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Barbara Bodichon's travel writing: her epistolary articulation of *Bildung*

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ABSTRACT

English painter Barbara Bodichon received a dynamic home education, consisting of engaging lessons, reading sessions, family discussions, sketching excursions, and trips at home and abroad. As an adult, Bodichon led a nomadic life, living between Algeria and England and travelling across Europe and America. Seeking to unpack travelling and travel letters as sources of learning, this paper studies Bodichon's correspondence as epistolary articulations of her *Bildung* (self-cultivation). It argues that, conforming to *Bildung*'s idea of forging one's individuality in interaction with the world, her travelling provided her with a variety of settings through which she extended towards the unknown and incorporated it into her sense of being. In turn, letters functioned as forums where she made sense of encountering the difference through which she individualised her subjectivity. Notwithstanding, a revised reading of *Bildung* permits teasing out to what extent Bodichon's self-cultivation was developed at the expense of certain social categories.

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Introduction

In 1849 Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829–1925), then a young Unitarian would-be poet, wrote to her close friend Barbara Bodichon (née Leigh Smith):

> Oh dear Barbara, your picture frame has made me think. What shall I do! What shall I educate myself for – writing? … I do not feel in the least clever. I can understand some things better than girls perhaps because, like you, I have had a peculiar education, but I can produce nothing & I cannot read any page of the Universe, much less translate it to my brethren.[1]

Following the Unitarian philosophy of education, Bessie Parkes and Barbara Bodichon (1827–1891) did acquire a higher standard of education than that, on average, offered to middle-class girls in other religious denominations. Despite her timid comment, for nine years Parkes attended a family-run Unitarian school for girls in Warwickshire, where she learnt English literature, arithmetic, history, French, German, Latin and Greek. Bodichon's

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[1]Parkes to Bodichon, December 5, 1849. Girton College Personal Papers (hereafter GCPP) Parkes 5/39, Girton College Archives, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.

education consisted of a thorough home instruction and some years of schooling at two Unitarian institutions.[2] The most striking element of this 'peculiar education' was the entertaining and stimulating sources of learning these two friends enjoyed as part of their daily routines: engaging private lessons, group reading sessions, animated family discussions, excursions in the countryside and sketching expeditions.

The history of women's education in England in the nineteenth century has received intense scrutiny – bringing the category of gender to the fore, largely missing in traditional accounts.[3] This body of literature has arguably tended to study *girls*' opportunities for schooling[4] and formal access to state examinations[5] as well as the development of teaching as a profession for women[6] and their participation as pedagogical theorists and policy-makers.[7] Bringing the attention to the prevalence and varying quality of domestic education among middle-class girls and women, in *Victorian Feminism*, Philippa Levine briefly mentions that 'Earlier generations of women had been essentially self-educated'.[8] In this sense, Ruth Watts extensively shows the role of mothers, relatives and tutors as educators at home among Unitarian families as well as the high standard of education Unitarian girls and women received, mostly within the domestic sphere.[9] For her part, Michèle Cohen suggests that, by the end of the eighteenth century, 'informal' education was promoted among boys leading to intellectual individual autonomy as opposed to stultifying didactic methods while 'informal' education among girls implied superficial learning. Seeking to defy this negative connotation, Cohen argues for considering the informal aspects of girls' education more substantially as rich sources of learning.[10] Along these lines, Kate Flint claims the act of reading as playing a prominent role in the self-formation of girls and women in the context of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. A locus of struggle, it was 'the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed', providing 'a site for discussion, even resistance' rather than conformity.[11] Echoing Flint's take, in her biography of Bodichon, Pam Hirsch highlights the significance of reading groups and letter-exchange in providing Bodichon with a rich informal source of learning. According to Hirsch, Bodichon had access to the family library and to the journals to which her relatives were subscribed. Her father 'did not censor reading and discussion on gender lines'. Hence, she and her female friends 'recommended books to each other and critically discussed, either face to face or by letter, everything they had been reading'.[12]

[2]All biographical data are taken from Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998). Biographical data taken from Bodichon's own letters are indicated in footnotes.
[3]Howard Clive Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760*, 2nd ed. (London: University of London Press, 1966); Stanley James Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: University Tutorial Press, 1965).
[4]Felicity Hunt, ed., *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850–1950* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987); June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991).
[5]Andrea E. Jacobs, 'Girls and Examinations, 1860–1902' (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2003).
[6]Christine de Bellaigue, 'The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870', *Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (2001): 963–88.
[7]Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop, eds., *Women, Educational Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[8]Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850–1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 28.
[9]Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760–1860* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 129–36.
[10]Michèle Cohen, '"To Think, to Compare, to Combine, to Methodise": Notes towards Rethinking Girls' Education in the Eighteenth Century', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment, 1650–1850*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 224–42.
[11]Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 41, 12, 15, and vii–viii.
[12]Hirsch, *Barbara Bodichon*, 32–6.

Seeking to shed new light upon available informal sources of education for *women* in the context of English mid-Victorian bourgeois families, this article further develops Hirsch's idea of learning through letters. For that purpose, it proposes the term 'epistolary education', according to which letters acted as educational instruments. In *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, Dena Goodman develops a conceptualisation of this term in her description of late eighteenth-century middle-class French women learning the art of letter-writing through manuals, *écrivans*, and epistolary conversations with older ladies.[13] Alternatively, epistolary education refers here to letters – the act of letter-writing itself – as educational tools: the learning and personal growth forged by means of family/friendship correspondence. As such, epistolary education stands not for teaching how to write epistles but for intersubjective epistolary self-cultivation. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, within the context of her informal educational scheme, as a girl and young adult, Bodichon gained further learning and developed her reasoning skills to a greater extent via the letters she exchanged with her best friends, including Parkes. Taking the form of written intellectual conversations (a continuation of unfinished face-to-face discussions or the triggers of tête-à-tête chats), in their letters these friends recommended and lent each other books and newspapers and shared their impressions on the topics they studied with their tutors, on the texts they read on their own, and on the experiences they had during their stimulating daily activities.[14] This article expands this notion of epistolary education by unpacking the acts of travelling and writing travel letters as informal educational inputs. It does so by putting into play the German neo-humanist educational term *Bildung* – the lifelong process of self-cultivation. Commenting on a series of illustrative letter excerpts, it teases out how, throughout her lifespan, Bodichon's *travel* letters functioned as forums where she worked out her *Bildung*.

A revised reading of *Bildung*

In its classical sense, *Bildung* is an educational ideal that refers to the lifelong process of becoming cultured. Unlike mere knowledge acquisition and skill training, *Bildung* seeks the personal growth of individuals in terms of intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic and physical development.[15] The task of *Bildung* is to bring all the potentials contained within each man to full expression as a means towards social progress.[16] Man's individuality becomes manifest through free and wide-ranging interaction with the external world.[17] *Kultur* is edifying; it is the means through which man develops his capacities.[18] Yet, being cultured (*gebildet*) requires a reciprocally transformative relation to one's environment.[19] Creative mimesis

[13]Deena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).
[14]Meritxell Simon-Martin, 'Educational Place and Space: The Unconventional Learning of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827–1891)', *History of Education Researcher* 89, May (2012): 7–17.
[15]I use the terms 'man'/'men' and male pronouns to reflect the original masculinist orientation of this term.
[16]Josef Bleicher, '*Bildung*', *Theory Culture Society* 23 (2006): 364–5.
[17]Lars Løvlie and Paul Standish, 'Introduction: *Bildung* and the Idea of a Liberal Education', in *Educating Humanity:* Bildung *in Postmodernity*, ed. Lars Løvlie, Klaus Peter Mortensen and Sven Erik Nordenbo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 4–7.
[18]Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Werke in fünf Bänden*, 5 vols, ed. Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960–1981), n.d., vol.1, 235, trans. and cited in Christoph Wulf, 'Perfecting the Individual: Wilhelm von Humboldt's Concept of Anthropology, *Bildung* and Mimesis', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no. 2 (2003): 241–9.
[19]Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen*, c1791–1792, translated and reprinted in Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, trans. and ed. John Wyon Burrow (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), xxvii.

with the outer world permits man to extend towards the unknown and to incorporate it into his self in a critical fashion.[20] In order for this critical engagement with the world to take place, man must make distance from himself and his beliefs. This self-alienation is necessary if man is to be open to difference.[21] For critical learning and self-development can only occur as long as man 'plunge[s] in the unknown' and adopts an open attitude towards new knowledge.[22]

In Wilhelm von Humboldt's conceptualisation of the term, social relationships are the means through which to acquire 'the richness of the other'.[23] Contrast and resemblance with others create a friction that leads to a more precise definition of one's individuality. The more diverse situations and social relations man is exposed to, the richer his *Bildung* can be.[24] In turn, it is by means of forging his individuality out of the process of active contact with the world that man contributes to other men's variety of situations.[25] In this sense, Humboldt highlights the relevance of travelling as an important means through which man acquires the diversity of the world:

> … travel introduces the mind directly to the various situations of the various countries, familiarizes it with their customs and their way of life (even if one already knows all about them) and is even useful if one goes to a place quite different from that which one wishes to study, because it furthers one's skill of adapting oneself to many different external circumstances. This is why travel is after all indispensable….[26]

In the process of *Bildung*'s project, the education of the self is undertaken in tandem with the transformation of contemporary culture.[27] It is by virtue of achieving a meaningful existence in interplay with the world that *Bildung* ultimately seeks to improve the collective whole. For the self-transformation of individuals is translated into a superior society. This ultimate progress is not a simple cumulative achievement but a dialectic one where, through critical interaction, mankind explores a wide range of human potentialities that eventually lead to betterment.[28]

Bildung is studied today as a contentious educational concept. As Aagot Vinterbo-Hohr and Hansjörg Hohr explain, this term was implicitly conceived as a process of personal growth among (Western) men. Humboldt's theory, for example, insists on the complementary relationship between men and women where women's 'ennobling' influential role in society is defined with respect to men's *Bildung* project. Responsible for a mere secondary (and subordinate) role, their destiny is to aid men's self-development.[29] Similarly, as

[20]Wulf, 'Perfecting the Individual', 246.
[21]Paul Standish, Preface to *Educating Humanity:* Bildung *in Postmodernity*, ed. Lars Løvlie, Klaus Peter Mortensen and Sven Erik Nordenbo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), vii.
[22]Øivind Varkøy, 'The Concept of *Bildung*', *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 18, no. 1 (2010): 85–96.
[23]Humboldt, *Werke in fünf Bänden*, 1792, vol. 1, 64–5, trans. and cited in Christoph Lüth, 'On Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of *Bildung* Dedicated to Wolfgang Klafki for his 70th Birthday', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 30, no. 1 (1998): 43–60.
[24]Ibid., 1797, vol. 1, 346, trans. and cited in Lüth, 'On Wilhelm von Humboldt's Theory of *Bildung*', 52–3.
[25]Humboldt, *Limits of State Action*, 27–8.
[26]Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'The Eighteenth Century', 1796–1797 (first publication), in *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt*, ed. Marianne Cowan (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 127.
[27]Løvlie and Standish, 'Introduction', 4.
[28]Burrow, *Limits of State Action*, xxxii, liv.
[29]Aagot Vinterbo-Hohr and Hansjörg Hohr, 'The Neo-Humanistic Concept of *Bildung* Going Astray: Comments to Friedrich Schiller's Thoughts on Education', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 38, no. 2 (2004): 215–30. Other scholars have focused their investigation on exploring women's negotiation of the male-oriented rationale of *Bildung*: Katharina Rowold, *The Educated Woman: Minds, Bodies, and Women's Higher Education in Britain, Germany and Spain* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010) and Marjanne E. Goozé, ed., *Challenging Separate Spheres: Female Bildung in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

Katharina Rowold and others argue, 'as it became increasingly associated with a classical secondary and university education', the ostensibly inclusive purpose of *Bildung* – to enhance humanity through personal self-cultivation – turned out to be a purpose achieved by a particular profile of students that turned their claim to their own right to *Bildung* into a privilege granted only to certain categories of people.[30] Along these lines, Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken claim that this educational project is not an emancipatory endeavour, but 'a privileged medium through which a certain power apparatus ("un dispositif de pouvoir") has been invested'. As a mechanism of power, *Bildung* implies a precise understanding of human beings as well as a particular way of attaining self-cultivation that are imbued with value-laden hierarchical connotations. The result is that *Bildung* turns out to be 'a social programme formulated in a specific historical and social context in which it becomes the key-term of bourgeois society' and an instrument at the service of its values.[31]

Drawing on these critical studies of *Bildung*, this article reads Bodichon's personal correspondence through the lens of this concept as a means to point out the educational dimension of travelling and writing travel letters. In order to do so, it proposes a narrative model of *Bildung* according to which travel letters, as platforms for knowledge exchange, critical thinking and self-reflection, functioned as forums where Bodichon verbalised *Bildung*'s process of self-alienation as prompted by social interaction and travelling. Ultimately, *Bildung*'s problematic underpinnings are put into use to tease out the negative implications of Bodichon's managing to develop her self-cultivation.

A narrative model of *Bildung*

Resonating with the idea of *Bildung* that man forges his individuality by means of creative interplay with others, narrative approaches to identity-formation argue that self-narration permits individuals to carve out their subjectivity. Self-writing acts as a forum where they make sense of their experiences, make them intelligible to themselves and to others and, in the process, forge their individuality. Indeed, many theorists of identity point out the first-personal perspective (the subjective standpoint of an embodied subject from which she/he lives his/her life) and the third-personal perspective of the self (the characteristics of one's identity that can be described in third-personal terms: traits of body and temperament for example) as well as its continuity across time. Taking this perspectival and temporal distinction of the self as a starting point, narrative theories of identity-formation argue that texts are spaces where individuals connect their first-personal perspective to character traits, emotions, beliefs and their past and identify with or distance from certain desires, values and decisions – what some scholars call self-ascription. Through a process of 'emplotment', narrative self-interpretation integrates the different elements of one's life (actors, motives, places, circumstances) into a meaningful sense of being, establishing connections between one's character, reasons for action, emotional responses to experiences, and life contingencies. In the process, individuals develop a normative self-conception that brings about the continuity of the self over time and therefore permits the anticipation of future actions. Narrative integration – dynamic, provisional and open to revision and change – is rendered

[30]Rowold, *The Educated Woman*, 77; Løvlie and Standish, 'Introduction', 6, 10–11; Varkøy, 'The Concept of *Bildung*', 87–88, 91.
[31]Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken, 'Do We (Still) Need the Concept of *Bildung*?', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no. 2 (2003): 139–54.

intelligible within the context of broader social, historical and cultural references shared by interlocutors – references with which self-narrators critically engage.[32]

Following *Bildung*'s encouragement to interact analytically with the world by means of social interaction (including in the context of travelling – a question discussed in the following section) and drawing on narrative approaches to identity-formation (where normative self-conception could be equated to *Bildung*'s notion of individuality), this article proposes a narrative model of *Bildung*, whereby Bodichon's epistolary dialogues reflect the essence of this educational project, ie the intersubjective process of self-formation. Thus, conforming to *Bildung*'s idea of forging one's individuality in interaction with the outer world through social intercommunication, in her letters, as sites for (self-)learning, (self-) reflection and dialogue (as forums for narrative integration), Bodichon (partially) carved out her subjectivity in dialogue with her correspondents. Letter-exchange provided her a platform where, while trying to make sense of the frictions she experienced in her interplay with her environment, she worked out her *Bildung*. Concurrently, within this epistolary development of *Bildung*, in line with Humboldt's theorisation of *Bildung*, this friction was prompted by Bodichon's nomadic lifestyle.

Bodichon's 'travelling' epistolary *Bildung*

Bodichon was born into a particularly progressive Unitarian family, actively engaged in the foundation of several educational institutions. At first glance, the Romantic and neo-humanist dimensions of *Bildung* seem to be at odds with the rationalistic and, to some extent, instrumentalist underpinnings of the Unitarian philosophy of education. Still, many aspects of their rationale are somewhat akin. They were both informed by the Enlightenment faith in rational knowledge as an instrument of critical thinking and progress, they placed individuality at the core of their philosophy, and they defended a liberal state as the sole guarantee for their educational projects.[33]

Following the educational pattern of the wealthiest and most open-minded Unitarian families, Bodichon and her siblings received an excellent home education during their childhood years in Hastings and London. In line with Unitarians' (and *Bildung*'s theorists') wish to provide a wide-ranging and holistic education where mental and body development are interwoven, the Leigh Smith children received a thorough instruction from their governess, Catherine Spooner, and their private tutors, James Buchanan and Harry Porter, who gave them lessons in Latin and history. A local horse-riding master, Mr Willetts, taught them to ride. During this period of home education Buchanan became a particularly influential figure. A Swedenborgian, he held the belief that 'education began in infancy and was a lifelong training of the soul for the reception of truth'[34] – an understanding reminiscent of *Bildung* as a lifetime process of personal development. Also suggestive of Humboldt's belief in the need to stimulate man's abilities in interaction with the world through social

[32]See for example Kim Atkins and Catriona Mackenzie, eds., *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).
[33]For a discussion of the links between *Bildung* and Unitarians' philosophy of educational see Meritxell Simon-Martin, 'Barbara Bodichon's *Bildung*: Education, Feminism and Agency in Epistolary Narratives' (PhD diss., Winchester University, 2012).
[34]William Stewart and William Phillip McCann, *The Educational Innovators, 1750–1880* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 245.

intercourse, Buchanan taught the Leigh Smith children through dynamic group play and in contact with nature as a way of stirring their imagination and learning.[35]

Bodichon also attended a Unitarian school for middle-class girls in London. But it seems that teachers followed a non-stimulating rote learning scheme alien to Bodichon's previous learning experience – a learning pattern also dismissed by *Bildung* theorists.[36] After her school years, a tutor, Philip Kingsford, came to the Leigh Smith household to teach the youngest brother political economy – a tutoring from which Bodichon equally benefited. In line with *Bildung*'s idea of a comprehensive education as a way of exploring one's talents, Bodichon also received private painting lessons from artists Cornelius Varley and Collingwood Smith and attended Francis Cary's drawing classes at Bedford College for a year.

Within this 'peculiar education' scheme, Bodichon shared her later informal educational activities with her female friends, most notably Parkes – either face-to-face or by letter (such as the opening quotation). The two friends regularly met either in Hastings or in London, where, as part of their daily routine, they rode on horse, visited acquaintances, walked up Hastings' East Cliff or around Westminster, sang, dressed up and performed plays. Besides their private tutorials, Bodichon and Parkes went to hear talks by literary figures[37] and attended public lectures.[38] They also visited exhibitions in several art galleries[39] and published their poems and short essays in the local newspapers.

Bodichon's educational pattern was complemented by other distinctive features: the vibrant political and literary salons her father organised, where he invited the leading thinkers and artists of the day; the painting expeditions she set off on with her sisters and female friends and on her own with a view to improving her artistic skills; and the regular family excursions and trips across Britain and abroad which, loosely following the tradition of the Grand Tour, provided Bodichon with practical lessons, entertainment and physical exercise.[40] As an adult, Bodichon kept on regularly embarking on sketching expeditions in the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, the Lake District and Wales, according to the season. Bodichon became a lifelong inveterate traveller. Within Britain, she was in constant movement: she lived in her three homes in England (in London, Sussex and Cornwall) from where she carried out her feminist, philanthropic and artistic activities. She also visited her relatives in their different houses in the south of England and in Derbyshire, and spent short periods of time at her friends' places and in health resorts. Abroad, she travelled across three different continents, where she visited friends and acquaintances and discovered other landscapes and cultures. Married to a French army doctor settled in Algeria, she spent more then 20 years going back and forth between Algeria and England – where she lived in winter and summer respectively.

[35]Julia Smith's comments on James Buchanan, Barbara Isabella Buchanan, ed., *Buchanan Family Records: James Buchanan and his Descendants* (Capetown: Townshend, Taylor & Snashall, 1923), 26; Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, July 1 [1850s], ibid., 22.
[36]Bodichon to Florence [Davenport-Hill?], 5 Blandford Square, July 1 [1850s], ibid., 25.
[37]Parkes to Bodichon, June 3, 1848, GCPP Parkes 5/26.
[38]Parkes to Mary Swainson, Hampstead, August 21, 1848, GCPP Parkes 3/18.
[39]Parkes to Bodichon, London, December 16, 1849, GCPP Parkes 5/41.
[40]The Grand Tour was an educative 'rite of passage' that introduced elite young men, and increasingly women too, to the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance, to the rich geography of the Continent, and to the different political systems of European nations. Resonating with Humboldt's theorisation of *Bildung*, its aim was precisely to foster in them critical views on the world, including their own culture. See for example, Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992) and Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London: Flamingo, 2002).

Belonging to that group of privileged female travellers who had the means to document their voyages,[41] Bodichon verbalised her experiences in her letters. In them, she expressed the transformation she underwent as a result of travelling. For example, after her honeymoon trip across today's United States and Canada she confessed to her American friend Caroline Dall:[42]

> You have no idea how very conservative England appears after America. I must say I see things with a different eye after [my] American experience.[43]

Indeed, as Kristi Siegel and others have pointed out, whether it is put into written words or not, travelling elicits 'identity upheaval'.[44] Frédéric Regard, drawing on Gayatri Spivak's claim that the 'empire messes with identity', suggests that 'the colonizing subject's identity, too, is distorted in the process of encounter'.[45] Resonating with this view of self-refashioning as a result of the encounter with the Other, this article argues that Bodichon's travelling stands for one means through which she undertook her self-alienation. As we shall now see, her nomadic lifestyle provided her with a wide variety of settings through which she extended towards the unknown and incorporated it into her sense of being. In turn, as put forward in the previous section, letters functioned as forums where, experiencing self-alienation, she made sense of encountering the difference through which she individualised her subjectivity.

With the aim of underlining both the lifelong nature of education and the variety of geographical settings in which it may be acquired, the letters singled out in the following sections range from early epistles written during Bodichon's twenties, to missives written as a married woman living and travelling abroad. Moving away from traditional understandings of personal correspondence that regard letters as mirroring the truth about historical figures, new theorisations of the use of letters in historical research conceive letter-writing as a site of struggle where individuals attempt to create meaning out of their lives.[46] As I have argued elsewhere, I read letter-writing as *performative* autobiographical acts of self-formation, whereby letter-writers work out their subjectivity through the signifying practice of self-narrating by means of their epistolary 'I' – in dialogue with culturally embedded discourses and determined by the features of the epistolary genre (most notably the intrinsic presence of the epistolary 'you'). Letters act as spaces where letter-writers uncritically adopt, partially or openly challenge, and individually re-appropriate (gender) normativity. Concurrently, as dialogical acts, letters inherently involve an addressee: the epistolary 'you'. The addressee determines the epistolary narrative strategies (content, tone, form, handwriting) adopted

[41] Kristi Siegel, 'Intersections: Women's Travel and Theory', in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, ed. Kristi Siegel (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 2.
[42] She was an American transcendentalist writer and women's rights supporter.
[43] Bodichon to Caroline Dall, Ladies Reading Rooms, 14 Princes Street, Cavendish Square, September 19, 1858, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, USA.
[44] Siegel, 'Intersections', 7.
[45] Frédéric Regard, ed., preface to *British Narratives of Exploration: Case Studies of the Self and Other* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 4.
[46] Elizabeth J. MacArhur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Jan Montefiore and Nicky Hallett, 'Lives and Letters', *Journal of European Studies* 32 (2002): 97–318; Máire Cross and Caroline Bland, eds., *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004): 201–35; Margaretta Jolly, *Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2008); Maria Tamboukou, *Nomadic Narratives, Visual Forces: Gwen John's Letters and Paintings* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Maria Tamboukou, *In the Fold Between Power and Desire: Women Artists' Narratives* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

by the epistolary 'I', ultimately producing multiple and nuanced epistolary voices in a single letter-writer. In turn, the act of projecting nuanced self-images in accordance with each correspondent permits letter-writers to explore their subjectivity. Each set of correspondences sent to a particular addressee creates a new scenario where letter-writers venture into different self-portraits. Ultimately, writing to such a variety of epistolary 'you' maximises letter-writers' opportunities for identity re-signification.[47]

In line with these revised theorisations, the following excerpted letters are read as epistolary articulations of *Bildung*. The argument is that Bodichon developed her self-cultivation during her lifetime – a phenomenon not directly accessible to historians. Simultaneously, parallel to the act of communicating with family, friends and acquaintances, she put her self- formation into words via her epistolary narratives. As sites for narrative self-understanding, the acts of letter-writing functioned as platforms where, mobilising discourses, she critically engaged with the world around her. Within this epistolary development of *Bildung*, her process of self-cultivation was prompted by the versatile articulations of her identity – her multiple epistolary 'I's. The variety of addressees to whom she wrote further stimulated Bodichon's articulation of her self-alienation as effected by travelling.

Austria, 1850: 'feelings about freedom and justice in politics and government'

In 1850 Bodichon and Parkes, aged 23 and 21 respectively, embarked on an unchaperoned trip in Continental Europe. They travelled through Belgium, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The two friends travelled with books and painting material with a view to putting words and images to their impressions. In her letters to her sisters (Bella and Nanny), Bodichon gave written voice to the exhilarating experience of travelling freely from country to country with her best friend. They dressed comfortably in loose-fitting short skirts above the ankle and were equipped with thick-soled boots and blue-tinted spectacles. Their outfits did not go unnoticed. The two travel fellows confided to Nanny and Bella their unsuccessful encounters with young Germans in a self-derisory narrative style – full of pride in their independence of spirit. The latter were half appalled, half amused by their outfits. For example, in Heidelberg, Parkes met a young German up in a castle during 'a glorious [but damp] sunset'. They 'talked of romantic old times (such a towering subject, suggestive of knights, lady lovers etc),' but the young man's heart cooled when he noticed the 'Big Boots' she had decided to put on for the sake of comfort, without paying attention to any 'female adornment'.[48]

To her paternal aunt, Julia Smith, Bodichon rather opted for dramatically expressing her views about the political contexts she encountered. From Austria, she expressed her profound distrust of the Habsburgs:

> I did not know before, how intense, how completely a part of my soul were all feelings about freedom and justice in politics and government. I did not think, when I was so glad to go in Austria, how the sight of people ruled by the sword in place of law, would stir up my heart, and make me feel as miserable as those who live under it.[49]

[47]Meritxell Simon-Martin, 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's Travel Letters: Performative Self-Formation in Epistolary Narratives', *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013): 225–38; Meritxell Simon-Martin, '"More Beautiful than Words & Pencil Can Express": Barbara Bodichon's Artistic Career at the Interface of her Epistolary and Visual Self-Projections', *Gender & History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 61–79.

[48]Parkes to [Bella and Nanny Leigh Smith], [1850], GCPP Parkes 6/65.

[49]Bodichon to Julia Smith, [Austria, 1850], cited in Hester Burton, *Barbara Bodichon, 1827–1891* (London: J. Murray, 1949), 33.

The Leigh Smiths were a politically and philanthropically engaged family. Bodichon's father and grandfather were Liberal MPs and her paternal aunt participated in abolitionist and free trade activities during the 1830s and 1840s. From an early age, Bodichon also took part in the political and literary salons her father organised in his London and Hastings homes, where she discussed the dominant debates of the time with leading figures. Bodichon seems indeed to have been imbued with her family's insights concerning politics. Encountering difference in Habsburg Austria, with its 'people ruled by the sword in place of law', provided Bodichon with the opportunity to further forge her individuality – here, gaining awareness and reinforcing her democratic and liberal political stance. Undergoing the process of narrative self-interpretation outlined earlier, in her narrative Bodichon undertook critical mimesis by revising and assessing previous beliefs – her 'feelings about freedom and justice in politics and government'. She already had these feelings (largely informed by her family's political commitments). But first-hand experience of Austrian life awakened in her a renewed self-understanding – one that considered the principles of freedom and justice as 'intense' and 'complete[ly]' parts of her soul and made her feel solidarity with 'those who live under' the sword. Through this process of self-narrating 'emplotment', Bodichon responded to the transformative experience of encountering difference by connecting her first-personal perspective (her personal beliefs, her emotions when confronted by 'the sword') to her politically committed family background and upbringing, and by distancing from the values represented by the Habsburgs.

In the process of forging her individuality, in her epistolary narrative, Bodichon challenged dominant discourses on bourgeois femininity that considered travelling, let alone travelling on her own, inappropriate for a lady. Indeed, Kristi Siegel, Ruth Jenkins and Sukanya Banerjee note that, in order to deflect criticism, female travellers employed a narrative stance that maintained a rigorous code of propriety. In their travel writing they strained the conventions of femininity but without breaking them.[50] For example, convinced of the necessity of self-justification, they began their narrative with an apology for engaging in such an improper activity and justified it in terms of enduring the voyage for the needs of others: as a colonial wife or as the daughter of a man who left work unfinished. Because their travelling provoked responses of paternalism, pity and apprehension, female travellers sought to 'distance themselves from the "horror" they in fact embodied'.[51] Others continually strove to demarcate themselves from 'the narrative liberties exercised by male travel writers', authoring themselves as distinctly female travel writers instead.[52] In contrast, without losing her caste as a 'lady' but going against sanctioned modes of female travelling and writing, Bodichon, without feeling the need to justify herself, invariably projected herself as a venturesome tourist voyaging out of curiosity and for the sake of pleasure, commenting on the political and social realities of the peoples she encountered – an attitude marked primarily as 'masculine'. In this sense, by assuming 'masculine' attributes and roles, Bodichon underwent what some authors have termed 'gender transvestism'.[53] With no sense of subtlety, in the above excerpted letters, Bodichon projected to her sisters the image of an autonomous self-indulgent young woman; simultaneously, following the Leigh

[50]Siegel, 'Intersections', 2–3.
[51]Ruth Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler: Spectacles and Phenomena', in Siegel, *Gender, Genre, and Identity*, 17, 19.
[52]Sukanya Banerjee, 'Lady Mary Montagu and the "Boundaries" of Europe', in Siegel, *Gender, Genre, and Identity*, 36.
[53]Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler', 16, 26.

Smiths' tradition, she presented herself to her family as a politically aware and committed citizen, wholeheartedly endorsing the advancement of justice and democracy. Her exposure to difference – to 'the sight of people ruled by the sword' – became a self-alienating experience that confidently reaffirmed Bodichon's self-conception as a freewheeling and politically committed young woman.

This process of critical mimesis was taken a step further when seven years later, during her honeymoon trip across North America, Bodichon revised her views on the nature and degree of freedom secured in England.

North America, 1857–1858: 'freedom, real freedom'

Bodichon and her husband married in London in July 1857. At the end of the summer, the couple set off on a 10-month honeymoon trip across America and Canada. In the letters she wrote home, Bodichon also projected versatile articulations of her self-alienation during her American trip. In her letters to the Leigh Smiths, Bodichon wrote long passages giving her opinion of American society while she reassured her maternal aunt (Dorothy Longden) about her marital happiness. In her letters to Longden, Bodichon made sense of her new marital status and informed of her blissfulness, giving accounts of their household arrangements and daily routine. Bodichon assured her aunt Dorothy:

> If you were here I would give you a very curious birthday dinner: queer fish, gumbo soup, roast grey squirrel, boiled wildcat, omelette of alligators' eggs, seven fried bananas and cocoanuts…. Aunty dear: you need not be afraid of the Doctor not taking care of me. He takes the same sort of care of me that Miss Hays used to do at Roughwood, and you said I should not find a husband who would do so. He is something like her in his ways – not so elegant, but more –.[54]

Simultaneous to her making sense of her married life, Bodichon also redefined her political outlook while in America. To her father, Aunt Julia and siblings, she wrote:

> This is really a free country in the respect of having no privileged class – excepting the class of white over black. White men are free in America and no mistake! My wonder is great at the marvellous manner in which the country governs itself. I find myself saying continually, 'this is a free country'. One is so little used to freedom, real freedom, even in England that it takes time to understand freedom, to realize it. Nothing sent from upper powers to be worshipped or humbly listened to, no parsons sent by a class of born rulers to preach and lecture to another class born to submit and pay. No race of men with honours they have not earned and power over others which the others have not consented them. Heavens what a difference! Here all who hold power are heaved up by the people, of the people. Until I came to America I hardly felt the strange want of rational liberty in England.[55]

Resonating with *Bildung*'s self-alienation effected by exposure to difference, Siegel highlights that 'For many women, comparisons of home and abroad provided a subtle method of critiquing their own culture'.[56] Like them, 'plunging' into the unknown ('real freedom'), Bodichon's first-hand experience in America led her to revise her understanding regarding her own country and come up with a redefined political outlook. In her self-writing, Bodichon underwent a sort of opposite process of narrative integration to her Austrian experience: in her interpretation of her new American circumstances, she linked her (past)

[54]Bodichon to Jo Gratton, New Orleans, December 21 [1857], cited in *An American Diary 1857–1858*, ed. Joseph W. Reed (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 67.
[55]Bodichon to her family, [New Orleans], December 27 [1857], ibid., 72.
[56]Siegel, 'Intersections', 5.

personal beliefs to distance herself from her own outlook. Before her American trip, England epitomised political freedom and justice. It is this referent against which she compared the 'rule of sword' in Austria during her European trip six years earlier. However, her exposure to a different society and a different political organisation ('the marvellous manner in which the country governs itself') urged her to question this referent. After her trip, it seemed to her that there was no 'real freedom' in England compared with America. The desirable democratic British parliamentary monarchy that Bodichon wished to be exported to other European countries that were still ruled by despotism became a deficient system as a result of her encounter with difference, ie 'real freedom'. And Bodichon found it difficult to accommodate this upheaval: 'One is so little used to freedom … that it takes time to understand freedom, to realize it'.

At the same time, undergoing an in-depth process of critical mimesis, while criticising England for its lack of 'real freedom', she also put into question this 'real freedom' in America by highlighting the privileges of the 'white over black' – a narrative integration similar to her Austrian experience. In making her American experience intelligible to herself and to her addressees via her epistolary self-writing, she interpreted her encounter with slavery by connecting again her self-understanding – the outcome of her self-ascription over time – to her upbringing and family background, with which she identified. Slavery was indeed a recurrent theme in her American travel writing. Bodichon's grandfather, William Smith, a wholesale grocer who imported sugar, teas and spices, campaigned for the abolition of slavery against his business interests. He subscribed to the *Anti-slavery Reporter*, and, as an MP for Sudbury (Suffolk), he contributed to introducing petitions against the slave trade in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Her aunt Julia Smith was involved in the anti-slavery movement in the late 1830s–early 1840s, campaigning against the apprenticeship system in the West Indies and against slavery in other parts of the world as auxiliary in the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. This political engagement against slavery was passed down to her through her father's and aunt's campaigning. Hence, in America, Bodichon went to several slave auctions on her own. Both auctioneers and sellers welcomed her and answered her questions politely. But Bodichon reported home how they distorted the truth about the slave trade: 'He [one of the auctioneers] said husbands could not be separated from wives, nor children until twelve from parents, that a slave if ill treated could demand a sale to change his master!'[57] Her talk to both slaves and free blacks showed her that these cases were the exception rather than the rule.

As Corinne Fowler points out, 'exilic displacement "from the familiar" implies that "cultural formations" have been transcended' and the apparent possession of insider knowledge commonly acts as an authorising strategy in asserting one's expertise.[58] Undergoing this 'exilic displacement', Bodichon's experience of self-alienation on the question of slavery coupled with her claim to eyewitness authority was translated into a reaffirmation of her stance and into an empowering authorial position. In her eyes, the credibility she gained as a witness of slavery made her a trustworthy commentator and conferred on her the authority to question works on this topic by other English visitors. In line with those tourists who

[57]Bodichon to her family, New Orleans, December 26, 1857, in Reed, *An American Diary,* 70.
[58]Corinne Fowler, 'The Problem of Narrative Authority: Catherine Oddie and Kate Karko', in Siegel, *Gender, Genre, and Identity*, 214, citing Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), 81.

'often prided themselves upon correcting the reports and views of previous travelers',[59] she was disdainful of the publications by female social commentators Amelia Murray and Frederika Bremer for example. Exerting her narrative authority, she justified her opinion on the grounds that these women had not been exposed to the realities of slavery as she had:

> I have read tonight nearly all of Miss Murray's book which has any opinions or facts about slavery. Lately also I have read Miss Bremer, and not long ago Stirling, sir C. Lyell, and Dickens' notes – and all seem to me to be very poor books on a rich subject. The two ladies lived with ladies and polite gentlemen and saw nothing of the life of the lowly I have seen during my nine weeks in New Orleans – a hundred times more of the real facts of slavery than those two ladies – and yet I could not dare to give my opinions except to say their opinions are founded on very insufficient data and that the evils I see here are immense, and the corrupting influence of this system so bad, so deep, that it seems almost impossible to exaggerate it…. My acquaintance with them has shown me much of African and New Orleans life which no English lady ever saw before. [60]

Ultimately, in the excerpted letters, Bodichon projected herself as a woman with a right to express her own voice on 'masculine' topics – politics, state systems and slavery. And she did so in the confident voice of an insider – for she had experienced the difference between 'freedom' and 'real freedom' as well the 'truth' about slavery – that directly challenged dominant beliefs in blissful female ignorance and ladylike modesty.

Informed by what she experienced in America, Bodichon seemed to go as far as to question class hierarchies back in England when she praised American society and government: 'Nothing sent from upper powers … others have not consented them'. As quoted above, she had never considered questioning her English reference prior to her experience of this 'free country'. This self-criticism can be interpreted as implying a re-evaluation of the political beliefs defended by her family (which informed her outlook, as previously mentioned). Although not explicitly articulated, putting into question the roots of her own outlook would imply a thorough critical engagement. Yet, her new apparently 'classless' viewpoint stands in contrast to the British bourgeois standpoint from which she spoke in other epistolary narratives.

Indeed, thus far, Bodichon's epistolary narratives suggest a positive outcome of her self-alienation as effected by travelling. By critically incorporating difference into her self-conception she disrupted sanctioned modes of womanhood. Prompted by the versatile articulations of her critical thinking that she projected according to her addressee, she engaged with beliefs and customs that challenged gender normativity – eg sanctioned modes of female travelling – in a distinct way. Writing to her sisters, she explored the freedom of unchaperoned travelling in the form of exciting socialisation with young men. Writing to her maternal aunt, she worked out a feminist understanding of wifehood at the heart of her marital union. Writing to her family on her father's side, she revised her political outlook and reaffirmed her self-conception as a politically committed citizen. Ultimately, Bodichon's epistolary narratives suggest that she did manage to subvert *Bildung*'s masculinist underpinnings: her letters are testimony to her fashioning her individuality as effected by social interaction.

Notwithstanding, Bodichon did not develop her self-cultivation unproblematically. Undergoing a partial process of self-alienation, on certain occasions, she passively absorbed

[59]Donna Landry, 'Love Me, Love My Turkey Book: Letters and Turkish Travelogues in Early Modern England', in *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*, ed. Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 55.
[60]Bodichon to her family, [New Orleans], February 11, 1858, in Reed, *An American Diary,* 99.

dominant discriminatory assumptions. In this sense, *Bildung*'s aforementioned controversial underpinnings can be turned into a productive way of teasing out Bodichon's feminist yet bourgeois and ethnocentric standpoint – that is, her *partial* achievement of *Bildung*. In line with Masschelein and Ricken's take on *Bildung* as a mechanism of power, my suggestion is that Bodichon's epistolary *gebildet* self can be read as illustrating the twofold conceptualisation of power proposed by Foucault – simultaneously oppressive and productive – as well as exemplifying his notion of 'resistance'. On that account, Bodichon's epistolary 'I' was not only an effect of power (as Masschelein and Ricken claim) but also the result of resistance as well as a *relais* – a 'footbridge' – of power. In other words, in keeping with Masschelein and Ricken, Bodichon's epistolary 'I' was an effect of power in that it was articulated within dominant (gendered) discursive regimes. To this I add that, illustrative of Foucault's understanding of resistance as intrinsic to power, Bodichon's epistolary 'I' acted too as the locus of agency: as mentioned, Bodichon did manage to work out her self-cultivation against gendered expectations. Additionally, Bodichon's epistolary 'I' was also a *relais* of power since it contributed to circulating oppressive assumptions about certain social categories. Indeed, as we shall now see, her travel letters suggest that *Bildung*'s requirement to encounter the unknown did not always lead Bodichon to a critical self-assessment that opened up her outlook to difference.

Spain, 1866–1867: 'buying up everything for the South Kensington Museum'

Having been married for almost 10 years, in autumn 1866 Bodichon embarked on her regular voyage to Algeria, on this occasion accompanied by her friend, novelist Matilda Betham Edwards. Instead of crossing France and sailing from Marseilles, the two friends headed towards Algeciras across Spain. In the series of letters she wrote to her friend Marian Evans (novelist George Eliot), Bodichon described her journey as an English visitor giving assertive practical advice on travelling, accommodation, shopping and sightseeing as well as offering confident personal opinions on local culture and customs. Thus for example, she advised her correspondent to carry 'a little hand bag & waterproof bath' to every hotel and 'a very big leather box', because 'size is nothing on railways & you can always leave it everywhere at the depots at the station'.[61] Likewise, she recommended visiting sights such as the cathedrals at Burgos and Toledo, the convents of Las Huelgas and Miraflores, the Prado Museum in Madrid, the mosque at Cordoba, and the Alhambra in Granada.

By recommending these monuments, as Deborah Cherry reminds us in referring to Bodichon's themes in her watercolour landscapes, Bodichon was citing locations that were 'already well known from guidebooks, tourist itineraries, antecedent imagery, colonial histories or archaeological reports'. This demonstrates the extent to which her recommendations were culturally determined.[62] For, as Tim Youngs points out, travellers 'observe and write according to established models … even when they wish to query or depart from them'.[63] Similarly, in terms of narrative approaches to identity-formation, Bodichon linked her self-conception as a regular traveller with a particular understanding of sightseeing

[61]Bodichon to Marian Evans, [Spain, 1866–1867], George Eliot and George Lewes Collection (GEGLC hereafter), Box 7, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, USA.
[62]Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850–1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 88.
[63]Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 209.

– disseminated via travel guides, art books, press articles, personal correspondence, and face-to-face conversations. And the reproduction of this already known sightseeing illustrates too that self-writing only makes sense within the context of broader social, historical and cultural references shared by interlocutors – as already mentioned. Yet, also illustrative of individuals' critical engagement with these references in their narrative self-ascriptions, Bodichon's recommendations were also the outcome of her uniquely experienced first-hand contact with Spanish culture. Hence, her exposure to cultural difference permitted her to further redefine her self-understanding as a traveller. By using her authorial power as a regular voyager to assess the cultural worth of these sights, she claimed to be a legitimate source of expertise.

Bodichon's direct contact with Spanish culture was indeed turned into a renewed self-conception as knowledgeable in art. Regarding herself as an accomplished professional artist, she projected a self-image as an expert in Arab culture and art with no signs of modesty by virtue of her expertise as an insider, ie as a resident in Algeria and frequent traveller. Thus, Bodichon recommended wandering about the streets of Cordoba and diving 'into the open shops, which are all arranged like Arab shops so that you can study all the manufactures of the place'. Writing in a commanding tone, she highlighted the remarkable 'likeness to Algiers' as for the 'forms, colours & trades'. Her detailed and precise narrative is evocative of the kind of accurate and careful descriptions written by male specialists:

> For example the Arabs have a rough simple way of turning wood, holding a bow (like a violin bow) in the right hand which turns the wood round while the left hand presses the chisel & the toes of the foot are used to direct it. Here in Cordoba I saw 4 or 5 Spaniards sitting on low seats turning exactly like Arabs – in another shop I saw weaving in rough handlooms exactly like Arab looms & the patterns were Arab patterns, they were weaving camels for the mules.[64]

Likewise, having visited the cathedral and the monasteries of Las Huelgas and La Cartuja de Miraflores in Burgos, Bodichon wrote:

> We saw Burgos very well but it is worth a month's study. Nothing can exceed the richness & picturesqueness of the cathedral…. The next day I wandered about with Streets Gothic Architecture in Spain & saw everything he writes about. Two remarks I have to make [.] he [sic] says there is no influence of the moors in the buildings. Here I think this is not true. The wooden doors of the Convent of Las Huelgas & of the Cathedral are of the exact panelling of the oldest doors in Algiers. There are also in the Convent of Miraflores in the sills of the arches which look out on that most dreary of monastic graveyards some tiles which I believe to be Moorish
>
> [Detailed drawing of a tile with caption: 'All the colours outlined in chocolate colour & the pattern [slightly?] raised Bright blue'.[65]

In the above excerpts Bodichon followed an already established tradition of female travellers using the written medium to assert their expertise.[66] And, in keeping with Cherry and Youngs' take, her epistolary voice was imbued with circulating understandings of the nature and value of (Arab, Spanish) culture. Yet, her judgement of the value (and, as we shall see, the state) of Spanish art was also the result of her own engagement with ongoing discourses.

[64]Bodichon to Marian Evans, France and Spain, [November–December 16] 1866, GEGLC Box 7.
[65]Bodichon to Marian Evans, France and Spain, [November–December 16] 1866, GEGLC Box 7
[66]See for example Betty Hagglund, *Tourists and Travellers: Women's Non-fictional Writing about Scotland, 1770–1830* (Bristol and Buffalo, NY: Channel View, 2009).

On the one hand, Bodichon broke with masculinist understandings of authorial power. Reappropriating the traditionally 'masculine' omniscient and commanding standpoint,[67] she took in a feminist subject position that neutralised the assessment of an unnamed male author on the influence of the Arabs in Spanish art by virtue of her expertise as an artist resident in Algeria and her know-how as a regular voyager. To assert her authority she resorted to a detailed drawing of a tile to support her claim – as if the visual provided her with a better medium to demonstrate her expertise. In her narrative, Bodichon articulated a process of self-alienation that permitted her to reaffirm and expand her artistic self-conception. Discovering the Arab influence on Spanish art and culture was translated into a reinforced artistic identity and into a renewed authorial voice that now expanded to Arab-Spanish expertise. This self-alienation was articulated within a feminist epistolary voice that claimed her and women's right to authorise themselves as cultural referents.

On the other hand, Bodichon's empowerment took place at the expense of certain social categories. Simultaneous to her subject position as knowledgeable in art, drawing on the dominant bourgeois discourse of British economic, political and cultural superiority, she used her authorial power to justify the appropriation of Spanish artwork. Bodichon was indeed impressed by the 'richness & picturesqueness' of Spain's sites and provided long detailed descriptions of their beauty. Yet, she utterly deplored the poor state of the buildings. Referring to the cathedral in Toledo she commented:

> Here the feeling of every thing going to ruin is quite terrible it really saddens me. It seems, if you would see anything you must come at once. 'This tower fell down last winter' said Cabezas [their guide] showing us a mass of Moorish ruin in the ditch & again in the Moorish houses he showed us ceilings half destroyed & told us a few years ago you could see all the colours & gilding.[68]

Based on her intercultural contact, Bodichon judged that the Spaniards were uncultured people, full of 'ignorance, stupidity and greed' and incapable of taking care of their own artistic treasures.[69] Having pointed out the poor state of their monuments, she concluded:

> It is really pitiful to see so much pure beauty unappreciated everywhere here in Spain. I really am quite reconciled to England buying up everything for the South Kensington Museum! That seemed to me wicked before I came & saw how utterly the best things are uncared for here.[70]

Conceiving the epistolary 'I' as the locus of a critical engagement with an intersectionality of discourses, Bodichon's epistolary narrative reveals her articulation of the feminist claim of women's right to an authorial voice within a mindset that took for granted British middle-class superiority – a dominant bourgeois discourse she shared with her social counterparts and her audience. In her epistolary narrative Bodichon undertook only a partial self-alienation: she was caught in cultural assumptions she did not call into question. Indeed, as discussed earlier, *Bildung*'s ideal of self-alienation implies distancing oneself from one's beliefs as a way of acquiring an open attitude towards new perspectives. It is the responsibility of individuals to broaden their mindsets as a way of improving society. And Humboldt emphasised the role of travelling as a particularly productive means through which man is exposed to difference. Moving away from this ideal, Bodichon's letters reveal that travelling

[67]Shirley Foster and Sarah Mills, eds., *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 178–9.
[68]Bodichon to Evans, France and Spain, [November– December 16] 1866, GEGLC Box 7.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid.

did not always lead to a complete critical mimesis in which the encounter with difference was translated into self-criticism. They unveil the extent to which her outlook was caught by unchallenged prejudices and hence the subject positions she constructed in her epistolary narratives were articulated within an exclusionary standpoint.

Conclusion

In the context of today's renewed interest in *Bildung* among theorists of education, Masschelein and Ricken describe this educational project as a mechanism of power that involves simultaneously a process of individualisation and a particular 'interpellation' in which people become part of a sociality embedded in hierarchical normativity. On that account, autonomy, self-alienation and individuality as promoted by *Bildung* may be regarded as a fallacy. For self-determining human beings are in fact the effect of normative subjectivities; critical mimesis is hardly practicable since, as Christiane Thompson reminds us, 'our perspective remains inextricably bound to the structures and categories of our own cultural and social background';[71] and one's individuality is but a particularisation of a society constituted by hierarchical powers. As such, as Michael Wimmer points out, *Bildung* may be interpreted as 'nothing but an illusion, an idea or a promise that even after 200 years, we are still far from seeing realized'.[72]

In keeping with this critical scholarship, Bodichon's *Bildung* should be interpreted as an unachieved (unattainable?) scheme. Instead of regarding *Bildung* as a doomed project, this article has put into play a narrative model of this educational concept as a way of exploring fruitful alternative informal sources of education for bourgeois (adult) women in the context of mid-Victorian England. As noted in the introduction, Flint has highlighted the potential social implications of the apparently private activity of reading among literate women; and Bodichon's biographer, Hirsch, has pointed out how reading groups and letter-exchange proved to be an informal learning input. In her study, Flint focuses on the act of reading as a site for active self-formation. In this sense, Hirsch's emphasis on both reading *and* writing letters as enriching Bodichon's access to education – although briefly discussed – further advances Flint's argument. Drawing on Regard's analysis of identity transformation as effected by encountering the Other, this article has complemented Flint's and Hirsch's more positive take on the potential of informal inputs of education for women. By incorporating travelling and writing travel letters as instruments for *Bildung*, it has both further elaborated letter-writing as a source of education and expanded the positive implications of (female) daily activities (eg reading, travelling) as sites for self-formation. Thus, this article has argued that, in line with *Bildung*'s notion of self-alienation, Bodichon's travelling brought about the exposure to the unknown that acted as input to her self-cultivation. In line with narrative approaches to identity-formation, this process of critical mimesis was in turn articulated in her travel letters which, today, offer snapshots of her epistolary meaning-creation of her 'lived' educative travels. Additionally, putting *Bildung*'s problematic underpinnings into use, this article has brought out the extent to which the self-formation prompted by informal

[71]Christiane Thompson, 'Adorno and the Borders of Experience: The Significance of the Nonidentical for a "Different" Theory of *Bildung*', *Educational Theory* 56, no. 1 (2006): 69–87.
[72]Michael Wimmer, 'Ruins of *Bildung* in a Knowledge Society: Commenting on the Debate about the Future of *Bildung*', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 23, no. 2 (2003): 167–87.

sources of education (ie travelling) was articulated within exclusionary standpoints – that is, how female agency was exercised to the detriment of certain social categories.

Thus, the excerpted letters have shown how, in her epistolary self-writing, Bodichon projected versatile verbalisations of her encounter with difference via her manifold epistolary 'I's by virtue of the multiplicity of correspondents to whom she wrote. In this process of narrative integration in which she connected the different perspectival and temporal dimensions of her self-conception in response to her ongoing experiences, Bodichon critically engaged with (gender) normativity. Challenging sanctioned modes of 'feminine' travelling in her narrative self-ascription, she projected herself to family and friends as an adventurous autonomous young woman, as a self-assertive wife at the heart of her marriage, as a self-critical, politically committed citizen, and as a confident artist, expert in aesthetics and Arab art. These multifaceted epistolary travel narratives stand for nuanced articulations of her critical mimesis as effected by her nomadic lifestyle.

As the locus of a critical engagement with an intersectionality of discourses, Bodichon's epistolary 'I' re-appropriated normativity, contributing to the circulation of a revised conceptualisation of the category of 'female traveller'. Nevertheless, Bodichon's travel letters also reveal that hers was a limited counter-discourse. Failing to overcome certain prejudices, her resulting standpoint was caught by bourgeois and ethnocentric assumptions she did not put into question. Moving away from *Bildung*'s idea of reaching progress by virtue of individuals' self-cultivation, Bodichon drew on the discourse of British middle-class superiority and thereby contributed to the reaffirmation of this cultural prejudice. While she helped redefine the category of 'female traveller' as an adventurous observer capable of relevant expertise, she did so at the expense of leaving unchallenged an element that underpinned white (upper-) middle-class Western travelling more generally: the belief in the superiority of Western culture over the backward Other. All in all, Bodichon's travel writing shows that, in her narrative attempt to make sense of the experience of living a human life over time, she did develop her *Bildung* – she succeeded in challenging this male-oriented educational notion by mobilising dominant discourses. Yet, in line with current critical readings of *Bildung*, she did so within a mindset that left unchallenged certain discursive traditions.

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