The Hermit and the Poet

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Abstract

The notions of literacy and citizenship have become technologised through the demands for measurable learning outcomes and the reduction of these aspects of education to sets of skills and competences. Technologisation is understood here as the systematisation of an art, rather than as intending to understand technology itself in negative terms or to comment on the way technology is used in teaching and learning for literacy and citizenship. Technologisation is approached here in terms of the understanding of literacy and citizenship as things (qualities, sets of skills) that one *has*. Being literate and being a citizen are brought together here in order to consider the implications of their technologisation for academic writing in the university. Drawing on the phenomenology of Gabriel Marcel the understanding of literacy and citizenship in terms of having is problematized, as is the distinction between having and being. This opens the way for a richer understanding of being literate and being a citizen explored through the figures of the Hermit and the Poet in Thoreau's *Walden*. The question of what we write in the name of in the university is considered in the light of this and of a particular notion of the public.

Introduction

In the current regimes of accountability governing education, learning must be evidenced to be said to have taken place. Outcomes must therefore be measurable and those skills and competences that are not so easily measured must be operationalised. Literacy and citizenship provide clear examples of this operationalisation, the need for measurability. In schools, for example, the phonics test provides a measure of language learning at a particular point; or in adult education, gaining a Level 2 qualification in Literacy marks the achievement of basic literacy skills. Citizenship has, in the European context, been defined as 'active citizenship', measurable according to particular activities and level of engagement, and at all levels of education evidence of having skills and competences for citizenship are required. Furthermore, this illustrates the way in which these terms are used in the context of a learning society in which ongoing accrual of skills is required. Today, literacy not only refers to learning to read and write in a particular language, but also to our ability to speak and act with competence in other areas, such as when we speak, for example, of computer literacy, or emotional literacy. Similarly, citizenship is understood not only as a legal status in relation to a nation-state but also to a set of transferable skills and competences that enable the individual to live in and

contribute to the particular place in which she lives and to the other places where she exists, for example, the online community, or her place of work.

Both literacy and citizenship, then, can be said to be technologised today. This means not only that they are mediated by technology – that we use computers to learn literacy, or that we must be computer literate, or that we express our active citizenship as much online as offline – but that they have been systematised in particular ways, evident in their definition in terms of skills and competences and for the purposes of measurability and accountability. We use the term 'technologisation' here not, for example, to offer a critique of the use of electronic or digital technologies to support the teaching and learning of literacy and citizenship, or that provide access to the practices of them. Nor are we claiming that such technologisation is a new phenomenon, a characteristic emerging in postmodernity. Writing, for example, requires the use of certain technologies, be these flints for scratching on rocks, styli for making marks on clay tablets, quills and pens for paper and parchment, or touch-screen and voice-activated technology in the digital age. In referring to 'technologies' of literacy and citizenship, we draw on the Greek τεχνολογία (*techne* - art or skill, and *logia* – contribution or treatise) and its sense of systematic treatment or technique. The systematisation to which we draw attention is found in the language of policy in relation to literacy and citizenship, in particular in the establishment of sets of criteria against which competence or achievement can be measured and monitored, and which situate the individual writer or the citizen in particular ways.

This paper starts, then, from a dissatisfaction with the way that being literate and the way that being a citizen are customarily understood, but with particular concern for the implications of these for the university and for academic writing. We begin to do this by giving attention to aspects of what it is to 'have', and what it is to 'be'. By taking issue with the understanding of literacy and citizenship in terms of *having* particular skills and competences, we do not intend to focus on the negative effects of this for them separately, in parallel. Rather, by focusing on a distinction between *having* and *being* we draw out dimensions of literacy and citizenship that, we argue, are denied by the technologised, individualised way we are asked to understand them. Furthermore, by considering literacy and citizenship instead in terms of a particular notion of the public, we draw out the interrelation between them. By invoking the notion of the public here we seek to move away from a notion of citizenship that one is understood to have by virtue of demonstrating it by doing particular things, a form of citizenship that one can be better or worse at according to particular measures. Critiques of discourses of citizenship and of citizenship education often offer a revised conception of citizenship that better meets various

criteria of inclusive liberal democracy. Here, we do not wish to replace a technologized account of what it means to be a citizen with an alternative account, but rather to speak instead (in the name) of a public to come, always in the making. That is, for example, by speaking of being literate as opposed to having literacy, we refer to a state that is always still to come, that is not pre-determined, and that can never be fully accounted for. The notion of the public is not conceived as replacing a notion of citizenship with a different version of a state/civil society contract. Rather, drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, it assumes the manner of our living together to be always in the making. That is to say that rather than working with a notion of citizenship as a normative term where what this entails is present as matters of fact (and which we then need to find ways to achieve), how to live, how to proceed, is a matter of concern around which a public/publics might gather (Latour, 2004).

Literacy, citizenship, and technologisation

The technologisation referred to above is evident in the way writing, or academic literacy, is framed. A whole industry has grown up in the production of text books and 'how to' guides explaining, from initiation to completion, the process of producing the academic report, the essay, the reflective account, the dissertation or the thesis. What characterises many of these texts and services is a focus on the output, the final product, and support often proceeds according to a well-rehearsed, and often prescriptive, formula of mapping ideas, creating a draft, editing and re-writing, and final proof-reading (Bailey, 2006). These particular skills and competencies constitute a particular form of academic *literacy*. As such, we call these approaches 'technologies' of writing, in that they constitute the systematic treatment of an art or skill (*techne*). If what constitutes good academic writing is articulated through such technologies, then it is even further prescribed in university assessment criteria that lay out what specific technical aspects of writing determine any particular grade. Such criteria tend to focus, almost exclusively, on the technical aspects of the writing. In all this, writing is situated as in need of demystification; writing is deconstructed, only to be reconstructed as a series of linear procedures that, if followed systematically, lead to the model output. Here, the writer is passive, following a set of instructions that blind her to other possibilities. What is valorised in these technologies is compliance and competence. But it is not only writing, but also the writer, who is technologised and systematised in this way. To *be* a writer is, it seems, reduced to *having* the skills of writing. Similarly, to be literate seems to consist of nothing more than having accrued certain prescribed skills in literacy that enable an individual to contribute to the

economy.[1] Such politicising of literacy positions it as 'tightly constrained within the parameters of larger purposes and agendas' (Lankshear, 1997, p. 7). Critics of such a view (Baynham, 1995; Papen, 2005) hold that literacy cannot be reduced to its exchange value as a commodity in the workforce of a globalised economy. To do so, argues James Paul Gee, is to: 'rip literacy out of its sociocultural contexts and treat it as an asocial skill with little or nothing to do with human relationships. It cloaks literacy's connections to power, to social identity and to ideologies, often in the service of privileging certain types of literacies in certain types of people (Gee, 1996, p. 46). For Gee, and other critics of technicist, utilitarian models of literacy (notably Street and Lefstein, 2007 and Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič, 2000), what is needed is a pedagogy for writing that profoundly disturbs the kind of technologisation to which we have drawn attention; it is a pedagogy that allows us to 'take possession of language again, rather than being passive victims of its entailments' (Street, 1997, p. 51).

Citizenship can also be said to be subject to its own forms of technologisation today, in its definition in terms of skills and competences, and in the examination of it. Having citizenship is not only a matter then of holding the passport of a particular country but of having particular individual skills and competences that one evidences in practice. In Europe, for example, the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL) at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission produced a definition of 'Active Citizenship for Democracy' (Hoskins, 2006), and 'identified measurable and distinctive elements' within this (p. 11). What counts as citizenship is therefore pre-defined in terms of individual acts, and the extent of active citizenship in a country or region is thereby rendered measurable and governable.

Citizenship education in schools has been criticised from a variety of perspectives. For example, analyses from a social justice perspective argue that the citizenship education curriculum further entrenches historical exclusions e.g. along race or gender lines, while neo-Marxist critiques show how the curriculum is designed to stifle dissent (Reviews of such literature are provided by, for example, Davies, 2001 and Osler and Starkey, 2005). The lack of a strong political dimension to the citizenship education curriculum has been seen to continue a historical trend of wanting to avoid the charge of indoctrination by education (see for example Davies, 1999; Pring, 1999). But what 'citizenship' is is often taken for granted in these accounts

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[1] This is perhaps best illustrated in the foreword to the Labour government's *Skills for Life* Strategy, when they claimed that improving basic literacy (and numeracy) would: 'enable people to earn more, to spend more, to help the economy to grow faster. The benefits to industry and the economy may be hard to calculate, but they must be vast' (DfES, 2001, foreword: p. 1).

to refer to the relationship of rights and responsibilities between individual and nation-state. In a post-welfare state context, however, citizenship is reframed as an individual learning problem; the individual citizen is addressed in terms of their responsibility to access knowledge to empower them to shape their own life (Delanty, 2003, p. 76).

To understand citizenship in terms of individual responsibility in this way, however, denies the other or others that our living together in the world presupposes. Community, or 'being-together-with', as Masschelein and Simons have put it, 'is not to be conceived as a value (a positive or conservative or traditional value) but as a condition of our existence (Masschelein and Simons, 2002, p. 604). Current policies and practices, however, (seek to) make our relationships with others explicit, and thus render them aspects of ourselves according to which we should explicitly account for ourselves and seek to work on ourselves. The understanding of citizenship as a set of rights and responsibilities, skills and competences, and of language as literacy has an immunising and depoliticising effect, in their reduction to what can be measured and taken into account. This denies certain conditions of our subjectivity: it fails to recognise aspects of human existence that can never be fully accounted for.

We begin here by outlining a distinction between being and having, drawing on Gabriel Marcel's phenomenology of having. We then turn to Thoreau's *Walden* (1854/1999) in which two figures, the Hermit and the Poet, present antithetical positions to the literacy learner and the citizen and so help to illustrate the notions of being literate and of the public we wish to explore. In the final section we return to the university to consider what this means for our practices of reading and writing.

Having and Being

Any consideration of the notion of 'being' might be expected to start from Heidegger. His questioning of the meaning of Being sought to address the neglect of it, as he saw it, in philosophy since Plato and our not only not knowing what we mean by being, but also our not being aware of the fact that we do not know. The very possibility of questioning the meaning of Being exists in the distinct entities that we are as humans: 'Dasein [Being-there] is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it' (Heidegger, (2006) [1962/1927], p. 32). Dasein, uniquely, has a relationship to that Being: 'Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological' (p. 32). In *Being and Time*, Dasein is constituted by Being-with-Others, not in the sense of individual autonomous beings forming a whole but being constituted by that being

with: those among whom I do not stand out. While Heidegger offers a way to radically rethink our understanding of our being in the world, there is in Heidegger's thought a sense of a collective responsibility, of resoluteness towards Destiny, as a 'marching together' (as Levinas put it) in the name of a singular (privileged) culture, constituted by the individual will to that destiny, that we wish to avoid. For our purposes here, then, we draw on the phenomenology not of Heidegger but of Gabriel Marcel, which takes us closer to the non-teleological account of the subject we later discuss with reference to Thoreau's *Walden*. We draw on Marcel's phenomenology of having here to further draw out why understanding literacy and citizenship in terms of having is problematic.

An example will help to illustrate the distinction between having and being that we wish to make. A lecturer working in a history department at a university is clearly a historian. She will have developed the relevant detailed knowledge of history and will have skills in analysing evidence. But our understanding of what our historian does, and who she is, is only adequately realised if we understand her task, her being a historian, to be projective in some way and to involve sustained commitment. If we acknowledge this, then to refer to *being* an historian is to recognise that it is an ongoing concern. This goes far beyond an idea of continual professional development that is characterised by attendance at courses and conferences, valuable though this kind of activity might be. Rather, it recognises that the important thing about understanding some possibilities for human beings is that they are engaged in a dynamic process of self-realisation (but in which what is to be realised is not pre-defined). To be a historian is to develop knowledge and skills, but it is also to engage with a life's work, to commit to this project which entails work within the discipline, and on the self.

Few would with the idea that being an historian, or a professional of any sort, is an ongoing process, and that in some sense we only ever *become* these people, something very different is often seen to be at work when discussing 'being literate'. In this case, there seems to be a general acceptance that people are literate, or not. The very idea of such a dichotomy presupposes that this state of being literate can be measured and quantified in a way that allows such categorisations. This dichotomy is embedded most clearly in measures such as the International Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2000) which aimed to identify the percentage of citizens who were literate, to then enable international comparisons and to target policy and funding.[2] At a

20 International bodies such as The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are also involved in measuring and recording literacy/illiteracy rates around the world through their Institute of Statistics. Other trans-national bodies such as the United Nations perform a similar task.

national level in England the dichotomy prevails. Children in schools are tested to ascertain whether they have reached the requisite literacy level for their age, and such statistics are published in school league tables.

Some of the factors that are at play in talking about being an artist or a historian are similarly at play in the idea of being literate. Not to take account of these factors, and to equate being literate only with having been judged to have reached a particular level of skill or competency, is to misunderstand the nature of our relationship with written language in particular.[3] It would be more meaningful to describe our relationship to language as one in which we are engaged in '*becoming* literate'. This is to conceive of being literate as characterised by a different engagement with language, one that is not merely equated with the acquisition of a particular set of basic level competencies. To further develop the distinction between having and being, we turn now to Marcel's phenomenology of having.

In his 1965 work *Being and Having*, Gabriel Marcel outlines what he calls a phenomenology of having. He highlights what he calls an 'essential ambiguity' in the notion of having (p. 171), revealed when we consider the implications of understanding having as possession. This conception implies the thing that I have to be external to me, to exist independently of me. In this sense, 'I can only have what I can dispose of' (p. 169). He is then led to ask whether we can say we *have* a body. Can I dispose of it? What am I then? He writes: 'We are here in the presence of a datum which is opaque and of which we may even be unable to take full possession' (p. 171). Marcel refers also to the way in which we conceive of our feelings in terms of having, that is, a feeling is something I have, just as I have a cold or the measles: 'In that case, it can be limited, defined and intellectualised' (p. 169). But, conceiving of feelings in terms of having in this way, to 'set it before myself and so form a conception of it' (p. 169), misses something of our feelings: It is 'not a clear-cut distinction' but 'a sort of scale of subtle differences, an imperceptible shading-off from a feeling I have to a feeling I am' (p. 169). This distinction draws out the different relations to language expressed by being and having that we draw attention to in the previous section: to conceive of having literacy is different from saying I am literate, and to speak of having literacy is to speak of it as defined and limited. Just as

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Measures vary depending on the definition of 'literacy' used, and whether the statistics are gathered from empirical data through testing, or from an analysis of the percentage of the population who are deemed to be literate as a result of having received a minimum numbers of years of schooling.

[3] Literacy is understood in the curricular documents for children and adults as comprising reading and writing, but also speaking and listening (DfES, 2001; DfE, 2010).

feelings cannot be contained by the language we use to refer to them, so language cannot be delimited to having literacy.

Marcel neglects, as he feels he ought to, the plainest, strongest sense of having – having headaches, having need, noting the absence of an article – to focus instead on the ambiguities in 'having-as-possession' and 'having-as-implication' (p. 172). He turns first to 'having-as-possession': 'Call it a certain *quid* relating to a certain *qui*' (p. 173). Here, having is characterised by both a certain exteriority (to me) and the interiority that comes from it being mine. He refers here to the tendency to having often being reduced to containing. Even if this is so, he suggests, 'the containing itself cannot be defined in purely spatial terms'; there is implied 'the idea of potentiality' (p. 173): 'To contain is to enclose, but to enclose is to prevent, to resist, and to oppose the tendency of the content towards spreading, spilling out, and escaping' (p. 174). This points then to a 'suppressed dynamic' at the heart of having (p. 174): 'It is this which lights up what I call the transcendence of the *qui*' (p. 174). He then considers 'having-as-implication'. When we describe a body as having a particular property it is not understood to be a separate entity from that body; it is implied that that characteristic is 'inside…of the body which it characterises' (p. 174). But, he adds, 'we cannot think of implication without also thinking of force…we cannot avoid representing the property or character as defining a certain efficacy, a certain essential energy' (p. 174).

There is again a sense of the impossibility of containment, or of separation between thing and person, in the notion of having. Even in 'the strongest sense of the word' having, which he suggested should be neglected at first, there is an energy to the thing that one has, a potentiality inherent to its definition as that thing. He gives the example of a secret: 'The secret is only a secret because I keep it; but also and at the same time, it is only a secret because I could reveal it. The possibility of betrayal or discovery is inherent in it, and contributes to its definition as a secret' (p. 175). This amounts to what he calls a dialectic of internality; the secret, for example, being such not only because it is had, contained, but also because it might be revealed. It is also not entirely separable from the one who has it. It is only a secret because one has it, and my having the secret makes it a part of me that is inseparable from me. Having is found then, 'in a scale where externality and internality can no longer be really separated, any more than height or depth of musical tone. And here, I think, it is the tension between them that is important' (p. 176). What Marcel moves towards then in this phenomenology of having is a sense of having *as* being. It is not a case of defining them both in order that they can be analysed separately, and the appropriate use of each term prescribed. Rather, by drawing

attention to the complexities in the notion of having, he problematizes a simplistic possessive understanding of having, and shows it to be inseparable in various ways from our being. Furthermore, the attention to the different notions of having, which moves towards a notion of having-as-being, gives us a richer account of being itself. Marcel writes of us being possessed by what we have: 'Our possessions eat us up', I said just now: and it is truer of us, strangely enough, when we are in a state of inertia in face of objects which are themselves inert, but falser when we are more vitally and actively bound up with something serving as the immediate subject-matter perpetually renewed. (p. 180)

He refers to the garden of the gardener or the laboratory of the scientist as examples of this fuller relationship to what we have and what we are. He warns, in light of this, of treating our thoughts and opinions as possessions: 'The more I treat my own ideas, or even my convictions, as something *belonging* to me-and so as something I am proud of (unconsciously perhaps)…-the more surely will these ideas and opinions tend, by their very inertia (or my inertia towards them, which comes to the same thing) to exercise a tyrannical power over me' (p. 180).

Similarly, then, to reduce our language to a set of literacy skills we possess closes down or thinking about what we say. To define what a citizen is or should be, to understand our citizenship as something we possess, closes down our thinking about living together, composing a shared world together, such that these terms possess us and contain us. Our inertia in the face of having-as-possession is redolent of the systematisation of the self that is at work in much of the contemporary thinking, and in the language of literacy and citizenship in which aspects of our subjectivity are alienated or denied.

What marks the difference for Marcel between inertia and our eventual alienation, and the vitality of the creative act (and this might refer to something ordinarily thought of as creative such as writing, or playing music, though it might also refer to more mundane activities to which we are committed even if we do not do them exceptionally well), is the place of thought: 'The thinker … is continually on guard against this alienation, this possible fossilising of his thought … and the whole of his thought is always being called into question from one minute to the next' (p. 181). Rather than a privileging of creative, artistic pursuits, this calls for an attitude to what we do in the everyday that defends what we do and what we say from standardisation and ossification. With the idea of 'perpetual renewal', to *be* is better understood as to *become*, as something we are but also are always in the process of. This not only encourages us to think critically about what we do, but also acknowledges this perpetual renewal as inherent to our

being human. We are never complete, and can never fully account for ourselves, that is, contain what we have in terms of having.

It is not only Marcel's distinction that is relevant for our argument here. By offering a phenomenology he intends specifically to offer a non-psychological account (p. 172), and one that is concerned with a territory 'outside the realms of logic or of the theory of knowledge' (p. 173). He tries 'to blaze a trail' across this territory, that is, to take a path that does not already exist, that has not been previously taken and that is not pre-determined. The very approach he takes, therefore, resonates with what he is attempting to analyse. He is not seeking a final analysis, based on logic, or what we already know theoretically to be the case, but presents an account based on our ordinary language and everyday experience.

To think of our being with others in these terms helps to illustrate the shift from thinking of citizenship as a status we legally hold and a set of skills and competences we evidence, whereby the society we wish to achieve, the notion of democracy on which this is based, and the means to achieve this are already determined, to an attitude of acting in the name of a public to come, responsive to the conditions in which we find ourselves, in which the very language we use to express ourselves (and therefore the measurement of literacy on the basis of it), may be insufficient. To explore this further we turn to Henry David Thoreau to explore figures that illustrate this attitude.

The Hermit and the Poet

We refer in particular in this section to Thoreau's chapter of *Walden* entitled 'Brute Neighbours'. Here we find a description of his observation of the animals in the woodland and the water that surrounds him at Walden Pond, and which starts with a dialogue between, in his words, Hermit (him) and Poet (his friend, the poet William Ellery Channing). These figures, we suggest, mark the antithesis of the technologised citizen and the literacy learner, who we have described above in terms of individuals who *have* particular competencies and skills and whose relation to citizenship and language are in these ways acquisitive and systematised. We do not necessarily conceive of the role of the poet as a job one has, but as being expressed in a particular use of, and relation to, language; one who is bound up with what she does with language, to paraphrase Marcel. It is a relation to language quite different, then, from that expressed in the discourse of *having literacy*, a having as possession (of skills) that also possesses us. Similarly, the citizen, whose fulfilment of this role is to be evidenced in terms of particular forms of participation, dialogue, and community cohesion, stands in contrast to the

hermit, who in these terms would be seen to be in need of intervention, to develop their skills and attributes in this direction. Thoreau's account of these figures, however, and their relationship to each other and to the society in which they live offers an image of language and citizenship, as being for the public world, that permits the aspects and possibilities of one's self and others that, we argue, are denied by their systematised, teleological form.

The text *Walden* as a whole, and Thoreau's act of living at Walden and building a temporary home there, illustrate what we mean. Thoreau intends *Walden* (1854/1995) to contribute to the American literature of the time, but also to act as a critique of what America has become. It is Thoreau's expression of his relationship to America, to an America still to come; it is his expression of himself as an expression of America; and a response to the feeling that America does not express him. Language and citizenship, then, are here intimately related. A central theme for Thoreau is 'of refusing to live what he will not call his own life' (Cavell, 2005, p. 226). *Walden* is an account of Thoreau's time spent in the woods in which 'account', along with other terms such as 'interest' and 'spending', relate to a particular meaning of economy. For Thoreau, philosophy is '"an economy of living", a description that in effect declares the whole of *Walden* to be a work of philosophy' (p. 216). The Greek root of economy, *oīkos*, meaning household, is pertinent here as it reflects the way in which for Thoreau the finding of one's home relates closely to finding one's voice, in the sense of the articulation of an economy of living or the life he *will* call his own.

In the chapter 'Brute Neighbours', Thoreau focuses particularly on the activity of the animals he observes every day in the woodland and the water of Walden Pond. It is not a romantic or pastoralist account but one that expresses the animals' mode of living as a means of reflecting on his own and that of the society he is part of more generally. Thoreau, writing as the Hermit, begins a dialogue with the Poet, who arrives from the other side of town, and greets him thus: 'Eh, Mr. Poet, is it you? How do you like the world to-day? (p. 201). Prior to the poet's arrival, the Hermit wonders 'what the world is doing now' and gives a detailed account of his surroundings in terms of what he can hear: not a locust or a pigeon, but the farmer's noon horn, the barking of the dog and the woodpecker tapping. The Hermit shows himself then, not to be removed from society, isolated from the world, but rather to be fully attentive to it, and immersed in it. The Poet in turn responds in terms of what he can see: how the clouds hang in the sky 'is the greatest thing I have seen to-day' (p. 201). His enthusiasm is to some extent poetically expressed, but then he returns to the demands of the day and the need to eat and trade, and so proposes that they go fishing. The Poet, then, is not only concerned with his

artistic pursuits, but also acutely aware of an industrial economy in which his art is not always sustaining, and that this is part of what the poet expresses. This is not an idealised view of a kind of alternative society in which marginal characters exist in harmony with nature and each other. Rather, this illustration serves to show the Poet and the Hermit as composing an economy of living in which they account for themselves in relation to the world rather than society. This mode of living in the world subjects the established order of society to critique by positioning the characters not as solely subject to its economic demands. This is not a rejection of traditional economy, but rather an 'experiment in living' in a different relation to it (p. 47). The Poet and the Hermit speak, then, in the name of a public that is always still to come. This rejects a normative account of an alternative society, one whose shape is already decided, but rather embraces an idea of living in the world as an orientation towards the self and the world that has no finality; it is always partial and on its way.

Back to the university

Contemporary talk around citizenship and literacy (skills) has become almost routine; but this has arisen largely out of the broader skills movement, stemming from the 1980s, that increasingly has stultified policy and practice in higher education. It is not that skills in themselves are problematic (think, for example, of the skills required by a musician to play a solo in a concerto, or by the electrician to rewire a house), but rather the assumptions that are made about 'being' on the basis of 'having' skills. These assumptions block the kind of thinking about our human becoming that is given force and substance in the work of Thoreau. We have not been concerned here with the idea of becoming in terms of defined stages, as tends to be the case in some developmental psychology; rather, what we have in mind is a richer account of becoming, espoused by Thoreau, that helps us more fully to understand an education for being literate and being a citizen and the interrelationship between the two. But to argue for a new way of thinking about an education for citizenship or for being literate is not to present it as a prescriptive account. If we consider what the education of *Walden* is, for example, it is in the very fact that there is:

> … no recipe for the good life but an illustration of the need for each of us not to copy Thoreau but to engage in our own experiment, to live as experiment: we should not settle down complacently, like the townsfolk, but should regard our lives as opportunity at every point, with neither established foundation nor final settlement, but with every occasion an occasion for new departure (Standish, 2006, pp. 148-149).

However, these ideas of departure seem lacking from contemporary understandings of policy and practice in the university. Let us return to the example of the historian in the university department. She is subject to the discourses and expectations that construct her and the university in the name of which she works. As such she is driven by particular forms of accountability – impact, outputs, etc. – which we might see in terms of an accountability to society rather than to the world. That is to say that her teaching and research must be responsive to particular demands – employability, social justice, meeting the skills gap, evidence-based policy and practice, innovation and creativity – that are not particular to the university but to which the university must answer. In this way, her practice and she herself are technologised, in the sense we use it here, that is, she is subject to an instrumental systematisation that both denies aspects of her subjectivity and positions her as accountable in very particular, reductive ways.

The notion of departure to which Standish refers, and which is central to the work of Thoreau, provokes us to rethink how the historian might account for herself otherwise. It is not that her work should not address important concerns in contemporary society or that impact is unimportant. This is not a wholesale rejection and replacement of what currently exists, just as in the position taken by the Hermit and the Poet in relation to their society. Rather, it raises the question of what the historian (or linguist, or physicist, or anthropologist, or engineer in the university…) writes in the name of. She is oriented to the world not as an expert (as we might commonly think of the academic, or the poet, to be, speaking for us, from a particular view) whose distinct role is to provide solutions, in the form of conclusive evidence of how to settle matters of policy and practice, but rather as one who represents the world to open it up to gather a public. Her writing is an expression of herself as a member of this public, but not in the name of fixing it. This writing, this creation of a public, is not a once and for all event, but a continual process of being and becoming, one to which loss and leaving are inherent. This brings us to a richer notion of what it is to be an academic, a writer, a citizen than is currently conceived in terms of technologised notions of having.

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