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Writing feminist genealogies

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ABSTRACT In this paper I considered the critical role of auto/biographies in the writing of a Foucauldian genealogy of women teachers in the fin-de-siècle Britain. In isolating points of convergence between feminist theories and the Foucauldian genealogical project, I explore the deployment of self-technologies of women teachers in a particular historical stage and geographical site, which I have identified as having a particular genealogical significance. What I suggest is that a genealogical approach to women teachers' auto/biographical writings at the turn of the century, creates new perspectives from where to theorise the different modes in which they chose to mould themselves and calls into question given discourses surrounding the persona of the woman teacher.

Dangerous encounters

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience - always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring or disfunctioning in things I saw in the institutions in which I dealt in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography.

(Foucault, in: Rajchman, 1985, p.36)

This paper is concerned with the encounter of feminisms, Foucauldian genealogies and autobiographical writings. What I want to explore is how women's autobiographical writings can inform the writing of a feminist genealogy.

The 'use' of Foucault has created a lot of tensions in feminist debates. As Rosi Braidotti has commented however, 'the theoretical programmes suggested by Foucault and Deleuze respectively are, in contemporary philosophy, the least harmful to women' (Braidotti, 1997, p.124). In this light, a number of themes have been picked up by feminist analysts who have discovered mutual points of problematisation as well as common areas of concern with Foucault.

Chris Weedon (1987) has considered Foucault's theorisation of the subject as the most interesting area of his work, for feminists. In her reading of genealogy as resistance, Jana Sawicki (1991) has suggested that genealogy opens the way for a historical knowledge of struggles, since it uses history to give voice to the marginal and submerged voices which lie 'hidden from history' and focuses attention on specific situations, thus leading to more concrete analyses of particular struggles. Feminist theorists have further problematised the subject within a Foucauldian framework [1]. Foucault's project of genealogy has particularly intrigued feminists who have drawn on his work, to explore the complex and multifarious ways that the female subject has been historically and culturally constructed. But what is genealogy?

Genealogy is Foucault's suggestion for doing research. It is both a mode of reflection on the nature and development of modern power and a theoretical tool for doing research. A key insight in genealogy is that truth cannot be separated from the procedures of its production. Consequently genealogy is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are produced, in what Foucault calls the discursive regime of the modern era. Instead of asking in which kinds of discourse we are entitled to believe, Foucault's genealogies pose the question of which kinds of practices, linked to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure.

Genealogy conceives human reality as an effect of the interweaving of certain historical and cultural practices, which it sets out to trace and explore. The subject in the genealogical analysis, is socially constructed in discursive practices, but at the same time, able to reflect upon these very discursive relations that constitute it, capable of resistance and able to choose from the options produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. What is significant in the genealogical strategy is exactly this conceptualisation of human reality as practices or technologies, which are to be analysed and deconstructed from within. Foucault maps out four domains of such technologies: first the *technologies of production*, second the *technologies of sign systems*, third the *technologies of power* and fourth the *technologies of the self*. These technologies of the self, 'permit individuals to effect, by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform themselves' (Foucault, 1988, p.18). As I will show further on in this paper Foucault's conceptualisation of the self as a set of technologies, has been particularly influential in the project of writing a feminist genealogy which will draw on women's autobiographical writings.

In the project of writing feminist genealogies, I have therefore identified Foucault's work as embodying a certain scepticism that has been critically useful: first, his genealogies as alternative methods for social and historical research have opened paths that could lead to those selves hidden in 'little dramas, unimportant events, unpromising places' (Hacking, 1991, p.28), the female selves, and second, his technologies of the self have sketched lines of analysis that, as Probyn has suggested, can be bent towards sexed/female selves: 'I think that in taking up Foucault's turn to the technologies of self we may find other perspectives on theoretical levels at which we can sex the self' (Probyn, 1993, p.116). What I want to show now is how these Foucauldian trails are interwoven in the writing of a feminist genealogy.

Mapping the genealogical domain

My interest in writing a genealogy of women in education drawing on auto/biographical writings of late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries, relates to my own autobiography, my lived experiences as a woman teacher, but it certainly goes beyond the limits of the personal. I have seen education as a hot area of genealogical research, an arena of antagonistic discourses, a site of power from which women have been traditionally excluded. A whole web of discourses,

special knowledges, analyses, legal and institutional arrangements, have settled upon this historical exclusion. Education, however, has been also the locus where counter-discourses and counter-practices emerged, to oppose the truth regimes and social structures that had legitimated and perpetuated women's exclusion. I have therefore started from the recognition, that women in education, fighting for autonomy and self-assertion, formulate a grid of analysis for genealogical research.

In the process of my inquiries, I have wondered where I should look for what Foucault (1986) has called 'grey documents' (p.76), of genealogy. Stressing the importance of writing in the formation of the technologies of the self, Foucault (1988) has traced various activities related to the writing of the self, including 'taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order 'to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed' (p. 27). Writing has also been a crucial theme in feminist explorations of the subject. Domna Stanton (1984) has argued that the female subject constitutes itself through writing. In rewriting her life, the author of the female self does not produce an autobiography but a *female autograph*. Shari Benstock (1988) designates female self-writing as a way of bridging the gap between 'self' and 'life' in an attempt to negotiate space from which to constitute a self. In this light, reading forgotten women's diaries, letters, auto/biographies and memoirs has offered me invaluable experience of genealogical research. Emerging from the dark spheres of history, women's self-writings give voice to experiences long unattended and discredited and have revealed various processes of the construction of the female self. Thus, through my readings of women's autobiographical writings I have begun to make sense of how 'through autobiographical writing the self is written out of and into its historical context' (Steedman 1992, p.14) and how this very practice of writing is interwoven in a critical technology of the self.

The genealogy I am suggesting draws on auto/biographical texts of women teachers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the era of the mass involvement of women in education. This period has already proved of particular interest for the historians of women's education. It is a period that signalled major changes in the education of women. There were various reasons for these changes, particularly the evolution of a state system of mass elementary schooling, which resulted in women's participation in the teaching profession, as well as the middle-class movement for the higher education of women. Prentice and Theobald (1991) have underlined historians' recent interest in personal narratives, which can create a different 'history', drawing on the diversity of experiences of women teachers themselves and have pointed out unexplored paths for future feminist research (p.14). In the context of such problematics, I suggest that British women teachers' auto/biographical writings of the fin-de-siècle era, have recorded a whole series of micro events as well as micro discourses, dealing with diverse ideological, political and personal issues. These self-writings either unpublished or long since out of print, has been for me an on-going genealogical exercise.

In exploring the deployment of self-technologies of women teachers in a particular historical stage and geographical site, which I have identified as having a particular genealogical significance, I am interested in fragmented

autobiographical pieces, a system of moments, rather than a narrative of a complete life. Stanton (1984) has argued that in terms of its referentiality autobiography should be considered as an un-ended, fragmentary, and heterogeneous mixture of discourses and histories. The writings of women appear discontinuous, digressive, fragmented and full of personal concerns and are thus opposed to the linear, chronological and coherent male writings which deal dynamically with personal achievements. Benstock (1988) sees the selves of the autobiographies oscillating between various and sometimes contradictory subject positions, trying to survive and find a voice through the act of writing the self. In this process of writing the self, the female subject traces ‘fissures of discontinuity’ that cannot be found in the texts that form the male tradition of autobiographical writing (p. 20).

Clearly, this partial and fragmentary vision is on line with genealogical trails of analysis. Instead of seeing history as a continuous development of an ideal schema, genealogy is oriented to discontinuities. Foucault (1991) sees genealogy as an ‘eventalization’, ‘making visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness which imposes itself uniformly on all’ (p.76). Genealogy seeks the surfaces of events, focussing on micropractices, tracing minor shifts, demonstrating discontinuities and recurrences.

Rereading dusty documents

As Foucault sees it, genealogy involves searching meticulously in the most unpromising places reading and rereading dusty documents, paying attention to unimportant details, trying to discern unheard voices.

Drawing on a variety of autobiographical and biographical sources, I have thus studied textual lives of female teachers in a range of social and cultural contexts, at the turn of the nineteenth century in Britain. College women, first as students and later as teachers were amongst the first I have examined and this was the case of the Girtonian Constance Maynard (unpublished). Her writings reflect aspects of the self-technologies developed by women teachers who studied and taught in the colleges associated with the University of Cambridge and became influential figures in the evolution of university colleges for women. They also reverberate with discourses from the movement for the higher education for women, a movement directly associated with the education of women of the middle classes.

Girton had various institutional and organisational problems, but it was prestigious compared to the sometimes dreadful conditions of the teacher training colleges [2]. It was in this light that I have read autobiographical writings of Winifred Mercier (Grier, 1937). She became a pioneer in the reform of teacher training colleges and later in her life a Girton College don.

Excavating technologies of the self cultivated in spaces where women lived, worked and were educated collectively, I have further considered the self-writings of women who became known for their contribution to the development of girls’ secondary education, a sector that was developed either in girls’ public boarding

schools or in daily high schools for girls [3]. I refer in particular to Dorothea Beale, headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies' College. She was among the few women teachers who achieved renown as individuals and they have consequently been the subjects of several biographies [4]. However, retelling well-known stories in order to destabilise their myths has been a crucial point of revision in the history of feminist thought and it is from this perspective that I have reread the stories of 'Miss Beale'.

In the history of women's education there are also the phenomena of the Assistant Schoolmistresses, women teachers who worked in the secondary sector, after having themselves completed a type of secondary education available for the daughters of the middle class. This is the context of the unpublished diary of Clara Collet, during the seven years (1878-1885) she worked as an Assistant Schoolmistress in a girls' high school in Leicester. It has been commented that like their male colleagues, many women teachers used teaching 'as a stepping stone to more powerful professional or political roles' (Prentice and Theobald, 1991, p.15). Theobald (1999) has further suggested that 'the history of teaching belongs as much to those who left as to those who stayed' (p.21).

Although the self-writings I have referred to were produced within distinct social, financial and cultural conditions, what they reveal as a whole is an extraordinary common area of ideas, feelings and attitudes, that seem to transgress social boundaries in their attempt to open up new directions in women's lives. Seen from a genealogical perspective, they also reveal an extremely interesting area of antagonistic discourses and power relations at play, which interrogate distinctions and dichotomies that have been used to theorise the status of Victorian and Edwardian women in education. Theobald (1999) has pointed out that in the literature on the history of women teachers in the United States and Australia, historians have constructed the lady-teacher as hero, as pioneer, and as exemplar of emerging feminist consciousness. I think that there is an interesting parallelism here with the heroic images of the British pioneers, the women teachers who were actively involved in the movement for the higher education of women from the literature that surrounds their personas and their deeds [5]. After the 1970s feminist historians [6] analysed the complex interweaving of class and gender in the construction of the myths of ladies' education. The lady hero was removed from her pedestal, while the elementary schoolteacher who emerged from the rise of the state schooling was often presented, along with her male colleague, as an unwitting agent of oppression [7]. What I suggest, however, is that a genealogical approach to women teachers' auto/biographical writings at the turn of the century, creates new perspectives from which to theorise the different modes in which they chose to mould themselves. These writings document the significant inflection of the Foucauldian *technologies of the self* in the case of women teachers and open up new directions in the theorisation of the female self. It is following these 'diversions' that this paper now turns.

Living in transition: ambivalence as a technology of the self

My being is becoming divided and at strife. On the one side stand the heart, the conscience and all the aims and aspirations supported by any

education and on the other stands the intellect and power to reason, strong in its own clear and trenchant force. I can find a few points where they agree ... For the most part the two sides are in deadly opposition and as they tug at my soul, I feel as though I should die under the strain. This is no use. ... Well, which I would rather be like? ... the difference is like that between sand and rock. Let me follow the best I know. My heart cannot wait or it will starve to death; my reason can and must wait.

(Maynard, unpublished, chapter 20, p. 473)

This is how Constance Maynard expresses mixed feelings of ‘hopes and hesitation’, in relation to the new directions her life has taken. Maynard, was an early Girtonian student. She came from a strict Evangelical family and had to overcome many difficulties, before she was allowed to sit the examinations to enter Girton College. She later founded Westfield College. She was a prolific writer and produced volumes of diaries, an autobiography and books drawing on autobiographical aspects of her life. In the above extract, her will to *know thyself* interferes with her feelings, in her case, evoked by her strict Evangelical upbringing. ‘Heart’ on the one hand and the ‘power to reason’ on the other seem to be incompatible in Maynard’s self-understanding. She feels disconcerted. She conceptualises her being as ‘divided’ and at ‘stride’ between feelings and reason. Her passionate quest for knowledge and the ability to reason runs the risk of leading her to a life of emotional sterility. Feminist theorists have widely argued that within a cultural system where masculine values dominate, a very firm dichotomy has been established between the feminine and the notion of rationality. This binary opposition has endured tenaciously until the end of the twentieth century and has become a topos in Western political and moral thought.

Constance Maynard has been a representative figure of the middle-class pioneers in the movement for the higher education of women. The genealogical approach to her auto/biographical writings, however, destabilises her persona. The image of the determined pioneer, can also be seen as a grey shadow of an ambivalent woman, slipping in between discourses, grappling with unresolved dilemmas, sometimes leaving them open. Although she decides to ‘follow her heart’, this is a decision, that relates to the urgency of balancing herself, so as to be able to go on coping. The uncertainty fits into the patterns of her life and becomes a source of continuous self-interrogation and discontent. The imperative of *know thyself* initiates a voyage into the contradictions and ambiguities of her inner self. *Know thyself* is rendered into *know yourselves* and learn to live with all of them. But how can that be possible? Here are some thoughts written on her thirtieth birthday:

Thus life is slipping, slipping away from me and while most people have settled prospects by thirty, I cannot believe that life has come in all its fullness but seems to be waiting, ever waiting for some new “dawn” and to feel this is only a transition, only one stage in my slow and uncertain growth.

(Maynard, unpublished, chapter 35, pp.19, 24)

Living in transition is how Maynard conceives and expresses her experience of living with multiple selves. It is a time, when she has accomplished many of her

life aspirations; she has graduated from Girton College and has worked as a teacher for three years. However she still cannot compose a coherent picture of herself. She is waiting for 'a new dawn'. She wants to change again. This ambivalence in the ways she is constructing herself as an educated independent woman at the turn of the nineteenth century is clearly not in line with the image of the determined pioneers of the first wave of feminism. Constance is a woman transcending the boundaries of herself, but the identity she is trying to construct is still obscure, 'a no (wo)man's land'. A feeling of living in existential transit is a theme that often recurs in women teachers' autobiographical writings. Braidotti has expressed her special attachment to 'places of transit, ... in between zones, where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present' (1994, p.18-19) and has further defined them as 'oases of nonbelonging, spaces of detachment, no (wo)man's lands' (Braidotti, 1994, p.19). Although Braidotti refers here to real places of transit, like stations and airport lounges, which she associates with sources of artistic creation for women, I think that the metaphor of transit can be used to stress women's experiences of existential fluidity in real and/or imagined spaces. This is Clara Collet in transition, at a critical point in her life as a teacher:

11-11-1883

I think I am leaving off being a girl; the future does not look very bright and that is a pretty sure sign with me that I am losing the power of building castles in the air which has been my chief delight until now. I am almost coming to a turning point in life I think and how I shall turn out I don't know. I have no particular ambition, have no special power and neither my religious nor social views suggest my clear aim is to be followed. I don't feel exactly unhappy while I am writing this; I only feel emotionless. Tomorrow I shall enjoy life as much as ever and laugh at what I have written;

(Collet, unpublished, pp.70, 71)

Clara Collet was a student of Frances Mary Buss at the North London Collegiate School. At the age of seventeen she left London to become an Assistant Schoolmistress in a girls' high-school in Leicester. While teaching there, she studied both for an external London BA and a teaching qualification. She later left teaching and became a social researcher. Clara Collet is again a woman that crossed the boundaries of her gendered identity and entered the male world to become one of the first women to take an MA in Moral and Political Philosophy. She was an adventurous woman, or wasn't she? In the above extract she feels discontented with her life being very close to abandoning teaching for good. Clara understands the transitional stage in her life through a loss. For her, 'losing the power of building castles in the air' is bound to the fact of losing youth, since she admits that dreaming the impossible has been 'her chief delight'. Morwenna Griffiths has stressed the importance of dreaming impossible dreams in the process of self-creation: 'To change oneself personally and collectively, requires a leap of the imagination, from the current assumptions and patterns into new forms of identity' (1995, p.191). Clara sees the joy of imagining a different self fading as she grows older. Her image of a grown-up self should be more serious and more down-to-earth. However she has no clear ideas about what her future self should

be like. She identifies the ‘negative’ points of her self, no ambition, no special power, and no strong social or religious beliefs. She feels that she lacks all the characteristics that would constitute a coherent, determined (male) identity. In addition she cannot discern emotions. Female gifts have flown away as well. What is this creature then? Where can she find a place for herself? Since she cannot find visible answers, she prefers to try and forget about them. Her future is uncertain and makes her feel anxious and agitated. She thus prefers to enjoy her present, by contemplating the good moments of her past. Foucault has noted that the refusal of a mental attitude turned to the future and the positive value given to the past, is a general theme in the practices of the self in the Stoic and Epicurean philosophy (1997, p.212). Thus, when her ‘tomorrow’, will have become a thing of the past, Clara will be able to enjoy life and laugh at herself. In distancing herself from her gloomy thoughts, she attempts to slide towards the light side of being. Life can be both unbearably heavy and/or unbearably light, Milan Kundera reminds us [8].

I have presented here some fragments from two unpublished autobiographical texts: the autobiography of Constance Maynard which still stays unpublished in the archives of Westfield College and the diary of an Assistant Schoolmistress which also stays unpublished in the archives of the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. Both women, Constance and Clara were prestigious figures of their era. They were also prolific writers and influential feminist researchers have drawn on their work (Vicinus 1985, Miller, 1990, 1996). While reading their self-writings I was intrigued by the fact that despite the fact that they were recognised and published, their personal writings were neglected. In looking more closely at their writings I frequently felt disconcerted myself. There were so many contradictions in these writings that made any attempt to ‘classify’ them extremely difficult, if not impossible. The genealogical reading of their forgotten, unpublished ‘grey’ autobiographical texts, has however, offered me a cluster of possible reasons for their having remained unpublished. What were these women after all? Maynard could be ‘wonderful’ when writing about her experiences at Girton, or when painting the portraits of the other women she was living and working together (1910a). She could also be ‘dreadful’ when writing about the ‘British national values’, or the rigid ‘family’ organisational principles she was adopting for Westfield College (1910b). Clara on the other hand was unbelievably beyond her era when criticising the norms and structures of her society, but cold and absolutely ‘detached’ when writing about other women. She was obviously renouncing all the ‘feminine’ aspects of herself, seduced as it has been commented (Miller, 1990) by the male values of the public sphere she had managed to enter. My project was a feminist genealogy; what could I ‘do with them’? The genealogical approach took me out of this impasse. I was not going to do anything! I was just going to present them as they were: entangled in a network of contradicting and oppositional discourses, travelling around different subject positions, powerful at times, and powerless at others, neither heroes, nor victims of their own lives and deeds. It was on the same line that I explored autobiographical aspects in the letters of two other pioneers, Winifred Mercier and Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham.

Letter-writing as a technology of the self

Long years of both bodily and mental confinement have left their shadows upon women's experience of solitude and reclusion, in ways that are often transcribed in their autobiographical writings. Women experience the paradoxical coexistence of feelings of complacency and frustration in solitude and strive to interweave contradictory and inconsistent experiences and memories into the making of a new self. In such moments of crisis, writing letters to each other turned out to be a significant practice in the set of technologies of self-creation. Winifred Mercier came from Scotland and spent some of the best years of her life, looking after her ill mother. While working as a teacher, she also studied for an external degree from the University of London. Her correspondence with her friend and fellow teacher Borland, offers a view of suffocated feelings and a longing for new intellectual and bodily experiences. Here she is writing to her friend J. K. Borland, in August 1902:

... does not the terrible silence of things oppress you sometimes? ... We are surrounded by such myriad life, so many worlds; I am frightened in their presence.... I should like to live in this world again as a better person. I can do so little to help, and never shall be able to do it, both from lack of character and lack of opportunity.
(Grier, 1937, p.37)

This is a letter about existential fears of silence that Winifred Mercier wants to share with Borland. In searching the sources of miseries in her life she speaks explicitly about the 'lack of opportunity', which she has elsewhere related to her gender:

I always hold that a fine woman, the most perfect woman, is more glorious, more wonderful, can rise to greater heights, and is altogether a more wondrous creation than the best man. I may be wrong, but I always think that the woman unites to the breadth and even balance of a man a power of intuition purely her own, unapproachable by man, which is her most godlike characteristic, her highest gift, and that this intuitive power outweighs the other gifts which the man may possess in greater richness.
(Grier, 1937, p.35)

Far from being stuck in gloomy thoughts however, Mercier and Borland develop a close relationship through their correspondence, where their selves become obviously a theme to work upon, and to be transformed through specific daily practices of care. Exchanging ideas about their reading designates a major level of their communication: '... What do you mean by reading Keats 'at the dead of the night'? Villain! Villain!! Villain!!! I am so moved that I am forced to use exclamation marks. I don't know, I have never found Keats cloying. I had better try him here...' (Grier, 1937, p.31).

Reading sustains the practices of the self, notes Foucault and he cites Seneca's point that 'one could not draw everything from one's own stock or arm' (Foucault, 1997, p.211). In writing to her friend and former pupil, Arnold, in August 1890, Dorothea Beale surveys the books she is currently reading: '... I have already begun a good read; all Lotze's books on religion, *The Children of Gibeon*, part of Stanley, a good deal of Green's philosophical works, and *Lux Mundi*, and endless magazines (Kamm, 1958, p.384). In the middle of an argument with another old pupil of hers, who has

become a writer of philosophy and poetry, Dorothea refers to a reading list: 'Have you read Martineau's *Types of Ethical History*? If not, do. Also Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. Last summer I read Lotze's *Microcosmus*, but I should recommend the two others rather ...' (Kamm, 1958, p.389).

Reading is also closely interrelated with writing in the practices of the self, 'as a way of gathering in the reading that was done and of collecting one's thoughts about it' (Foucault, 1997, p.211). Women teachers' correspondence about their reading is not only a way to exchange thoughts about literary creation, but also a way to reflect upon themselves, through a critical reading of the ethics and morality of the textual characters. This is Mercier again writing to her friend Borland: 'I have just finished 'Harry Richmond'. Great book. I was absorbed. Don't you like it? I find the father very painful, though I admire.... Courage is the half of all virtues, I believe, because all the other fall to pieces without it, indeed many are only specialised forms of courage' (Grier, 1937, p.31).

Sometimes their exchanges go into great depths, touching subtle variations of female gender performance as it is represented in male literature. The intent is to capture what has been written and transmit what they have managed to read, in the process of shaping themselves:

...You must read some more Hardy, Lamb. I believe I know now why I admire him so much and do not think him at all pessimistic. All his women are the tools of destiny, I mean the sport of destiny. They can only stand by and be played upon. They do not shape their own lives, but are the rough from which Life hews out what will fit in with other lives and this from no fault of theirs. They are overpowered. One cannot turn the tide anymore than one can change the wind. We can only wait for the one to turn, or ride with our backs to the other. Man 'may be man and master of his fate', but it is certain that woman is not, except in rare instances and then more by happy, accidental circumstances of birth which coincide with certain types of character.

(Grier, 1937, p.36-37)

However, it is not only reading that preoccupies their communication through letter writing. In Foucault's analyses, 'the letter is a way of presenting oneself to one's correspondent in the unfolding of everyday life' (Foucault, 1997, p.218). In reviewing their daily activities, they highlight the importance of a rhythm of life in stabilising themselves, rather than the exceptional character of their activities. In this kind of epistolary practice, the body is an important site of concern and it is interesting to see of how meticulously they deal with it. Here is an indication of Mercier's daily activities:

I do a little Greek every day. Programme: Greek after breakfast till about 10.30, do a little cooking, etc.: mend, and sit with mother. Dinner. Read, Mend, Tea. Turn with Mother or little walk with the boys. Mend, Read, Supper. Bed, which usually comes as early as 9.15. So I have not much to chronicle.

(Grier, 1937, p.31)

This daily programme is followed by a list of interrogations about Borland's physical condition. Through her letter, Mercier makes herself dynamically present within Borland's life and urges her to open up herself to the gaze of her friend. 'To write is thus to "show oneself," to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence' (Foucault, 1997, p.216). Health reports are included in this tradition of correspondence, and intend both to examine and to advise. The body in its relation to the care of the self is again particularly focused:

Tell me when you write, exactly how you are. In case you don't write to my satisfaction, I propound a list of questions for your answers.

1. Do you sleep well?
2. Do you feel hungry?
3. Has anyone remarked on your looks, if so, what did they say?
4. Are you any fatter?
5. Have you any black rings?
6. How would you like to climb the Merrick tomorrow?

Now on your pencil answer true.

(Grier, 1937, p.32)

Therefore, letter writing turned out to be a critical technology of the social female self. As Kamm has noted, Dorothea Beale was a voluminous correspondent and she enjoyed both receiving and writing letters. Her papers include a very large number of drafts and copies of letters, which she sent, because if she were to write an important letter, she would keep it for a time, to rethink about it or even rewrite it, if necessary. Writing letters was according to her biographer, her first morning activity, even before school (Kamm, 1958, p.382). It seems that through her letters, Dorothea shapes herself through the advice and opinion she gives to her addressees. As Foucault notes, 'The letter one writes, acts through the very action of writing, upon the one who addresses it, just as it acts through reading on the one who receives it' (1997, p.214). Dorothea's letters are saturated by deep religious feelings, but she touches an immense variety of topics and themes. She usually advises former students, who now work as teachers, all over the country, about their work, their readings and the good maintenance of themselves. She points out however that '... I can do nothing in a letter but suggest lines of thought and lines of reading...' (Kamm, 1958, p.390). Here is a letter to her student Arnold, in June, 1881: 'I am so vexed to hear about this chronic headache. Remember it is one of your duties to God, who has given you work, to keep yourself fit, so you must use every means... do not put too great a spiritual strain upon your soul; the body is to have rest and not too great excitement... I believe you ought to do less in the holidays' (Kamm, 1958, p.282). It is obvious, that Dorothea is not only interested in the cultivation of the mind, but also in the good care of the body of her students. Her correspondence is life-long and continues, even if her students have left teaching, to get married. This is a letter to Arnold again, shortly after her marriage, urging her not to give up her mental activities:

... you were much in my mind... it seemed to me that it must be your energies were to be used to the full, and yet your married life, to which you have now been called, does in some degree restrain you ... Today it

seemed to me as if you should still speak, but in writing; you have the power of writing well ... Now see if speaking is not to be your work whether writing is. How I feel I need solitude, and can't write for want of it; but you have solitude enough to enable you to write ... I think the solitude of the cycle will help you too ...

(Kamm, 1958, pp.388-89)

Letter-writing is also an opportunity to exchange philosophical ideas, or even have arguments with her former students. Here is another letter to her old student, the writer of philosophy and poetry, in July 1898:

... I am glad to hear you have come to a satisfactory agreement with Blackwood. It is an advantage to have a leading publisher. Now as regards the sonnet. I don't feel as if anything could make the Eros of later Greek religion pure ... I know there is behind the myth the thought of love, of one who is the offspring of truth and purity, of perfect beauty. But love associated with Eros as we know him, is not love...

(Kamm, 1958, p.394)

Letter writing is not only confined to a bilateral relation. It establishes and sustains a network of communication among intellectual women, through which they are mutually helped and guided. Dorothea, writing again to the above writer of philosophy and poetry, in November 1895: 'I am sending you a little book on *Psychology* by a young teacher and writer ... If you feel inclined to look at it, and give her a few written criticisms I should be glad. We want so much common language in all these subjects, words are used so differently...' (Kamm, 1958, p.392).

Through the exchange of letters, the moral and ethical principles of women's education, freedom, justice, order, independence and responsibility are brought up again. Although these principles draw on the male pedagogical and philosophical tradition, they interrogate the gendered power structures that have sustained this same tradition: '... women have plenty of practice in submitting to little rules. We want to give them discipline of deciding for themselves and acting upon their own responsibility...' commented Emily Davies, the founder of Girton College in one of her letters (Stephen, 1927, p.252).

Living in transition: resisting yourself and the world around you

We have had a glimpse of the various difficulties, contradictions and unresolved dilemmas that some women educationalists were facing in their attempt to mould themselves at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, one might think that these were difficulties arising from personal choices in quite isolated personal cases. Without downplaying the personal dimension in the ways subjects deal with the world around them, what the genealogical approach has brought to the surface is the polyvalent, complex and often contradictory ways through which discursive and non-discursive practices were interwoven in the formation of these very choices. What I have argued is that the genealogical approach has been a useful tool to desacralize the heroic subjects of the 19th century pioneers of women's education, but at the same time, it has enabled an analysis that attempts to go

beyond traditional dichotomies: women teachers either as agents of oppression and bearers of middle-class values, or as victims of their era. It is in this light, that I go on to examine various instances of women in higher education resisting the rigid structures of the educational institutions they had fought so hard to enter, in the first place.

When I came up in October 1874, the lack of cordiality between the authorities and some of the senior students was soon perceptible. The symptom which Miss Townsend has described was only one symptom of a general feeling of resentment against what they considered as unwarrantable interference with their liberty.

(Maynard, unpublished, chapter 12, p.446A)

In this extract, Maynard refers to the tensions that were created at Girton between the students and the Committee about the timetable and the preparation time for the Cambridge examinations. The students felt that the work they had to do was overwhelming and they asked for more time than the male students of Cambridge, while the Committee thought that any differentiation would jeopardise their claims to equality. The tension created between the students and the Committee at Girton reverberated the already existing differences with regard to higher education for women. Since the movement for the higher education of women, was a very strong counter-discourse of the era, it is not surprising that it provoked opposing and contradictory ideas and arguments, concerning its practical applications. It is known and has been widely analysed, that there were two main ideological directions with regard to the best way of leading women to higher education, 'the uncompromising and the separatists' as Sara Delamont calls them (1978, p.154). The former claimed that women's colleges should follow exactly the same procedures and regulations as the traditional university colleges for men, while the latter argued that the particularity of being a woman and having a background of a differently oriented education, should allow for certain exceptions and more lenient regulations.

Apart from the time problem, however there were other problems at Girton, mainly concerning the right of the students to participate in the decisions taken about the structuring of college life. It seems that the students entering the first women's college in Cambridge had taken to heart the vision of liberation and they found it difficult to compromise with the disciplinary rules of the otherwise pioneering institution. Prentice and Theobald (1991) have particularly stressed the need for further analysis of women teachers' practices of resistance (p. 25). Along these lines, what the genealogical approach suggests, is that the analysis of the apparatus of women's education should give credit to the various ways some women, like the Girtonians Constance Maynard and Louisa Lumsden [9] while still students of the colleges, resisted certain disciplinary arrangements of their lives in colleges, as well as the curricula of the male university colleges. As Maynard was writing in her autobiography:

It is quite true that some part of the Early Victorian Standard of right and wrong had been formed by the merest conventions, ... but I confess then died an over-violent death at the hands of these daring young women. Any sort of rule of absolute Right and Wrong was discarded and everything

was for growth, self-expansion and trial of the native powers of experiment.

(Maynard, unpublished, chapter 12, p.445)

Maynard's admiration for what she saw as a total subversion of values at Girton coexists with the fact that later on, when these women moved up in the educational hierarchy, adopted what they had previously fought against. Later compromises, however, cannot ignore the importance of their rebellion as students. What is of more importance in the analysis of the colleges from a genealogical perspective, is not so much the effects of power, but the subjective capacities that were being developed in the attempt to resist the power that had made women what they were. It is through practising *technologies of the self* that some women began to form new moulds of existence, always circulating in a grid of power and resistance.

Writing the self/Playing with the self

In the beginning of this paper I referred to the influential work of Domna Stanton (1984) and Shari Benstock (1988). Their analyses have suggested that women's self writings have often interrogated the supposed coherence and autonomy of the male selves that are represented in the Western tradition. While keeping with the deeply rooted tradition of writing the self, women have also decisively bent its traits. I think that the auto/biographical fragments I have drawn on in this paper, have forcefully illustrated these arguments. What has intrigued me in reading women teachers' self-writings, is the polyvalent contradictory and elusive textual selves this genealogical investigation has come across. These auto/biographical writings have further highlighted the sense of a multifaceted, 'bodily' female subject, who in Braidotti's (1994) theorisation, works upon herself amidst differences within herself and between herself and the 'others', both men and women.

What has also been specifically interesting about women teachers' self-writings is that the female writers interrogate their own authorship in a playful manner within a wider context of ambivalence surrounding their existence and self-assertion as authors of their own lives. Remember how earlier on in this paper, Clara Collet wants to laugh at her 'emotionless' state of being, admitting the temporality of her feelings and foreseeing that 'tomorrow', she will be able to enjoy life again (Collet, unpublished, pp.70, 71). We have also seen that in their writings, women teachers do not hesitate to reveal their inconsistencies, dilemmas and contradictions and often dare speak out their inner fears. Thus Winifred Mercier writes about how 'frightened' she feels about the idea of being 'surrounded by such myriad life, so many worlds' (Grier, 1937, p.37).

Grappling with fragmentations of their experience, women teachers use among other strategies and practices, certain *technologies of the self*, as it has been pointed out. However, the *technologies* they use to work upon themselves, often divert from the male canon, as it has been presented by Foucault. We have seen how in Constance Maynard's narrative, the imperative of *know yourself* has been recontextualised within her living experiences and has been modified as *know*

yourselves and learn to live with all of them. In contrast to what Foucault (1988) has suggested for the male tradition, the practices the female self uses are not always models that she finds in her culture. They can also be practices that criticise, oppose and resist the legacy of her culture. Thus, despite her firm belief in the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the family, Dorothea Beale advises her former student not to allow her married life ‘restrain’ her intellectual activities (Kamm, 1958, pp.388-89).

The genealogical investigation has therefore traced female subjects working upon themselves, to weave together different and often contradictory patterns of their existence. The selves they are constructing often lack coherence and unity. Sometimes they seem to be accommodated within their social setting, other times they revolt and negotiate new subject positions. In the genealogical framework, these selves seem to be formed by temporary unities, and parodic coalitions. In Braidotti’s (1993) theorisation, they are ‘nomadic subjects’, in a non-stop process of becoming. It is this elusive condition of women’s textual existence that as I have suggested, renders their texts provocative for a genealogy *of technologies of the female self*.

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NOTES

1. Teresa de Lauretis (1987) draws on Foucault’s conceptualisation of sex as a technology, but criticises his lack of interest in the different implications such a technology can have on male and female subjects. Judith Butler (1990) interrogates the naturalness of being female and looks into the ways gender is constituted through discursive and performative acts. To do this she employs the Foucauldian genealogy as a critical tool. In her analysis of new technologies and feminist politics, Donna Haraway (1990), considers women as sets of fractured identities and stresses the lack of any essential criterion for identifying women as an entity. Haraway (1991) acknowledges, however, the possibility of forming coalitions, affinities rather than identities, in response to specific historical moments of resistance and has further developed an epistemological project which rejects the validity of global theorisations and suggests the perspectival standpoint of ‘situated knowledges’. Jane Flax (1990, 1993) has further developed original and innovative analyses based on Foucault’s work, particularly drawing on his genealogical approach.
2. For the conditions of the teacher training colleges, see amongst others, Widdowson (1980) and Copelman (1985, 1996).
3. In the secondary sector, girls were first officially admitted to the Cambridge Local Examinations in 1865 and to those of Oxford in 1870. By 1894 there were over two hundred public school for girls, and the majority of them were established or reformed after 1870. See Pedersen (1991, p.45).
4. The biographies include Kamm (1958), Raikes (1910), Steadman (1931).

5. See amongst others Clough (1897), Raikes (1910), Stephen (1927), Grier (1937), Kamm (1958), Glenday and Price (1974).
6. See Delamont and Duffin (1978), Dyhouse (1981), Copelman (1985, 1996), Purvis (1991).
7. See amongst others Lortie (1975), Grace (1978), Jones (1990).
8. Milan Kundera in 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being'.
9. Louisa Lumsden came from Scotland and was one of the five Girton pioneers. In *Yellow leaves*, her autobiography, she bitterly criticises many aspects of Girton life, which as a student she had persistently resisted (Lumsden, 1933). She became a tutor at Girton, then a teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College and finally headmistress of St. Leonard's public school for girls. While at Girton, Louisa Lumsden met Constance Maynard, who came to the College in 1871, and they became friends. Later on, when Constance went to St. Leonard's School to work with Louisa as her headmistress, their friendship was irrevocably cut. See Maynard, unpublished, chapter 35, Tamboukou, 2000a, 2000.

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