towards narcissism and a limited view of the individual as self-contained, as in some way attained, and therefore as capable of self-expression in an unproblematic fashion. My concern is rather with how a student achieves voice in her written work in a way that comprises more than mastering a certain set of skills that commonly pass for academic writing. None of this is to deny that there are distinctive practices of writing that are shared by members of academic traditions and that in these a number of rhetorical and linguistic structures can readily be identified. Nor is it to deny that students should be aware of how writing is typically pursued in the respective disciplines. It is, though, to challenge the notion that the writing frame gives voice to the student.<sup>4</sup>

The writing frame gives voice not to the student, but to its author's interpretation of the perceived rules of the discipline in relation to how and what knowledge is presented and therefore privileged. Lillis terms this the 'reproduction of official discourses' (2003, p. 193), a voice so uniform and ideologically inscribed, that it can be likened to a monologue. In referring to the monologic nature of certain practices in university, Lillis attempts to show that these practices are found particularly in much pedagogy of academic writing, because they recognise and aim to reproduce only certain powerful discourses, whilst denying voice to others. This often unthinking conformity with epistemological and textual conventions in academic writing—a conformity that is an inherent risk of the writing frame—leads to a form of academic voicelessness. In challenging what she terms 'monologic'—Emerson might say 'conformist'—practices in education, Lillis draws on Mikhail Bakhtin to argue strongly for a more dialogic approach to the pedagogy of academic writing, and for the bringing together of different discourses in order to create hybrid texts. There is a danger here, though, that Lillis' approach—with its emphasis on discussion and negotiation of assignment content, with her desire for student writing to be open to what she terms 'external interests and influences' (Lillis, 2003, p. 204) leading to hybrid texts as new ways to 'construct meaning'—might lead to what Standish refers to as 'a kind of tokenism of expression' (Standish, 2004, p. 104). Although she draws attention to the state of voicelessness felt by the students who participated in her empirical research, she concludes that approaches to academic writing should focus on 'design' (Lillis, 2003, p. 204). Yet these aspirations are somewhat vaguely expressed. They call for a reliance on approaches that themselves risk becoming yet further monologic, performative requirements of writing in the university.

Whilst Lillis' concerns are nearer to more commonly accepted notions of voice, my aim in what follows is to explore voice somewhat differently, as a notion that incorporates aspects of personal expressiveness and of writing style as forms of authenticity, but also in terms of the more complex matter of who the student is. How far is the student present in her words? How present in her relation to her community? And how is this evident in the responsibility she experiences to say what she means? It is voice understood in these terms that is at risk of being silenced in the university. In showing here how voice might be recovered, I draw on the understandings of the term that have been pursued in Stanley Cavell's philosophical writing. Voice as textually mediated pronouncement or enactment is highlighted by Timothy Gould in his exploration of the concept in what he calls the method of Cavell's philosophy. For Gould, voice is a necessary condition of human expression (neglected and repressed though this is by certain forms of philosophy): 'I learned to hear the question of the voice as epitomizing an entire region of questions about the means by which human beings express themselves and the depth of our need for such expression' (Gould, 1998, p. xv). Cavell's writing—its intricacies, its deliberate opacities, its allusions in all their breadth to literature and film, its ploys to slow the

reader down ... in sum, its style—is his philosophical project, the expression of his voice.

### VOICE AND THE MELODRAMA OF THE UNKNOWN WOMAN

What are the features of the genre of film that Cavell (1996) identifies as the ‘melodrama of the unknown woman’? In the films that Cavell groups under this heading,<sup>5</sup> the woman is characterised by her isolation and unknownness to the man, and the institution of marriage is transcended: ‘the woman seeks her unattained, but attainable self otherwise than in marriage’ (Cavell, 2004, p. 108). Her opinions repressed and refused, the woman’s unattained state derives from her ‘decreation’ by the man, from the negation of conversation.<sup>6</sup> She is denied access to conversation with her neighbours, and this negation of talk is the negation of the woman’s self and of her voice.

The repression of voice is particularly apparent in *Gaslight*. The film depicts the marriage between a young woman, Paula, who has been traumatised at an early age by the murder of her aunt, Alice Alquist, a famous opera singer, and Gregory Anton, her one time piano accompanist during her singing lessons in Italy. In one of the opening scenes of the film Paula declares to her tutor, Maestro Guardi, ‘I haven’t the voice, have I?’ This innocent comment, however, anticipates a more serious condition of voicelessness, as Gregory determines to persuade Paula—progressively and under the guise of love—of her own derangement. His purpose is to locate and lay claim to her dead aunt’s jewels. Yet the irony here is that at the start of the story Gregory is ostensibly the accomplice in the training of Paula’s voice, together with Guardi, the voice teacher. In his marriage to Paula, he wickedly perverts the role of the voice tutor.

Although Cavell talks of Paula’s decreation at her husband’s hands, there is a sense in which Gregory actually *creates* her, in which he defines her reality. He does this to her directly when, on entering Paula’s family home following their marriage, he proceeds to show her the way around her *own* house, as if she were somehow unfamiliar with it: ‘This is the dining room ... and the drawing room’. But he also creates a negative image of Paula in highlighting her supposed forgetfulness, to herself (‘Don’t you even remember that?’) and to others, as, for example, when he explains to Nancy, the newly appointed maid: ‘Your mistress is inclined to be rather highly strung’. *Gaslight* presents Gregory as the authoritative figure, the source in effect of a relentless monologue. He issues orders, with thinly veiled reproach (‘Come, Paula, don’t stand there in the doorway’), and asks questions that invite only one answer (‘Where would you like us to settle? ... How would you feel about London? ... You shall have your house in a square’). Paula’s voice is repressed and even denied.

The power of the discourse that Gregory imposes is apparent in a scene where Paula reaches to put coals on the fire and wakes her (supposedly) sleeping husband. Paula is keen to tend to the fire herself, but Gregory, knowing that his wife is somewhat intimidated by Nancy, her maid, voices

the rule of the house, that the fire is maintained by the servants. His insistent ‘Why don’t you tell Nancy what you asked for?’ forces words on Paula, making her the dummy to his ventriloquism. The denial of Paula’s voice is also a distortion of her ordinary community with others, isolated as she finds herself in a house with only a deaf cook and a devious maid. In another scene Nancy announces that a neighbour, Miss Thwaites, wishes to visit, but Gregory does not wish to be bored with the small talk of neighbours. To Paula’s tentative, somewhat desperate ‘I would have liked to have seen her’, he responds: ‘If you really had wanted to see her, all you had to do was say’; yet saying this is the very thing he has prevented her from doing.

But how can this film cast light on writing in the university? Paula is the victim, it turns out, of the very person who murdered her aunt, and her marriage and descent towards madness have been nothing but ploys in Gregory’s attempt to find the missing jewels. How can such melodrama possibly cast light on writing in the university?

Yet whatever constraints there may be on the analogy, there are points of connection. Paula and the student embarking on academic writing both experience a kind of loss that affects relations with their immediate community. Paula’s increasing sense of her loss of sanity alienates her from other members of her household and from the wider community represented by the neighbour. In a not dissimilar way, if Lillis is right, the student can experience a dislocation from familiar ways of speaking and an alienation from the discourses within an established academic community. In each case, this sense of loss is the result of a kind of imposition: for Paula, the obligation to follow Gregory’s script and to behave in the way he authorises, and for the student the obligation to comply with the requirements of the writing frame. Let me draw attention to one of the opening scenes from *Gaslight* in order to illustrate the point that the means by which the voice is developed may actually lead to its repression. Paula’s singing lessons with Guardi in fact lead to her realisation of her own loss of voice. So too the writing frame has the potential—especially in the university—to repress thinking and to result in academic voicelessness. The very idea of a writing frame reinforces the sense of authorised, monological bodies of knowledge, routinising in the process their modes of expression and presentation. The performative culture in higher education that embraces the use of such aids leads to formulaic learning that amounts to a faking of education itself.

## **VOICE AND THE RECREATION OF THE POLITICAL**

### *Voicelessness and Conformity*

With the use of a rigid frame, writing becomes a composite. But the far richer sense of composition, which involves a crafting of language, is lost. When Heidegger’s celebrated cabinet-maker creates a bespoke piece of furniture, the end product, one can imagine, will be unique: the hand tooled joints, the marks of the plane, the depth of polish . . . all will



be evident to the discerning eye. This contrasts dramatically with the flat-packed, ready-to-assemble item that comes with clear instructions for the order of assembly. One might conjecture further that it is precisely in developing a response to the different woods and to 'the shapes slumbering within them' that true learning lies.<sup>7</sup> Surely the crafting of language is no different. To recognise this is not to make a plea for endless creativity; rather it is to move away from the prevalent idea of writing, with its rigid, clearly identified criteria of good practice, in order to consider again the essay, with its roots in *essay*, to attempt or endeavour.

It is important to see how this spans the individual and the political—or, say, the existential and the institutional. When Emerson rejects conformity in favour of self-reliance, this is no mere individualism; conformity is a threat to democratic society, but self-reliant individuals benefit society, its religion, arts and culture: 'It's easy to see that a greater self-reliance—a new respect for the divinity in man—must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their associations; in their property; in their speculative views' (Emerson, 1982, p. 185). Similarly, Thoreau's aim in the writing of *Walden* is no less than America's recovery from the conformity of its 'quiet desperation' (Thoreau, 1854/1999, p. 9). Non-conformity, characterised by aversive thinking, reminds us of Thoreau's account of a kind of thinking where we are 'beside ourselves in a sane sense' (Thoreau 1854/1999, p. 123). 'Writing', Cavell claims, 'is the aversion of conformity, is a continual turning away from society, hence a continual turning toward it, as if for reference ... One might call this process of writing deconformity' (Cavell, 1996, p. 66).

### *Recovery of Voice*

The means of recovery—of response—is the acquisition of a new way of speaking, an initiation again into language as it were, where this has been blocked, frustrated or distorted by the imposition of a script. Recovery of voice for Paula is initiated at a moment of crisis in her life that occurs late in the film. Here, Gregory's murder of Paula's aunt, his deliberate attempts to convince his wife that she is descending into madness, together with his own desperate searching for Alice Alquist's jewels, have all been exposed with the help of Cameron, the detective. Paula's crisis is one of her coming to terms with these revelations. The significance of the moment of crisis is subsequently reinforced by Cameron when he states: 'Nothing less than your whole life depends on what you do now'. But Paula needs to be alerted to this crisis for she is, as it were, in a state of dreaming, of sleepwalking, a 'haunting of her existence' (Cavell, 2004, p. 113).

Cameron facilitates the recovery, letting her find her own way with words. Paula's recovery of voice is through conversation, a *turning* of her thoughts such that what she voices is her conviction that the noises in the attic that have nearly driven her to derangement are those of her husband, madly searching for Alice Alquist's jewels:

- 'Mrs. Anton, you know, don't you. You know who's up there?' - — 'No, no.'
- 'Are you sure you don't?'
- 'No, no. How could he be?'

### THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY INSTITUTIONS

Yes, it will be objected, there persists a major barrier to the drawing of any plausible analogy here in that the film is the story of a madman, and Paula's loss of speech is the result of a madman's actions. This is a compelling story, but it is the story of a freak. How could such a film then possibly have a bearing on the wider educational problem we are considering?

Plainly this will not do. One reason for the film's extraordinary resonance, as Cavell's reading and his identification of the genre amply demonstrate, is that the condition depicted by these extraordinary events is one that is common to our experience, evident most fully in the common experience of women. On these lines then the extraordinary story reveals an existential pathology. (What would it be like to deny this?) Cavell has referred to this as a kind of vampirism: we see Paula's life being drained from her by the oppressive presence of the man, a draining of energy that is symbolised in the film by the fluctuations in gaslight in the house, the lowering of light in the room that Paula is in as Gregory obsessively hunts for the jewels in the attic. This drawing of light is a draining of her spirit—suggesting connections between *Geist* and 'gas', between spirit and breath, where her breath is the source of her voice.

But if the film diagnoses an existential loss of voice that is part of our common experience, can this not be seen to operate also through our institutions? Is there a vampirism of our institutions such that they drain us of energy? (What would it be like to deny this?) Does this explain the educational malaise that is my concern? To consider this further it is worth identifying three ways in which patterns of loss and recovery might be identified in relation to the education of voice.

The first is the theme of *Gaslight*. At the start of the film we hear Paula singing; we are to think of her as a gifted young singer. But there is something amiss with her voice, accompanied as she is by Gregory. The recuperation that appears to be offered by his care and attention, and by her marriage, proves false: it deprives her of her voice. It is in the depths of her suffering, and on the verge of madness, that she is able to turn, with the catalyst of the promptings provided by Cameron, the detective. Only with the 'aria' of her eventual invective against Gregory can she find her voice again. The second concerns the student in the university today. On the face of it the student's experience is one of gaining a new facility in writing, through adopting the techniques imposed by the writing frame. But there is a loss here too, for whatever the student might bring to the university in terms of her own voice is now superseded by the prescriptions of the frame. As an adjunct to this, the tokenism of concern with 'student voice' provides an opportunity for expression that distracts

from the loss that such rigidified writing exacts. But these two forms of loss we have been considering can also be understood in relation to a third pattern, and this might be held to be critical for education. Here we need to turn again to Thoreau. The finding of voice connects with the theme of finding one's way, which is at the heart of *Walden*: 'I desire that there be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead' (Thoreau, 1854/1999, p. 65). A crucial part of finding one's own way is the activation of what Thoreau calls the father tongue: 'a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak' (ibid, p. 93). Although the contrast in Thoreau is between the spoken language of the mother tongue and the father tongue typified by the written word (the 'maturity and experience' of our use of language), finding one's voice is akin to activating the father tongue. The father tongue requires a taking on of responsibility in our use of language, which is to say in our borrowing it and returning it richer to the language community. 'I borrowed an axe,' writes Thoreau, 'It is difficult to begin without borrowing, but perhaps it is the most generous course thus to permit your fellow-men to have an interest in your enterprise. The owner of the axe, as he released his hold on it, said that it was the apple of his eye; but I returned it sharper than I received it' (p. 38). But, and this is the key point here, the father tongue cannot be achieved without a kind of estrangement from or loss of one's relation to those words to which one has become accustomed. A degree of loss is a condition for the recovery of language if this is to be educative.<sup>8</sup>

So we have three patterns of loss. And the negativity of loss *is* vulnerable to distortion or corruption. Paula's case and that of the father tongue contrast in that the cause of the loss is sinister in the former case, benign in the latter; but in both cases recovery is achieved. This is a measure of the education that Cavell identifies in the genre he describes. In the case of the student initiated into writing frames, by contrast, we have as yet no reason to believe that this recovery will occur. Some students may gain confidence through the use of writing frames such that they will go on to write more fully as themselves, and some may simply rebel (and perhaps be the better for this); but others will surely succumb to those lowered expectations of language and expression in which the writing frames approach colludes. At precisely the point in an education when language should become troubling, it is routinised. There is reason surely to worry also that lowered expectations of these kinds are endemic in academic discourse generally, not least in educational research.<sup>9</sup>

## LESSONS FOR THE PEDAGOGY OF ACADEMIC WRITING

What lessons do these patterns of loss imply about our education? And what, then, does Cavell's work imply for the pedagogy of academic writing and for what it is to write in the university? Writing frames,

particularly in their most prescriptive forms, may well deny the student voice that they aim to facilitate because they stifle possibilities of thought, in content as well as structure. Student voice in academic writing must not be forced in this way, for to do this is to subject students to a form of ventriloquism.<sup>10</sup> By contrast students stand in need of initiation into the father tongue, into a form of language that is suppressed by academic practices such as the writing frame. Just as Thoreau's father tongue is an ongoing process, one of growth, of daily observance, so is the development of student voice. Only gradually will the fog clear, but some kind of clouding is necessary. This is a condition of the finding of voice. Students must begin like all of us by borrowing, but, against the blunting of language in the writing frame, they can aspire to sharpen it in their use. They can then 'achieve self-reliance through processes of initiation into, and aversion from, cultural practices, through a tolerance and intolerance of words' (Standish, 2004, p. 104). Writing frames, by contrast, open a path to conformity, as Thoreau surely anticipates: 'it is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves . . . How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity' (Thoreau, 1854/1999, pp. 287–288).

The discussions in this paper have implications for both the student and the academic writing tutor. If the student is truly to find voice, in whatever discipline she studies, then she must see this as something more than the mastery of technical skills. Indeed, the development of voice may not be best served always by active speech but sometimes rather by silence, by a turning of attention 'away from the activation of voice and towards reception' (Standish, 2004, p. 105). This concept of reception is illustrated in the closing scenes of *Gaslight*. Cameron has evidence with which to confront Gregory. Paula asks Cameron falteringly: 'What will I say to him?' Cameron's response is that of a voice coach (at least in the initial stages): 'You won't have to say anything.' Before Paula is ready for her 'aria of revenge', she first has to recognise not only the denial of her voice and the denial of herself, but also the enormity of what the journey to recovery of her voice will entail. Curricula for academic writing must surely deal seriously with what Cavell terms the 'grown-up social state of deafness to one's voices' (Cavell, 1994, p. 35).

Lillis calls for a re-examination of what knowledge is privileged in academia, and for the inclusion in student writing of different discourses to foreground the students' own experiences of the world.<sup>11</sup> Whilst this might succeed in altering the tenor of students' academic writing in a limited fashion, what Cavell draws attention to in his discussion of writing philosophy is its call for 'autobiographizing, deriving words from yourself' (Cavell, 1994, p. 41)—to the way that it, perhaps above other forms of enquiry, requires us to find ourselves in our words. But should this not also be a characteristic of academic writing more generally, of the kind that promotes students' self-reliance, that develops students' autonomy as writers in an ongoing acquisition of the father tongue?

Receptiveness to the new and readiness to depart from settled ways of thinking or writing is notably absent from Lillis' discussions. Whilst she demonstrates successfully that students feel voiceless in the face of the academic writing practices and assessment requirements of many universities, her proposed solutions offer at best only a temporary outlet for self-expression. Technique *is* relevant and it can be learned, but this is likely to involve the giving of appropriate examples, sometimes of providing the right tip. Paula's discovery is of the repression of language, and of the possibilities and risks that this opens up; and in this she is aided by the promptings of Cameron. There are two aspects of his interaction with her that are worth adverting to in this context. First, Cameron makes no attempt to determine the form of Paula's speech through offering her a new script—say, a kind of salvation story—but allows her to arrive at her own words. Second, the marker of Paula's recovery of voice, what Cavell terms her '*cogito ergo sum*' (1994, p. 76), is announced in her own words. When she announces to Cameron 'I want to speak to my husband. I want to speak to him alone', the double meaning of 'alone'—that is, 'to my husband only', and 'on my own'—demonstrates that Paula has found a form of expression with which to confront Gregory. Indeed, her subsequent display of speech to her husband is the scene of transformation in which she delivers her 'aria of revenge' (ibid, p. 76). The aria is not a replica of Gregory's words but creatively appropriates them in order to pursue her own line of argument, to voice her own re-creation. Following this emotionally charged scene, Cameron's bland comment, 'It's starting to clear', apparently refers to the pall of fog that has been hanging over Thornton Square, but it also implies rather more: the clearing of Paula's mind and the recovery of her ability to speak.

If the denial of voice is a denial of the self, then the recovery of voice is a finding of the self and the expression of voice a *continual* process of re-finding one's self. 'I keep coming back to aspects of the idea,' Cavell writes, 'that the having of a language is an allegory of having a self' (Cavell, 1995, p. 103). Any curriculum for academic writing should recognise the denial of the self that mere mastery learning suggests, and the ongoing possibilities for the creation of the self that voice coaching affords. The continual creation of the self, through the development of voice, is, for Cavell, akin to a re-birth; not a physical experience, but a re-birth into language, into 'serious speech'. In the end it is on this that the academic community depends. Voice is not something that can, or should, be taught and learned through an aid such as a writing frame. Its development is an expression of the worded nature of our individual and political lives.

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## NOTES

1. The practice of using writing frames has long been established as a mechanism for supporting the development of early stage writing skills. As such, they have a history of use in adult literacy classes, but more recently have been recognised as a valuable resource in schools in England for supporting transcriptional and compositional skills for children across different curriculum areas (DfEE, 2000). Indeed, inspectorate bodies and curriculum advisors from different sectors of education highlight the use of such supporting strategies and applaud the ‘scaffolding’ that teachers are able to offer and the differentiation in teaching and assessment that such tools afford. Their use in the United States is highlighted by Annemarie Jackson’s work where she claims that writing frames can be used effectively by teachers in the language arts to model and to support narrative writing (Jackson, 2003).
2. Figures 1 and 2 see: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>
3. A related difficulty is highlighted by Naomi Hodgson and Paul Standish (2007) as they consider the growth of the methodological training through which graduate students are inducted into aspects of educational research. Research methods training, they argue, aims to familiarise students with the practices of educational research and to develop competence and participation to the neglect of a perhaps deeper engagement with enquiry into education.
4. Paul Stapleton and Rena Helms-Park have argued that student voice must sometimes be given a status secondary to the consideration of ‘fundamental problems’ and issues within the respective disciplines (Stapleton and Helms-Park, 2008 p. 94). Stapleton’s earlier work (2002) points to the problem more clearly: ‘the great emphasis it (voice) has been accorded . . . appears to be disproportionate in relation to other aspects of writing, particularly the content contained within’.
5. Cavell (1996, p. 3) identifies the following films as representative of the genre: *Stella Dallas* (1937) *Now Voyager* (1942) and *Gaslight* (1944).
6. Cavell identifies a genre of 1930s and 1940s film that he calls the ‘comedies of remarriage’. In these films, conversation between a husband and wife is the means of recreation of the marriage. Films such as *It Happened One Night* (1934) *The Awful Truth* (1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *The Lady Eve* (1941) and *Adam’s Rib* (1949) are definitive of the genre.
7. Heidegger’s idea of an apprentice in his *What is Called Thinking* (1968) would be a useful one here, especially as the origin of the word lies in its meaning as ‘someone learning’—*apprentis*, as distinct from ‘someone being taught’. For Heidegger, the craft of the apprentice is not learned by gathering knowledge or by repeated practice alone. To become a true cabinetmaker the apprentice cannot just gather knowledge about what he is to craft; rather, he must learn to respond to the different kinds of wood and it is this relation that marks out and maintains the craft from other ‘busywork’. Cavell, in discussing Heidegger, makes a similar point when he quotes from Emerson: “‘Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.’” What translation will capture the idea of provocation here as calling forth, challenging?’ (Cavell, 1990, pp. 37–38).
8. See, for example, ‘The Thoreau Strategy’ in Smeyers, Smith and Standish (2007), pp. 124–139.
9. See, for example Richard Smith’s ‘Proteus Rising: Re-Imagining Educational Research’ (Smith, 2008).
10. There are other powerful representations of denial of voice and of ventriloquism. See, for example, the following: ‘Yes, school boys find great sport in being able to say something without the teacher’s being able to discover who said it. Boyishness is related to the impersonal, and it is impersonality which pleases man—that is, personally being impersonal, being a person but without any danger or responsibility, being an ill-tempered, malicious person perhaps, venting all one’s spite—but anonymously or by ventriloquism’—in Søren Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers* (Kierkegaard, 1967, #3224).
11. These, it is suspected, will afford expression to previously marginalised viewpoints and to those which might be considered to be ethically suspect. What is rather anticipated is an overcoming of the self in the act of writing, an expression of something beyond the self, something other and demanding.

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