

Introduction

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The diaries of Anne Lister (1791–1840) challenge our understanding of the history of sexuality, and of the social, economic and political contexts of nineteenth-century society. Containing twenty-six bound volumes from 1816 to 1840, as well as loose pages from 1806 to 1810, the Lister archive is more than five million words long (three times the length of Samuel Pepys's diary), with 15 per cent written in Lister's 'crypt hand' or code, detailing her intimate and sexual relationships with women. The importance of the Lister diaries has gained increasing recognition in recent years. This is the first volume of essays to bring together an international range of scholars and researchers working on the Anne Lister archive. It showcases the burgeoning and dynamic field of Anne Lister Studies both within and beyond academia.

The diaries' survival is nothing short of miraculous. They were first discovered in the 1880s by John Lister when he inherited Shibden Hall. Once he cracked the code with the help of an antiquarian friend, Arthur Burrell, and realised what it contained, he placed the diaries behind wooden panels. What followed over the next hundred years was sporadic interest in the diaries from historians who never alluded to the coded sections.¹ In the 1980s, the Lister diaries were finally properly catalogued and made available to the public as an accessible archive, one hundred years after they were first discovered.² The history of the diaries as a material artefact, with their repeated return to the literal and proverbial closet, reflects the complicated trajectory of queer history itself, with its legacy of shame, occlusion and censorship.

An archive that pushes the boundaries of the social, sexual and gendered norms of early nineteenth-century Britain, the Lister diaries refuse to fit neatly into available scholarly categories. This has often resulted in their placement in an outlying class of their own. As Susan S. Lanser has argued, the Lister diaries form part of a broader narrative of how pre-twentieth- and twenty-first-century intimacies between women were 'entangled with

1806
 Monday August 11th Eliza left us
 Had a Letter from her on Wednesday
 morning by Mr Ratcliffe the 13th Just
 Wrote to her on Thursday 14th by Mr Lund
 Wrote to her again on Sunday 17th put into
 the Post office at Leeds on the Monday following
 that Evening the 18th Had a parcel from
 her Music Letter & Envelopes
 had a Letter Wednesday August 20th
 Answered on the 21st
 Sunday 24th wrote to ER put into the Post ^{Monday} office
 Wednesday 27th has a Letter from her in answer ^{to two}
 Friday 28th rec^d a parcel from ER by Mr Lund
 Sunday 30th Wrote to ER in answer to ten sheets
 by Mr Lund ~ Sunday 7 of September wrote
 Tuesday 9th had a Letter from her
 Wednesday 10th had a Letter from ER
 Friday 12th had a Letter from ER
 Thursday 11th wrote to ER in answer to hers of the 10th
 Sunday Sep^r 14th wrote to ER by my Uncle &
 Aunt Lister going to Hull, on the same
 day a short Note to Miss Hargrave enclosed
 with 3 B Handkerchiefs 1 Slip in a parcel
 with my Letter to ER in answer to one
 from her on Saturday 13th by Mr Vasslet
 enclosing me a Cornelian Brooch
 Monday August 25th 1806 Rode with Mr
 Mitchell to Bakuip the first time. Seve
 was out of Yorkshire
 Sunday Sep^r 16th had a Letter from ER in answer to
 mine by my Uncle & Aunt by the Post they being at Hull
 Wednesday rode with Mr Mitchell to fix by through Elland
 Rastrick and Bighouse on that day was the Praetoria
 at Elland Wednesday Sep^r 17th 1806

Figure 2 Anne Lister's first diary entry (11 August 1806). West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, SH:7/ML/E/26/1/0003.

contests about authority and liberty, power and difference, desire and duty, mobility and change, order and governance',³ yet the Lister diaries cannot be seen as representative in that they have no comparable analogue.⁴ Writing soon after publication of the first extracts from the diaries, Martha Vicinus cautioned against using them as a yardstick by which to measure other queer/lesbian histories.⁵ While not claiming the Lister diaries as a reference point, the chapters in *Decoding Anne Lister* nevertheless explore how this unusual archive intervenes in histories of the nineteenth century and helps us to redraw and reimagine the constantly evolving fields of gender and sexuality as well as those of life writing and the role of women in social and political life. They also ask in what ways the social, political and economic conditions of early nineteenth-century Britain enabled the emergence of a figure such as Anne Lister. And what potential the material history of the diaries can unearth as we continue to engage with, uncover and interpret their extraordinary content.

The global significance of the Lister diaries was marked by their inclusion in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2011. The diaries are also reaching far beyond the world of scholars and archivists and generating a dialogue among genealogists, amateur historians, diary transcribers and avid fans of the BBC/HBO *Gentleman Jack* series. A community has evolved around the figure of Anne Lister that is engendering a broader and more public discussion about our understanding of queer sexuality, gender variance and women's roles from the nineteenth century to the present. As the controversy over the plaque commemorating Lister's union with Ann Walker at Holy Trinity Church, York, reveals, the Lister diaries have striking relevance to our current conversations around public history and memorialisation, and to how we shape those conversations in the light of the suppressed and occluded queer, lesbian and gender nonconforming past.⁶

The Lister diaries bear out the idea that if attended to correctly, the past can redirect our understanding of the present. The chapters in this collection reflect the encounter between past and present by showing how Lister's transgression of gender and sexual boundaries not only marked and shaped every aspect of her lived experience, but also challenges our understanding of the evolution of sexual and gendered narratives up to the present. *Decoding Anne Lister* includes interviews and essays on Lister's queer sexuality and gender variance, her role as a diarist, her pushing of gender barriers through her involvement in local politics and in the managing of her Shibden Hall estate, her adventurous and at times gender-defying travels through Britain, Europe and the Russian

Caucasus, and the highly successful adaptation of the Lister diaries into the BBC/HBO series *Gentleman Jack*. Revealing not only the life of an exceptional woman but also the local and global world in which she lived, the Lister diaries reconfigure the more traditional trajectories of nineteenth-century histories of gender and sexuality, and of social and political life.

Lister was keeping her diary at a time of extreme political, social and economic transformation and upheaval. Key events included the Napoleonic wars (1803–15), the expansion of the British empire, the Industrial Revolution (1760–1840), the Peterloo Massacre (1819) and the 1832 Reform Act, several of which are commented on in the diaries.⁷ Within this public history, Lister navigated and challenged the codes, rules and norms of genteel society while also being very much of her time, participating in class and institutional privilege, wanting to advance her own social connections and seeking the advantages afforded her by her landowner status once she inherited Shibden Hall in 1836.⁸ As much as they defy sexual and gender norms, the diaries also document a need and desire for social and political belonging, foregrounding a tension that is itself a constitutive part of queer, lesbian and gender nonconforming archival histories.

The bound volumes of the diaries begin in 1816, towards the end of Jane Austen's life and at the start of Charlotte Brontë's, and Lister herself made occasional references to having literary aspirations.⁹ However, in contrast to published literary works of the period, Lister's private diaries have provided frank and explicit observations on romantic and sexual queer intimacies, gender nonconformity, social belonging and exclusion, and invaluable social commentary on class and local politics. Lister's status as a woman of privilege who was simultaneously operating outside the normative codes of her class provides a unique insight into the norms of nineteenth-century society as well as how those norms could be contested. The diaries help us to understand how, among the many transformative effects of the Industrial Revolution, the radical separation of the private and public spheres within an increasingly influential and economically powerful bourgeois class contributed to create a space for a queer figure such as Anne Lister. As Sharon Marcus has shown, the separation of the gendered spheres meant that, rather than being a thing apart, female intimacy was encouraged and supported. Both married and unmarried women were free to develop romantic female friendships, with the underlying assumption that homosociality would never slide into homosexuality. Marcus argues that these relationships were intricately woven into

nineteenth-century society, so that 'female friendships peaceably coexisted with heterosexual marriages and moreover, helped to promote them'.¹⁰ This active encouraging of female friendship left the field relatively open for those women who chose to cross the unspoken boundary between sentimental friendship and sexual intimacy, Lister and her lovers being among them.

In her diaries, Lister becomes a key liminal figure who exposes the boundary crossings of her society. For if Lister was herself exceptional in terms of her gender nonconformity and her refusal of the codes of femininity, her many lovers were less so. How, in this homosocial world of separate spheres, did Lister manage to seduce so many women who did not question their gender identity or sexuality to the same extent as she did? Lister's tales of seduction would suggest that the boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual in bourgeois and aristocratic Britain was fluid in ways that were tacitly acknowledged if never explicitly stated. If this is the case, Marcus's analysis suggests that this fluidity actively created a space for Lister rather than positioning her as an entirely exceptional subject.

Lister does belong to a larger group of pre-sexological nineteenth-century gender-nonconforming women who formed intimate sexual relationships with one another, among them the Ladies of Llangollen, Anne Damer, Emily Faithfull, the Michael Fields, Minnie Benson, Ethel Smyth and Frances Power Cobbe.¹¹ Yet the Lister diaries engage with questions of sexuality, sexual pleasure and gender nonconformity in a unique manner. Broadly speaking, historical scholarship dealing with desire between women has had to develop ways of understanding this desire outside of empirical modes of representation. Lanser has argued that there was a dissonance between the relatively few known examples of female same-sex eroticism prior to the twentieth century and 'the larger space and excessive language accorded it in print'.¹² She shows how the Sapphic circulated as a discourse denoting subversion and threat in inverse proportion to its embodied reality. Other scholars have argued that because of their elusive quality, sexual relationships between women cannot be 'revealed' through historical proof, but rather approached through what Judith Bennett has called their 'definitional uncertainty' and explored in terms of the 'not said' and the 'not seen'.¹³

In contrast, in terms of sexuality the Lister diaries stand out as remarkably explicit, self-aware and hyper-visible.¹⁴ Although Lister used her 'crypt hand' to record her intimate relationships and sexual experiences, she described sex with anatomical precision. Here, for example, is Lister's

account of having an orgasm with Mrs Barlow in Paris in 1824: 'I had kissed & pressed Mrs Barlow on my knee till I had had a complete fit of passion. My knees & thighs shook, my breathing & everything told her what was the matter.'¹⁵ Lister's ongoing fascination with anatomy and the workings of the human body as well as her eclectic reading practices appear to have given her the psychological and intellectual confidence to name and describe her sexual practices and experiences in ways that would have been unthinkable for most women of her era. In Ann Walker's newly discovered diary from 1834 to 1835, comparisons can be made between Walker's and Lister's same-day entries to show that Walker never discussed sex in the way Lister did.¹⁶ As we have seen, this explicitness led to the diaries being repeatedly returned to the closet, and upon publication of the first extracts in 1988, rumours circulated that the Lister diaries must be a hoax.¹⁷

Ground-breaking as the Lister diaries have been, their openness has complicated how we think about queer/lesbian and gender nonconforming histories, in that they have established a standard of 'proof' that is yet to be found in other comparable archives. The status of Lister's gender variance, alongside her unwavering erotic interest in women, has also helped to shape Lister scholarship. Jack Halberstam's identification of Lister as an example of 'female masculinity'¹⁸ finds ample evidence in the diaries. From her early decision in 1817 'always to wear black',¹⁹ to having 'drawers put on with gentlemen's braces'²⁰ and to arranging her hair 'curled . . . like the crest of a helmet at the top of [her] head',²¹ Lister repeatedly defied the dress codes of traditional femininity. She also occasionally fantasised about having a penis, as in an entry from 7 May 1821, 'Supposing myself in men's clothes & having a penis.'²² She engaged in traditionally masculine interests, such as opening her own coal pit and having a sophisticated knowledge of pistols, which she did not hesitate to use when needed. Lister was also quite often mistaken for a man, both at home – 'The people generally remark, as I pass along, how much I am like a man'²³ – and, on one occasion, three times in one day as she travelled through Strasbourg.²⁴ She understood herself as having 'manners like those of a gentleman'²⁵ and would often explicitly perform masculinity in the way she held her cane or twirled her watch. These performative gestures and identifications with masculinity extended to her seduction practices, where she often consciously adopted the role of husband, as with Eliza Raine and Mariana Belcombe, and she also tended to fall for conventionally attractive, feminine women.

Lister's self-presentation in the diaries can therefore be framed in terms very similar to the behaviours of the eighteenth-century female husband, whom Jen Manion describes as having an 'ability to flirt, charm, and attract female wives' and whose gender embodiment demonstrated that 'gender was malleable and not a result of one's sex'.²⁶ Lister's explicit descriptions of sexual desire and sexual practices also fit into Ula Klein's analysis of representations of female cross-dressers as able to teach 'readers how to recognize the realistic, pleasurable, and serious possibility of female same-sex desires that are not apparitional but, rather, tangible, visible, and embodied'.²⁷ To this extent, Lister's performative and embodied expressions of masculinity correspond to the cross-dressing or trans model more closely than to the elusive or apparitional 'lesbian' one.

At the same time, while certain of Lister's lovers or women she was interested in claimed to wish she were a man, often so that they could share a more public life with her – Miss Browne, a potential love interest, tells Lister in February 1819 that 'she could not help thinking she wished I had been a gent'²⁸ – Lister herself resisted a full identification with masculinity. Her occasional 'wish to be a gent'²⁹ seems to have coincided with her desire to be freer to seduce her female lovers, rather than to inhabit a masculine identity in any permanent way. For example, her Parisian lover, Mrs Barlow, tells Lister: 'It would have been better had you been brought up as your father's son,' to which Lister firmly replies: 'No, you mistake me. It would not have done at all. I could not have married & should have been shut out from ladies' society. I could not have been with you as I am.'³⁰ In this key exchange, Mrs Barlow's wish that Lister had been brought up as her 'father's son' is repudiated. It seems rather that Lister sought the freedom afforded by nineteenth-century homosocial culture to delight in the intimacy of female society where she could be, in her words, 'as I am'. Yet this simple phrase reveals the complexity of Lister's relationship to her gender, one with which scholars continue to grapple and which leaks into our current-day debates on gender identity and sexuality. In a more ambivalent entry from 1830, at the age of thirty-eight, Lister wrote: 'Said I to myself as I came in this evening, alas I am as it were neither man nor woman in society.'³¹ Not only does this entry reveal Lister's understanding of gender as a mode of constraint imposed by a set of social conventions, but it also exposes her sometimes melancholic relationship to her gender variance.

Lister consistently refused to envisage heterosexual marriage, even a marriage of convenience, repeatedly claiming that she 'never intended to marry at all'³² and that any kind of sexual contact with a man aroused in

her feelings of revulsion. This placed her at odds with several of her female lovers, especially with Mariana Belcombe – whom Lister described as the love of her life – who married Charles Lawton in 1816, largely because she had no other means of financial support. The question of marriage haunts the diaries and brings with it the ongoing conundrum of Lister's gender identity. Far from being a radical, Lister was a product of her gentry class and wanted a marriage on her own terms, in which she would take on the role of husband married to a wife. Finally claiming a marital-style partnership in 1834 with a neighbour, heiress Ann Walker, Lister achieved a lifelong goal. This is the narrative that has served as the basis of the *Gentleman Jack* TV series, once again connecting past and present, and speaking to our current global struggles over LGBT+ marriage equality.

In the diaries, the governing normative frameworks of gender and sexuality and Lister's subversion of them underwrite every other aspect of her lived experience. Whether Lister was confronting the local coal baron, Mr Rawson, expanding and renovating her Shibden Hall estate, climbing the highest peaks in the Pyrenees or mastering Greek and Latin more competently than her tutors, she refused to be constrained by the imposed limits of femininity, claimed her gender variance and asserted her right to desire whom she pleased, even if this produced moments of shame, humiliation and exclusion. The essays and interviews in this volume show how Lister's fascination with her own 'oddity' and her desire to understand herself were inseparable from her drive and ambition, which in turn paradoxically foregrounded the opportunities as well as the constraints of her nineteenth-century society.³³

Increasingly, the Lister diaries are being interpreted as a liminal archive that touches on multiple disciplinary fields, including life writing, travel writing, social history, women's writing and women's history as well as queer, lesbian and gender nonconforming histories of sexuality. *Decoding Anne Lister* is divided into five parts with a foreword by the award-winning Irish Canadian author, Emma Donoghue, who, upon discovering Helena Whitbread's edition of the extracts in 1990, wrote the first play based on the Lister diaries.

By focusing on key aspects of the Lister archive, each section shows how the diaries shed new light on questions of gender, sexuality, identity construction and sociability, and on the social, political and economic frameworks of nineteenth-century society. *Decoding Anne Lister* also examines how this archive from the past intervenes in our present. The opening and closing interviews with Helena Whitbread and Sally Wainwright discuss the emergence of the Lister archive from its near-total obscurity

to its status as an iconic prime-time television series. Caroline Gonda's interview with Helena Whitbread engages with the challenges of how to bring an archive such as the Lister diaries to public attention, what obstacles were encountered, and what a transformative role the diaries played, and continue to play, for local histories and for queer and women's histories in general.

Although Lister had ambitions 'in the literary way' and 'a wish for a name in the world',³⁴ the diaries themselves were a personal, private document, never intended for the mass public readership they have acquired today. Extracts of the coded sections of the diaries finally saw the light of day in 1988, when Virago published *I Know My Own Heart*, edited by Whitbread, at that time a Yorkshire-based independent scholar. Whitbread then published a second volume in 1992, *No Priest but Love*, with extracts covering Lister's time in Paris between 1824 and 1826. Jill Liddington has also published three volumes of extracts from the diaries: *Female Fortune* (1998), with extracts from 1833 to 1836, *Nature's Domain* (2003), with extracts from 1832, and *As Good as a Marriage* (2023), with extracts from 1836–8. These published extracts enabled Sally Wainwright to conceive and develop the *Gentleman Jack* series, a project which, as Wainwright's interview shows, took many years to be funded by the BBC.

Emma Donoghue's interview with Sally Wainwright at the end of our volume reveals the journey the diaries have made since the 1980s. Both Donoghue and Wainwright have had a longstanding interest in the Lister diaries and have contributed to their adaptation for a broader audience. Donoghue's interview with Wainwright focuses on the complicated process of adaptation for television and how to 'stay true to [the diaries'] spirit and texture'. Wainwright also discusses the challenges of navigating the overwhelming richness of the source text to extract the content needed to shape and fashion a queer historical television drama. Alongside the published extracts, Wainwright immersed herself for months in the Lister archive, initially doing her own transcriptions and wanting to understand this exceptional diarist from the source.

In Part I, "Nature was in an odd freak when she made me": Lister, Sexuality, Gender and Natural History', Laurie Shannon and Anna Clark engage more closely with Lister's understanding of her 'odd' sexuality by unpacking and analysing what kinds of resources were and were not available to help her craft her narrative of the self. While access to the classics and their frank references to same-sex erotic practices offered an invaluable resource for Lister, Shannon argues that Lister's interest in natural history played an equally key role in providing an ethical as well

as a scientific framework for her self-understanding as an ‘odddity’, giving her ‘permission’ and ‘authorisation’ to be who she was. Shannon’s analysis of Lister reverses the binary between the natural and the unnatural or deviant, arguing that Lister saw herself as ‘following natural prescriptions’ rather than perceiving herself as a ‘freak’ of nature. Calling Lister’s approach ‘queerly traditional’, Shannon argues that Lister’s understanding of the questions of nature and the natural continues to be relevant in how we understand sexuality today.

Clark’s chapter explores Lister’s engagement with anatomy and unpacks her desire to grasp the workings of the human body, particularly as it relates to sexuality. While Lister understood the sensations of sexual pleasure in a scientific way, she recorded discovering the clitoris for the first time in 1831. Clark analyses this late discovery by contextualising it within debates about the relative importance or irrelevance of the clitoris in contemporary medical texts and examines Lister’s own sources for learning about female anatomy. Clark argues that little work has been done on nineteenth-century understandings of female anatomy and that Lister’s studies in France with Georges Cuvier and Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire – recently made available as online diary transcriptions – allow us to compare British and French understandings of female anatomy during this period.

Lister’s forays into natural history and anatomy were part and parcel of her thirst for knowledge. That thirst is reflected in her intimate diary writing and in her interest in the power of language more generally. Part II, “My spirit’s oil”: Lister Reading, Lister Writing’, examines how both Lister’s creation of lexicons and her use of the diary form were central to her self-construction and to her knowledge acquisition. Fascinated by words in all their variety, Lister compiled lexicons from different languages that helped her to develop a knowledge base about sexuality. As Stephen Turton argues, by the time Lister turned thirty, ‘she had compiled her own private glossary of erotic and anatomical terms as a means of making sense of her sexuality’. Lister’s ‘imaginative use’ of dictionaries and her compilation of lexicons provide us with further insights into her use of language, and her idiosyncratic adaptation of certain terms shows how she challenged the linguistic norms of her day. Turton shows how Lister’s close attention to lexicography formed a crucial part of her self-understanding and enabled her to expand linguistic possibilities in terms of non-normative approaches to gender and sexuality.

Lister’s diary writing, in turn, was as much a map of the social world as a form of personal record keeping. She meticulously recorded others’ comments about her, for example how acquaintances found her ‘deep-toned

voice ... very singular³⁵ and how she was seen as a bluestocking. She would also on occasion turn the conversation to '[her] own oddities'³⁶ to gauge how her friends and acquaintances reacted. Lister's diary also formed her most intimate relationship, the place where she could unburden herself, analyse her feelings and share her private thoughts, as well as comment on politics, her various business practices, her travels and other more pragmatic concerns. Lister repeatedly recorded how the act of writing had a therapeutic effect, making her feel calmer after a crisis: 'It is always a relief to me to write down what I feel & after I have done, I am, as it were, satisfied.'³⁷ Because of her status as a gender and sexual outlier, diary writing for Lister was less a genteel occupation than a necessary way of caring for the self. She needed her diary as a survival tool that enabled an ongoing and indispensable dialogue between her public and private identities: 'I owe a good deal to this journal. By unburdening my mind on paper I feel, as it were, in some degree to get rid of it; it seems made over to a friend that hears it patiently, keeps it faithfully, and by never forgetting anything, is always ready to compare the past & present & thus to cheer & edify the future.'³⁸

Caroline Baylis-Green examines the discursive strategies in Lister's diary writing and how Lister negotiated the relationship between her crypt hand and her plain hand. Challenging the 'lesbian continuum' model that certain scholars have applied to Lister, Baylis-Green approaches Lister's crypt hand from a different perspective, arguing that the diaries reveal a relationship between coding and closeting. She argues that the diaries' coded sections 'subvert assumptions about disclosure and latency', allowing Lister to explore the liminal space between her crypt hand and her plain hand, what Baylis-Green calls 'the edge of her own closet/s'. Paradoxically, the coded sections of the diaries ultimately function as the most open and transparent ones in their ability to discuss sexuality frankly, whereas the uncoded sections follow a more public script and participate in a depersonalised 'public closet'.

Lister's private self-construction as a diarist was also inextricably meshed with her very visible and public persona. In Part III, "'Born at Halifax": Lister's Politics, Local and Global', Lister is considered in terms of her public role and her relationship to political discourse. Susan S. Lanser, Cassandra Ulph and Angela Clare each explore Lister's engagement with the public sphere, revealing a figure who refused to be defined by the constraints of domestic femininity, even if her visibility led to occasional incidents of harassment and public humiliation. Lanser's contribution broadens the question of Lister's politics in terms of Tory party affiliation

and considers how she reacted to the great political events and upheavals of her day. Lanser asks what Lister most cared about and how she responded to her era's 'national and global tumult', as well as to notions of Englishness in the context of both her public and private identities. Specifically, Lanser analyses how Lister's Protestantism, conservatism and more general 'quest for status' might be interpreted as a 'constitutive' element of her sexual self-fashioning.

Cassandra Ulph, in turn, explores Lister's more local 'engagement in associational activity', as a way of understanding 'women's participation in civic and intellectual life' during the early nineteenth century. Ulph argues that Lister's gender nonconformity and her position as proprietor of Shibden Hall gave her an exceptional status within her Halifax community, enabling her to 'deploy traditionally patriarchal forms of power' in promoting particular civic projects, such as the 'Lit and Phil' society. Ulph suggests that rather than turning her into a social outlier, Lister's unusual status provided her with an influence that was itself exceptional for a woman of her class during this period.

In the final chapter in this section, Angela Clare, the Collections Manager for Calderdale Museum Service, focuses on Lister in the context of local belonging and the evolving significance of the Shibden Hall estate. Clare analyses how Shibden Hall connects past and present, from its initial status as a heritage 'hidden gem' to its current place as a 'literary house' equivalent to the Brontës' Parsonage at Haworth. Clare shows how this new designation reflects Lister's own deep investment in Shibden Hall and how Shibden cannot be understood as a heritage site without an understanding of the imprint Lister left on it. The increased visibility of the Anne Lister diaries and the *Gentleman Jack* series, in turn, has played a critical role in how Shibden Hall is now being contextualised and interpreted.

Lister's intellectual and physical restlessness pushed her to expand her horizons well beyond her Yorkshire community. Refusing the limits generally placed on women during this period, she became an avid traveller from early on. Part IV, "'Curious scenes": Lister's Travels', examines Lister's crossing of geographical boundaries, which in certain contexts can be mapped on to her crossing of gender boundaries, in that she went on journeys no other European women had previously attempted. Between 1826 and 1832, Lister spent only a few weeks in Shibden Hall, repeatedly returning to the continent on tours that included France, northern Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and the Pyrenees. Prior to these, she also visited Scotland and Wales, with

a particularly evocative visit in 1822 to Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby, known as the Ladies of Llangollen, a renowned female couple who had escaped their Irish families in 1780 in order to live together in Llangollen, North Wales, and who had achieved a certain notoriety, captured in a sonnet by Wordsworth. A generation older than Lister, they served as role models in her diaries, representing the kind of long-term companionship she dreamed of achieving.

However, over her lifetime Lister did not limit herself to the conventional European tour. As an accomplished hiker and mountaineer, she climbed some of the highest peaks in the Pyrenees: among them, in August 1830, Mont Perdu or Monte Perdido (3,335 m) – the Pyrenees' third highest peak on the French–Spanish border. She also made the first 'official' ascent of the Vignemale (3,298 m), the highest peak of the French Pyrenees, noting in her journal in August 1838: 'I have made each ascent for my pleasure, not for *éclat*. What is *éclat* to me? What is *éclat* to anyone?'³⁹ In tribute to her achievement, a section of the route was named the Col Lady Lister.

Lister's most adventurous trip, however, began in 1839 with her 'wife', Ann Walker. Setting off from Shibden in June with Walker and two servants, the group travelled through France, Denmark and Sweden into Russia, arriving in Saint Petersburg in September and then reaching Moscow in October 1839. From there they travelled south along the frozen Volga river to the Russian Caucasus. Very few Western European travellers had ventured as far into this remote landscape and it was virtually unheard of for any Western European women to make such a journey. Not only was the expedition physically challenging, but because of unrest among the local population against the Tsarist regime, at times they needed a military escort. While Lister often recorded in her diaries visits to 'oddities' that included the display of giants and 'Esquimaux', here she and her party became the objects on display: 'The people coming in to look at us as if we were some strange animals such as they had not seen the like before.'⁴⁰ It was during the last leg of this journey to western Georgia in 1840 that Lister died of a fever near Kutaisi. Walker was faced with the task of returning her body to Shibden Hall. Until recently, it was assumed that Walker accompanied the coffin home over the course of six months, but newly discovered documents show that she in fact returned earlier on a different ship.⁴¹

Kirsty McHugh and Angela Steidele examine Lister's travels through Great Britain and the Russian Caucasus respectively and consider the ways in which these parts of the diaries contribute both to travel writing and to the genre of autobiography. McHugh argues that we need to analyse the

Lister diaries more closely as life writing and travel writing. She shows how Lister's home tours in the 1820s have contributed to recovering female travel writing during this era, both for the study of tourism and in terms of female sociability – specifically Lister's visits to the Ladies of Llangollen and to the Scottish aristocrat Sibbella Maclean. By reading Lister through her travels and her interactions with place, we can achieve a deeper understanding of her complex relationship to class, sexuality and gender outside her local Yorkshire communities.

Steidle follows Anne Lister and Ann Walker's footsteps on their final journey from Saint Petersburg along the Volga to the Caucasus and to the scene of Lister's death in Kutaisi. Noting the ways in which the Russian landscape has been transformed since the early nineteenth century, Steidle travels through space in order to travel back in time and to reflect on the genre of autobiography. She asks what it means to use geography in order to understand history. She also contemplates Lister's own role as autobiographer, particularly through her travel diaries, which broke new ground in terms of how far these two British women were able to get off the beaten track. McHugh and Steidle consider not only the ways in which travel expanded Lister's self-understanding, but also how these journeys add a new critical dimension to our comprehension of the possibilities of travel for women during this period.

The Lister archive is evolving on an almost daily basis as more transcriptions are completed and shared. This, in turn, is a direct result of the diaries' expansion beyond the realm of academia into that of popular culture, fandom and crowdsourcing. Notoriously impenetrable on account of Lister's unreadable handwriting and the sections in 'crypt hand', the full archive is now becoming available online through a volunteer Digitisation and Transcription Project run by the Calderdale Museum and West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) and funded by a generous donation from Sally Wainwright's Wellcome Trust Screenwriters Fellowship. Lister herself refused to be contained within boundaries – intellectual, physical or sexual – and it is fitting that her archive is no longer confined to a handful of academics. In its boundary crossing and democratisation, the Lister archive and its unfolding narrative can also be read as a queering of traditional modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination.

In Part V, "I beg to be remembered": Lister, Public History and Popular Culture', the volume's final section considers the effects and repercussions of the Lister diaries' shift beyond academia into mainstream culture and the ways in which such a transition creates new possibilities, unforeseen challenges, and unexpected and enriching dialogues that

demand a rethinking of our own categories of gender and sexuality as well as those from the past. Caroline Gonda considers the ways in which Lister eludes modern-day attempts to classify her gender identity, a phenomenon particularly evident in the controversy over the plaque at Holy Trinity Church to celebrate the Lister–Walker union. The plaque initially labelled Lister as ‘gender nonconforming’, a description later replaced with the term ‘lesbian’. Despite Lister’s insistence on her own exceptionalism, Gonda explores how she sought role models, such as the Ladies of Llangollen, that were distinct from her narratives of seduction and closer to notions of female community. Like Shannon and Clark, Gonda argues that Lister’s understanding of ‘the naturalness of her desire for women’ was key to how she inhabited her gender and sexual identities in ways that continue to resonate in a contemporary setting.

In the final chapter, Chris Roulston considers Lister’s contemporaneity in terms of how the Lister diaries have entered popular culture through the BBC/HBO series *Gentleman Jack*. She analyses how the adaptation of the Lister diaries into a television series has produced a particular culture of fandom that has made viewers rethink their present in terms of a new relation to the past. She argues that Wainwright’s refashioning of the Lister diaries for today’s television audience has in fact led us back to the ‘phenomenon’ that Lister was in her own time and to a new understanding of the importance of Lister for today.

The chapters solicited for this collection showcase the ways in which the Lister archive complicates, disrupts and unsettles our expectations and our understanding of the sexual, gendered, social and political frameworks of early nineteenth-century Britain, as well as how this disruption creates new possibilities for the present. Extending in approach from in-depth analyses of the diaries’ contents to their broader historical and contemporary influence, the contributors to this volume are expanding the scope and reach of Anne Lister Studies. Once the Lister diaries have been opened, they are difficult to put down, inspiring affective as well as intellectual engagement. We hope that this collection will reflect the dedication, enthusiasm, thrill and sheer surprise the diaries repeatedly manage to generate in their readers.

Notes

- 1 See J. Liddington, ‘Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791–1840): Her Diaries and the Historians’, *History Workshop* 35 (Spring 1993), 45–77, for a comprehensive account of the history of the diaries.

- 2 See *ibid.*, 57.
- 3 S. S. Lanser, *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565–1830* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 2.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 5 M. Vicinus, 'Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?', *Radical History Review* 60 (1994), 57–75, 66.
- 6 See 'Anne Lister: Reworded York Plaque for "first lesbian"', BBC News, 28 February 2019, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-47404525, accessed 15 November 2021.
- 7 For an analysis of Lister's engagement with her historical period, see Lanser, this volume.
- 8 Anne Lister inherited a third of Shibden Hall in 1826, when her uncle James died. She inherited the rest of the estate in 1836, upon the death of her father, Jeremy Lister, and her aunt, Anne Lister. For an account of the history of Shibden Hall, see Clare, this volume.
- 9 See H. Whitbread (ed.), *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* [hereafter *Secret Diaries*] (London: Virago, 2010), p. 96.
- 10 S. Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 2.
- 11 See *ibid.*, p. 20.
- 12 Lanser, *Sexuality of History*, p. 4.
- 13 Vicinus, 'Lesbian History', 58.
- 14 J. Bennett, 'The L-Word in Women's History', unpublished papers (October 1990 and September 1993), quoted in Vicinus, 'Lesbian History', 57.
- 15 11 November 1824, H. Whitbread (ed.), *No Priest but Love: the Journals of Anne Lister from 1824–1826* (Otley: Smith Settle, 1992), p. 47.
- 16 See Baylis-Green, this volume, for a discussion of this comparison.
- 17 See A. M. Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 14.
- 18 J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
- 19 1 June 1817, *Secret Diaries*, p. 18.
- 20 2 April 1817, *Secret Diaries*, p. 9.
- 21 17 September 1818, *Secret Diaries*, p. 76.
- 22 7 May 1821, *Secret Diaries*, p. 167.
- 23 28 June 1818, *Secret Diaries*, p. 60.
- 24 Lister records this on 22 June 1827. See A. Choma, *Gentleman Jack: the Real Anne Lister* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 3.
- 25 29 November 1816, *Secret Diaries*, p. 6.
- 26 J. Manion, *Female Husbands: a Trans History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 1.
- 27 U. Klein, *Sapphic Crossings: Cross-Dressing Women in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), p. 2.
- 28 18 February 1819, *Secret Diaries*, p. 92.
- 29 18 February 1819, *Secret Diaries*, p. 94.

- 30 25 October 1824, in Whitbread, *No Priest but Love*, p. 36.
- 31 26 January 1830, Anne Lister Papers, West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), SH:7/ML/E/12/0153-0154.
- 32 28 May 1817, *Secret Diaries*, p. 17.
- 33 On 19 June 1824, Lister writes: 'Speaking of my oddity, Mrs Priestley . . . thought nature was in an odd freak when she made me', in *Secret Diaries*, p. 374.
- 34 3 March 1819, *Secret Diaries*, p. 96.
- 35 22 March 1820, *Secret Diaries*, p. 134.
- 36 2 July 1821, *Secret Diaries*, p. 172.
- 37 1 October 1819, *Secret Diaries*, p. 116.
- 38 22 June 1821, *Secret Diaries*, p. 171.
- 39 A. Pryce, 'Anne Lister: the Mountaineer', 'Packed with Potential' website, 20 December 2020, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3428e82114dd43fe810e814c09610f7e>, accessed 3 April 2022.
- 40 24 February 1840, quoted in A. Steidele, *Gentleman Jack: a Biography of Anne Lister*, trans. K. Derbyshire (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019), p. 273.
- 41 See S. Crabtree's article on the 'Packed with Potential' website, *In Search of Ann Walker*, for details of Ann Walker's journey back to England from Kutaisi. The available documentation shows that Walker travelled home on a separate ship from the one containing Lister's body: <https://insearchofannwalker.com/research-ann-walkers-return-to-shibden/>, accessed 3 March 2022.