The unexceptional Anne Lister: periods, boredom, lesbians and mediocre sex

by

Anna Hawthorne

English Literature PhD

School of English

University of Sheffield

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Abstract

Anne Lister (1791 -1840) kept a journal for half of her life, beginning her first systematic journal in 1816 and writing daily entries until her death in 1840. In this thesis, I have selected three years of her journals, between 3rd April 1819 – 3rd April 1822, to focus my analysis upon. The process of transcription led me to select topics that reflected the daily and more ordinary aspects of her record. I also sought to offer a new version of Anne Lister that I felt was currently missing from representations of her in scholarship and media as 'an extraordinary woman'. My focus on her ordinary concerns led me to write upon her consistent desire for women, her intricate and mundane connection with Tib, the regular shedding of her endometrial layer, and her daily dawdling and persistent indolence. My methodology for exploring these topics has been to write in a rhetoric of vulnerability.

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Zadie Smith, whose gentle articulations kept me motivated.

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Introduction

Ordinary Biography

> The idea of publishing at some time or other has often come across me, and I have mused on what subject to fix: it occurred to me when getting up this morning, that people very often talk of things they do not understand, and that, with tolerable management, one might give a few useful essays on these matters, such for instance as politics, religion, etc. each essay containing a sort of digest of its subject[1] – Anne Lister, Thursday 11th October 1821

> Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. – Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011)

There are many things I wanted this thesis to do and many things that it never did and so I thought it appropriate to begin with failure. Lister, like me, also had aspirations for her writing that did not come off: plans that, to put it flatly, failed. Indeed, she wrote a few times of this thirst to publish her writing and yet she died without succeeding in these aims. I would love to agree with Halberstam's queer optimism here, that these instances of failing have been somehow *more* creative or surprising than what the achievement of them would have looked like, but that would be a lie, lacking in the sort of authenticity I seek to present in this writing. I would, however, go so far as to hope that though I may have failed to create *the thing* that I wished for, the *something* that I have tolerably managed is at least suggestive of my ambitions, as Lister's journal is of hers.

[1] Thursday 11th October 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0071

Style, for me, has been a consistent preoccupation, largely triggered by Susan Sontag's essays 'Against Interpretation' (1965) and 'On Style' (1964). She writes in 'On Style' that '[a] work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary on the world.'[2] This sentiment seemed to fit my experience of working with the manuscript diaries, that they included content, so many themes and objects, Lister's ongoing 'commentary on the world', and yet to transcribe them was altogether something excessive of this commentary. It was an experience. And then, the meta-pirouette, I could not help but reflect on my own writing and ambitiously hoped to play with the style of this thesis, to make it adamantly present. One idea was to structure it in a series of fragments or to include photographs of things (cloth boots, an umbrella, a pocket watch) to attempt to embed some texture into the thesis that might emulate the fragmentary and object strewn sensuality of Lister's entries. I did not manage to do this. Instead, this thesis is relatively conservative in its structure, though my attention to style forms an integral part of my methodology and is self-consciously present. And though things, such as menstrual napkins, are discussed, I did not end up centralising this theme – another scrap for the cutting room floor.

The drive of the thesis, aside from this preoccupation with style, has been to address the biographical. My initial reading was into life writing, auto/biography and diary studies, and the issues that have presented themselves most keenly to me are succinctly encapsulated in these three quotations from Hermione Lee:

> The possibilities for the representation of a self are infinitely various.
>
> Biography is the story of a person told by someone else.
>
> There is no such thing as an entirely neutral biographical narrative.[3]

I have wanted to represent Lister as truthfully as I could and yet I have also been acutely aware that such truth is arguably a fiction and all I can do is offer up *my* version of Lister; as Jill Liddington writes in her essay on Lister and 'the Historians': 'Faced with such a daunting

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[2] Susan Sontag, 'On Style,' *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 21

[3] Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pages, 4, 5, and 134 respectively

mass of material, each generation has - perhaps inevitably - left us their *own* version of Anne Lister.'[4] However, this perspective is a little misleading, as the diaries provide a body of evidence that will only support a limited number of representations. Perhaps, in this sense, Lee is a little flamboyant to posit an infinite variety. I could not represent Lister as an atheist for instance or someone who hated scholarly learning, as there are examples in the diaries that would directly refute such claims. Additionally, I could not say that she had a loud and infectious laugh, as there is no evidence to support or deny such a claim. It is for drama to make such imaginative embellishments and for me, as a scholar, to stick as closely to the text as I can. Jill Liddington is correct, however, in her comment about the 'daunting mass of material', even the "short" sample I have chosen to focus upon amounts to nearly half a million words and is filled with an assortment of what Virginia Woolf describes as 'odds and ends' – 'capacious' indeed[5] – that could never be entirely held within the confines of a thesis.

Selections must be made. The daily activity of transcribing Lister's journals slowly offered up to me the overarching theme of the ordinary, which I've used as a guiding principle. I quickly struck upon Georges Perec's essay 'Approaches to What?' and his demand to focus upon the 'endotic' in opposition to the 'exotic', to 'question the habitual' and to '[q]uestion your teaspoons.'[6] Interestingly, in my sample there are only 3 teaspoons mentioned and always in relation to medicine, such as when Lister "rubbed in a teaspoon full of laudanum" in Miss Vallance's left side.[7] The ordinary, or 'endotic', for Lister does not generally constitute teaspoons. The ordinary is a shifting terrain. The way I've developed my version of ordinary has been to appreciate the ways in which others have represented her as an extraordinary woman, their focus on her sexuality and sexual exploits, her masculine presentation, and her great interest in studying, and to turn these upside down and to have a look at the underside of these, the moments when she is not having great sex, when her body menstruates, and when she is lacking in interest. This is not to refute that she could be

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[4] Jill Liddington, 'Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791 - 1840): Her Diaries and the Historians,' *History Workshop,* 35 (Spring, 1993), pp. 45 - 77, p. 48

[5] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* vol. 1, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 266 (entry for 20 April 1919)

[6] Georges Perec, 'Approaches to What?', *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* trans. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p. 210

[7] Saturday 6th January 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0117

extraordinary. She was certainly an eccentric character and stood out in her time, as much as our own, but she was only human and no one can be extraordinary on the daily.

A Short Biography on Lister

Anne Lister was born in 1791 to Rebecca and Jeremy Lister, the latter being the younger brother of James Lister, owner of Shibden Hall. She grew up in Market Weighton, until the family moved to Halifax in 1806. She was a lively child and difficult to manage, a point that she, and consequently many scholars, have enjoyed relaying. Her education was made up of Chettle's Girls school in Ripon (when she was 7, for approx. 2 years), private Latin lessons with Reverend Skelding in Market Weighton (13 years old), the Manor House school in York, as a boarder (14 years old), and then private lessons for quite a few years with Reverend Knight in Halifax (beginning at 15 years old).[8] She describes her childhood to Miss Brown like this: "*I told her I was a curious genius and had been so from my cradle she wondered what I was when little I said a very great pickle sent to school very early because they could do nothing with me at home and whipped every day except now and then in the holidays for two years*".[9] She refers to herself as 'a pickle' in various conversations with others; it seems to be something that she carries forwards with her as an indication of the early slant of her disruptive or 'odd' character.[10] This lively, disruptive, odd character does not, however, very often show up in her daily record.

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[8] With thanks to Packed for Potential and their fabulous timeline, in which I am indebted for much factual information that falls outside my period of focus: https://www.packedwithpotential.org/timelines. Accessed 22/06/2023

[9] NB. I have chosen to use double quotation marks for the quotations from Lister's journals to differentiate them from my secondary quotes on the page and because I feel like it better represents her first person account. Wednesday 10th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0110

[10] See also, Wednesday 10th March 1819, SH:7/ML/E/2/0117: "*I was fifteen when I first went to Mr Knight was always a great pickle never learnt anything at school was always talking to the girls instead of attending to my book talked a little of my being whipped every day at Ripon*"

The subject I met with when transcribing slept, ate, read, wrote letters, went to church, and walked, and for the most part, tried extremely hard to be liked by others.[11] In many ways, it is others who have thrust extraordinariness upon her, as she suggests when reacting to Miss Brown:

> *she said Mr Parker at whose house she had been staying at Selby knew my father and that his brother Mr Parker of Altencoate asked her if he Mr Lister had not a very extraordinary daughter he had heard of me in Lancashire I smiled and said I thought the epithet extraordinary unjustly applied I should deserve it better without the extra oh no said she you cannot think so*[12]

The report of this conversation does suggest an air of false modesty – perhaps it would be considered unattractive of Lister to agree with such an epithet? However, it also shows the extent of the social reactions that she triggered. People talk about her from as far away as Lancashire. There is, from the beginning, a discrepancy between Lister's daily, ordinary existence, and this version of her that others view and share. It is this correlation drawn between worthiness and extraordinariness – she is not *deserving* of the extra – that I hope this thesis manages to counter. Though, in typical Listerian fashion, she does then lay claim to the term 'extraordinary' later with Miss Brown, as she says, "*she often thought my regard for her passing strange and that surely I took strange fancies I owned that I must plead guilty and that perhaps in this instance I might deserve the epithet of extraordinary".*[13] However, within this conversation she seems to queer the positively leaning term 'extraordinary' to explain, and largely *excuse*, to Miss Brown her "*strange fancies*". So, Lister's own use of 'extraordinary' is a twist and turn of social management; her attempt to manage the threat of prejudice.

Lister moved into Shibden Hall with her aunt Anne and uncle James in 1815, when she was 24 years old, though she spent a considerable time living there for the two years prior to this time. There does not seem to be a clear record of the reasons for her

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[11] Indeed, even when she didn't like people, she behaved nice enough so that they would not know: "*I arm in arm with charlotte and jane agreeableized so that they seemed to like my conversation talked about friends* etc. *and charlotte gave me a long letter from her great friend Mrs K now in India to read silly girl thought to make the offer but my manner betokened not my mind* --" Wednesday 4th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0088

[12] Sunday 1st August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0077

[13] Thursday 5th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0078

permanent move into Shibden Hall. Her journal notes kept between 1807 - 1810 show her regularly dining at Shibden Hall.[14] Then there is a series of letters between her and Miss Marsh directed to her at Shibden Hall between August 1814 - December 1814, which suggest she was living there for this time before finally moving in more permanently.[15] The likelihood is that she did not get on so well with her parents and after many long visits at the Hall, felt that she would be more comfortable there, as well as perceiving the opportunity of inheritance that such a move could generate. So when my sample begins in April 1819, she has lived at the Hall for around four years. She has settled in. Her family relationships were complicated and ever changing (as they tend to be for most). Her mother died in November 1817, nursed by her sister Marian, and Lister missed the end. It sounds like her relationship with her mother was fraught with tension, yet, two years after her death she shows a sense of beginning to rewrite the narrative of this relationship, as she reports on a conversation with her friend and sexual partner Isabella Norcliffe:

> sat up talking to IN. about my mother - *Tib* [Isabella] *said she could not forget her former opinion of her she was no more to be compared with my father than light and dark that she had no feeling we all used to think so and that when my father broke Sams death to her he did it by saying well your plagues gone he'll plague you no more I said I had forgotten this and could only regret she had brought to my recollection so great a proof of want of feeling in my father from whom so bitter a taunt was heartless and unmanly I said there was much to be said for my mother that all her faults had been seen through a microscope and all her children prejudiced against her I was determined however that nothing should* [lead] *me to neglect paying her memory every respect in my power Tib said I had very much changed my opinion and she fancied did not seem so fond of my father as formerly to the former I cordially assented but shuffled off the latter*[16]

According to Tib, she also used to be fonder of her father and this opinion has changed. I feel like there is a maturation evident in her realisation that they were prejudiced against her mother from a young age, though possibly also a forgetfulness, as Tib so faithfully reminds Lister of her mother's lack of feeling. Lister lost her favourite sibling, Sam, in 1813,

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[14] West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, SH:7/ML/E/26/1

[15] SH:7/ML/58 - SH:7/ML/64

[16] Tuesday 17th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0082

to a drowning accident in Ireland when he was only 20. This left her with only one other sibling, her younger sister Marian. Her relationship with her sister is not necessarily filled with joy, though there is care, as Lister shows when her sister falls ill while staying at Shibden and Lister so diligently nurses her and obsesses over her symptoms and how to treat her.[17] There are also amusingly dry entries that deliver a specific sort of familial intimacy, such as, "My father gave me Marian's letter - merely, as it were, on business, containing an account of the kind offices she is good enough to do for me in the clothes-providing department".[18]

However, her father and sister can incite a lot of shame in Lister. She is living a more privileged life at Shibden Hall and aspires to a higher rank, so when she is faced with seeing her father and sister after a time apart, she writes, "*shocked to see them both look vulgar the first sight of them always takes me low and I feel it now near nine exceedingly my father and aunt are gone out and I have left Marian to be by myself in my own room I feel as if my heart was sick and my spirits frozen"*.[19] Lister uses "vulgar" in its derogatory sense quite frequently for anyone she thinks ugly, does not like, or finds repulsive. Whether it is the way they behave or how they look, it carries strong associations of rank (or, as we would say, class) for her, and in this instance, it is referring to her father and sister's lower-rank appearance. Her father is not good with money and during my three-year sample, she must get heavily involved in the business of selling his farm at Market Weighton. Though there may be a level of discomfort in this relationship, there is an obligatory closeness, nicely exemplified by this image of Lister riding behind her father on the same horse: "*rode behind my father to Skipton in the rain carrying an umbrella".*[20]

Her closest family relationship is with her aunt Anne, whom she does most of her daily activities alongside, whether it is making calls in the town, reading the prayers together (which they do diligently every Sunday), or sitting and talking over dinner or supper. Lister's relationship with her uncle James is less easy-going. They argue more frequently, such as when he embarrasses her "*in his out of patience way*" in front of Charles Howarth, the carpenter, and she reflects afterwards, "*he is awkwardish to deal with but I should mind to*

[17] Entries between Monday 19th July - Sunday 1st August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0071-6

[18] Tuesday 4th January 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0020

[19] Tuesday 3rd July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0040

[20] Monday 3rd December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0083

say nothing of this sort before my aunt I really must mind what I am about however this time will get over I will try to take care in future".[21] The relationship with her uncle must be navigated carefully as he is the owner of Shibden estate and the authority within the household; most significantly for Lister, he has the last word on visitors. Furthermore, Lister's future prospects and income entirely rely upon him. In time, after many discussions with her aunt Anne and uncle James and also by exhibiting her competency by managing the selling of her father's estate, uncle James agrees to leave Lister the estate in March 1822.[22] This comes right at the end of my three-year sample, so for the majority of this thesis, the Lister I am talking about does not have this promise and her future is still relatively uncertain, including concerns that her uncle might give the estate to their Welsh relatives.[23] This means I do not have the business woman version of Lister that was depicted in the *Gentleman Jack* TV series (2019-22) or biography by Anne Choma (2019); instead I have the entirely dominated and trapped Lister who can only dream desperately of one day being the master of her own estate.[24]

Lister is very concerned with money, as she must rely on handouts from her aunt, uncle, and father in order to have any financial autonomy. This means she must keep her own accounts, in order to save money and be able to buy gifts or books more freely.[25] The family is not exceptionally well-off, so she must repair her own clothes most of the time, including (a) the collar of a nightshirt, (b) her "*black silk legs*", (c) her stockings, (d) her "*bombazine petticoat*", (e) her neck handkerchiefs, (f) "*an old bombason waist*", (g) her black cloth boots, (h) her cotton socks, (i) her silk petticoat, (j) her "*black chamois shoes*", (k) her gloves, (l) an old boot, (m) her "*chemise and white petticoat*", (n) her night cap, and (o)

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[21] Saturday 22nd September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0065

[22] "*talking over matters at breakfast before Tib came down I asked my uncle to settle his affairs and said ^at once^ I thought he had better leave me the estate paying my father an annuity out of it he said he thought of another way to leave me the estate so that I could make a will of it but suffering my father to receive during his left the rents of such and such and parts ditto I suppose my aunt well I I think ^that^ after all I shall get some certainty of the estate for it seems my uncle is satisfied with me and has made up his mind to trust god be thanked for it and may he make me worthy of all his mercies"* Friday 8th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0107

[23] "*talking to my aunt about my uncle's will and the welsh Lister she said he once thought of bringing to and fixing them at northgate and giving enough to live there that they might not be strangers* etc. *to the estate*" Tuesday 19th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0035

[24] Wednesday 3rd May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0050, and, Saturday 28th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0095

[25] Many instances of her "settling her accounts", for an example: "writing my journal of yesterday and settling my accounts for yesterday and also the summary, for the 2 last months" Friday 7th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0013

her torn gown.[26] Things, things, things. It was these details that started to push me towards ideas of the ordinary, there was a texture at work in transcribing her entries that built up into something that didn't seem to closely resemble the Anne Lister that her contemporaries saw or was presented to me elsewhere. Her day-to-day consisted of so much stuff, so many visits, odd-jobs, weather reports, gossip, clothes, objects broken, fixed, or bought. I felt that something was lost in always presenting Lister as extraordinary, a sort of flattening out occurred, all attention was directed at such small moments in the text and so much material was discarded.

A Literary Review on Lister Scholarship

The scholarship community around Anne Lister is wonderful, inclusive and ever-growing. The Anne Lister Society (ALS) was created by Professor Laurie Shannon in association with Sally Wainwright, Anne Choma, and Pat Esgate in November 2019. Their progress was delayed by the pandemic but they soon launched the ALS Inaugural Meeting in 2022 in partnership with the Anne Lister Birthday Week of events that runs over the beginning of April in Halifax. The meeting is open to academics and the public and the community is one of shared enthusiasm and collaboration. West Calderdale Archive launched the Diary Transcription Project in July 2019, which aims to transcribe all of Lister's diaries and have them freely available on their online archive.[27] Each page is given to two volunteers and then checked for accuracy and they release the work when each volume is completed. They have already transcribed and made available her initial diary notes and 14 of her journal volumes. Their progress has gained momentum and it is likely (from my own estimations) that they

[26] (a) Sunday 6th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0012; (b) Tuesday 3rd August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0077; (c) Saturday 6th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0108; (d) Monday 24th January 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0026; (e) Sunday 30th January 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0027; (f) Saturday 15th April 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0046; (g) Tuesday 16th May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0054; (h) Sunday 6th August 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0074; (i) Wednesday 13th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0082; (j) Monday 25th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0085; (k) Sunday 29th April 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0024; (l) Sunday 17th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0035; (m) Sunday 1st July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0039; (n) Sunday 26th August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0057; (o) Sunday 28th October 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0075

[27] <https://wyascatablogue.wordpress.com/exhibitions/anne-lister/anne-lister-diary-transcription-project/> [Accessed 23/06/2023]

will transcribe the remaining 12 volumes within the next two years. The transcription project is an incredible achievement and a body of material that will boost Lister studies tenfold. Furthermore, there is now a PhD Scholarship on Anne Lister funded by the playwright and director Sally Wainwright at the University of York, with the intention 'to foster sustained research and scholarly conversation about Anne Lister, in order to establish her permanent place in the historical and literary record and to interpret the rich legacies of her life and writing for the future'.[28]

There is also the website Packed for Potential that describes their project as 'a global community of people who share an interest in uncovering and understanding the lives of Anne Lister and those in her circle with historical context through open, collaborative, and accessible research.'[29] On this website there are timelines of Anne Lister, Mariana Lawton, Isabella Norcliffe, and Sabella Maclean, as well as webpages for various ongoing projects, such as Anne Lister's Sex Guide, Anne Lister's Religion, and Anne Lister's Cousins (periods) amongst many others. The group of people who created Packed for Potential then launched the Anne Lister Research Summit, an online conference that uses a mix of formats, such as facilitated discussions, workshops and showcases to share knowledge on a global and accessible level. I have had the pleasure of speaking at both the Anne Lister Meetings in Halifax and participating in a discussion as part of the Anne Lister Research Summit and have found both experiences to be welcoming, jovial, and stimulating. There is great scope for Anne Lister studies to continue expanding with such accessible and collaborative research communities and such a wealth of material to feast upon.

This Anne Lister phenomenon, as it seems appropriate to name it, is only relatively recent, prompted by a combination of factors, such as the HBO/BBC series *Gentleman Jack* that ran for two seasons and propelled Lister into the popular imagination and onto a more global platform, combined with the digitisation of her journals that was only completed back in 2019 and made transcribing them so much easier and more accessible than the microfilm copies. Previous to this explosion of Lister scholarship, the research on her was quite minimal and largely relied on Helena Whitbread's edited publications of her journals.[30] I

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[28] <https://www.york.ac.uk/history/study/funding/sally-wainwright-scholarship/> [Accessed 23/06/2023]

[29] <https://www.packedwithpotential.org/about/about-us> [Accessed 23/06/2023]

[30] *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791 - 1840* (1988), *No Priest but Love: Excerpts from the Diaries of Anne Lister, 1824-26* (1992), and then the updated versions, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010), and *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister: No Priest But Love* (2020)

would demarcate Lister scholarship into two waves: the wave that spanned 1993 - 2013 and the new wave, triggered by the TV series *Gentleman Jack,* that rose in 2021 and runs to the present day. Within the first wave there is the historical work of Jill Liddington, who provides some of the most thorough work on Lister, and whose publication of *Presenting the Past* (1994) and its companion essay 'Her Diaries and the Historians' (1993), triggered my own awareness and appreciation of the way Lister has been represented by others.[31] Along with Whitbread's edited diaries, Liddington provided historical context that other scholars in the first wave utilised.

The first wave tends to focus on her sexual relationships with women, as this was a significant theoretical period for gender and sexuality studies and Lister was a wonderful example of a woman sexually engaging with other women in pre-sexologist times. They also, due to lack of access to the primary material and time constraints, tend to rely on Whitbread's version of the text more heavily (though not exclusively). The essays are written with depth and nuance but I'm going to render them temporarily shallow for the purpose of showing a general pattern or continuity that connects them. Forgive me for this brief run down: Terry Castle (1993) suggests that Lister used the philosophies of Rousseau and Byron to help her construct her lesbian identity; Anna Clark (1996) builds on Castle's constructivist angle by adding a broader spectrum of influences on Lister's lesbian sexuality, which include her reading of the classics and interest in anatomy; Jack Halberstam (1998) refutes Castle and Clarke's assertions of Lister's lesbian identity and, by more strongly focusing on Lister's masculinity, argues that we should consider Lister as 'preidentitarian' and an example of a female husband and a tribade; Susan S. Lanser (1998) is the first to truly pay attention to class and argues that Lister, as well as other 'gentry sapphists', practised what she terms 'compensatory conservatism' to balance out their other transgressions and keep the status quo; Anira Rowanchild (2000) writes a thesis inspired by Castle and Clarke's emphasis on literary influences on Lister's identity, looking specifically at Lister's literary self-construction, which works to combine what Lister read with how she then wrote and constructed her literary self in the journals; Caroline L. Eisner (2001) also focuses on the act of writing, discussing how Lister uses the process of writing her journal to 'rewrite herself'; Clara Tuite (2002) then discusses the nuances of Lister's writing style, still drawing heavily on the

[31] Jill Liddington, 'Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791 - 1840): Her Diaries and the Historians,' *History Workshop,* 35 (Spring, 1993), pp. 45 - 77; and, Jill Liddington, *Presenting the Past: Anne Lister of Halifax, 1791 - 1840* (Hebden Bridge: Pennine Pens, 1994)

associations previously drawn with Rousseau and Byron; Danielle Orr (2004) writes an essay that continues Rowanchild's emphasis on the activity of writing and argues for Lister's journal writing as an active form of homosexual agency; Stephen Colclough (2010) builds on Clark's suggestion of Byron's influence upon Lister by looking at how this text, and other popular texts of the period, such as *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799)*,* were used by Lister to signal subversive desires to others; Chris Roulston (2013) famously calls Lister 'the UK's First Modern Lesbian', a title that is often repeated in the popular press, and her essay uses Lister's sexuality as a way to explore themes of modernity and shame; and Susan Valladares (2013) writes on both Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen, and seeks to replace 'the critical focus on these diarists' sexuality with a much broader consideration of the personal, social and economic import associated with their literary interests and activities.'[32]

There are another two theses that sit within this first wave, though the amount of time they had to work on their projects and their consequent opportunity to transcribe large portions of Lister's journals granted their work more complexity and richness of detail. Catherine Euler's (1995) thesis focuses on the historical dynamics of gender, class, politics, and women's sociality. It is incredibly rich in historical detail as it's a thesis from the department of History – I only mourn for my own project that it focuses on Lister's later years, between 1830 - 1840, so was somewhat irrelevant to my version of Lister.[33] Danielle Orr's (2006) thesis 'examines the day to day practices that constituted Anne Lister's sexuality

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[32] Terry Castle, 'The Diaries of Anne Lister,' *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 97 - 106; Anna Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7.1 (1996) pp. 23 - 50, p. 37; Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Anira Rowanchild, '"My mind on paper": Anne Lister and Literary Self-Construction in Early-Nineteenth-Century Halifax,' Thesis, The Open University, 2000, Open University portal, Web. 30/06/2023; Caroline L. Eisner, 'Shifting the Focus: Anne Lister as Pillar of Conservatism', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies,* 17.1 (2001), pp. 28 - 42; Clara Tuite, 'The Byronic Woman: Anne Lister's Style, Sociability and Sexuality,' in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. by Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 206; Dannielle Orr, '"I Tell Myself to Myself": homosexual agency in the journals of Anne Lister (1791 - 1840), *Women's Writing*, 11.2 (2004), pp. 201 - 222; Stephen Colclough, '"Do You Not Know the Quotation?" Reading Anne Lister, Anne Lister Reading', in John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (eds), *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 159–72; Chris Roulston, 'The Revolting Anne Lister: The U.K.'S First Modern Lesbian', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 17.3-4 (2013) pp. 267 - 278; Susan Valladares, 'An Introduction to the "literary person[s]" of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen', *Literature Compass,* 10.4 (2013), pp. 353 - 368

[33] Cat Euler, 'Moving Between Worlds: Gender, Class, Politics, Sexuality and Women's Networks in the Diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Yorkshire, 1830 - 1840', Thesis, University of York, 1999, White Rose portal, Web. 30/06/2023

and sociability within the range of her writings , as well as her society.'[34] Orr's more literary focus on language usage was especially useful for me to develop my own treatment of the text.

The new wave continues many of the same themes as the initial wave, though there is a shift in discourse, as queer theory has expanded and the terrain of gender and sexuality studies has changed from how it was a decade ago. There is also a marginal change in the use of primary material, as these essays could use digitised images of her journals to check for context or widen their body of evidence, and many of them had access to the transcribed volumes that were available from 2020 onwards. There are two outlying essays and then a squad of essays that are published in the 2022 issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies.* The first outlier is Chris Roulston's (2021) essay that seeks to revisit Lister's reading of the classics in order to trouble the idea of Lister forming a coherent and unified sense of self. Roulston's formulation of Lister as 'a figure of rupture' and 'a subject whose engagement with questions of sexuality and identity resists a linear temporality and a standard progress narrative' really resonated with my project to disrupt such cohesive representations of Lister.[35] I was glad to read someone else who had recognised that the representations of Lister were beginning to solidify (regardless of intention) into a sleek two-dimensional version of Lister as a unified, Lesbian powerhouse of agency. The second outlier is Stephen Turton's (2022) essay on Lister's use of philology to understand her sexuality and gender, as well as to derive pleasure. He focuses on how Lister disrupts the lexicography process and rewrites dictionaries in order to alter what she reads to better reflect her experience, to become (or live out) what he playfully terms 'the lexicographical lesbian'.[36] Though I do not use Turton later on, his essay has been influential, especially thanks to his introduction to me of Paula Blank's essay 'The Proverbial "Lesbian"' (2011), which was incredibly fruitful for my Lesbian chapter.

The squad of essays are grouped in an issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* dedicated to Anne Lister scholarship. The introduction is written by Jennifer Reed and Ella Ben Hagai who introduce the main reason to focus on Lister as a way 'to explore the

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[34] Danielle Orr, 'A sojourn in Paris 1824-25: sex and sociability in the manuscript writings of Anne Lister (1791-1840),' Thesis, Murdoch University, 2006. Research Portal, Murdoch. Web. 30/06/2023.

[35] Chris Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation: Anne Lister and the Ancients,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 30.1, January 2021, pp. 112 - 135, p. 113 and 115

[36] Stephen Turton, 'The Lexicographical Lesbian: Remaking the Body in Anne Lister's Erotic Glossary,' *The Review of English Studies*, 73.310 (2022), pp. 537–551

malleability, the resilience, and the boundaries of what the term ‘lesbian’ might mean to us'.[37] This issue is the fourth of Volume 26, the first issue of which was titled 'Is lesbian identity obsolete?', so the editorial decision to use Lister as a way to expand on what 'lesbian' might include is strategic. The essays included look at both Anne Lister and 'the *Gentleman Jack* phenomena',[38] so a few of the essays have the TV series as their primary focus and though interesting for their insight on how the series has functioned to transform Lister's representation to the wider public, these essays do not speak closely to my more textual focused project here. There are four of these *GJ* focused essays, which I will begin with and move through relatively quickly. First, Chris Roulston’s essay has a queer theory focus and argues that the TV series 'allows viewers to anticipate an imaginable queer future through the queer past, appearing to make possible a genealogy in which queer desire is no longer cast as an historical impossibility.'[39] Second, Nicole Lyn Lawrence and Sarah Bertekap’s essay wishes to highlight the way the show presents Lister to audiences with 'pink-tinted glasses' as 'an affirmative project’ and in so doing they suggest the show causes viewers to look ‘away from historically-rooted sociopolitical issues of class inequality and traditional gender norms’.[40] I am indebted to this essay for their use of Sara Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), which I use for my chapter on Lister's relationship with Tib. Third, Mette Hildeman Sjölin's essay looks at how the TV series adapted Lister's queer language for modern audiences.[41] And fourth, Sarah Wingrove's essay discusses 'queer pilgrimage' and draws Lister's own pilgrimage to visit the Ladies of Llangollen in parallel with the pilgrimage of contemporary fans to visit the town of Halifax and Shibden Hall.[42]

Of the other essays in this issue, there are a couple that are topically rogue. Marlene Oliveira looks at the diaries of Ann Walker, Lister's partner in her later life, and argues that

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[37] Jennifer Reed & Ella Ben Hagai, '*Gentleman Jack* and the (re)discovery of Anne Lister,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 303 - 308, p. 306

[38] ibid., p. 306

[39] Chris Roulston, 'From text to screen: *Gentleman Jack* then and now,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 309 - 322, p. 312

[40] Nicole Lyn Lawrence & Sarah Bertekap, '"Pink-tinted glasses": looking and affirmation in *Gentleman Jack', Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 323 - 337, p. 325

[41] Mette Hildeman Sjölin, 'Adapting the queer language of Anne Lister's diaries,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 382 - 399

[42] Sarah Wingrove, 'Queer Pilgrimage: Anne Lister, *Gentleman Jack,* and Locating Community,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 449 - 457

we need to focus more on Walker's voice to add greater historical accuracy to the depiction of her, rather than relying on Lister's presentation.[43] Then, Joan M. Burda looks at British landowning inheritance law and the role that wills played in Lister's life; she does well to show how much emotions affected economics in this period, looking at the various alterations that Lister kept making to her will when different relationship ties were made or broken.[44]

The other four essays in this issue focus on Lister's journal, rather than the TV series, and many of them still predominantly revolve around the issues of sexuality and gender. Rebecca Hamilton looks at the way Lister's crypt hand is used, as well as her treatment of other women in the journals, to argue for a process of silencing, concluding that 'her diaries prove that one can subvert silence by conforming to it.'[45] I like the general tilt of this essay and its use of Robyn Warhol's notions of narratability and the unnarratable, which I use later on in the Dull chapter. I do, however, dislike the way Hamilton writes the following:

> Lister's understanding of her own sexual orientation coupled with the historic unspeakability of female same-sex desire work to silence the experiences and validity of likewise sexually inclined women that she encounters. Almost determined to be a singular oddity, she relegates these women to the shadow of her own identity.[46]

She shames Lister for not writing in more depth about the thoughts and actions of other women in order to accuse her of participating in the silencing of lesbians in history, which misunderstands the genre of a private diary and conflates it with the more traditionally outward focused genre of the novel, as well as strangely accusing one of the only explicitly lesbian accounts we have of participating in the silencing that it works to undo. It also gives Lister an inordinate amount of power, which seems like a relatively naive reading of her journals and misses out the moments when her version of reality is proven to be naive itself, such as when Tib confronts Lister about Lister's preference for Mariana, and Lister writes

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[43] Marlene Oliveira, 'A Matter of perspective: Ann Walker through her lens and those of her contemporaries,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 415 - 427

[44] Joan M. Burda, 'The role wills and estate planning played in Anne Lister's life,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 428 - 448

[45] Rebecca Hamilton, '"Impossibility of its being deciphered": Anne Lister, her "crypt hand" diaries, and the contrast between voicing and silencing,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 338 - 353, p. 351

[46] –ibid., p. 341

"*she has a little more penetration than I gave her credit for".*[47] There is a level of rhetorical playfulness in Hamilton's point, especially evident in her use of the metaphor of a shadow cast by an identity, and it works towards her conclusion that subversion interacts with conformity but it doesn't mean I have to like it. It is too harsh.

Jessica Campbell's essay works to qualify Lister as a lesbian. She nicely sums up the previous scholarship on Lister that speaks to this quandary and concludes: 'Identifying Lister as a lesbian is an immediately comprehensible way of communicating to a broader public that this woman in the early 19th century loved other women—romantically, sexually, and throughout her entire life.'[48] I like her careful way of treading through this tense terrain and her more colloquial style of prose. Her essay ends by referring to the next essay by Charley Matthews, which returns to reading practices and argues for Lister as transgender.[49] Matthews uses a quantitative research method, which I find refreshing and speaks to some of my own preferences to include quantity when discussing Lister's journal, though unfortunately Matthews refers to the quantity of books or articles read, and does not refer to the quantity of time given to each item, so language learning and maths are presented as rather minor in their colourful graph, when the time Lister dedicated to working through these texts far surpassed the time it took her to read travel books or literary poetry.[50] Their discussion of Lister as transgender and their response to how Lister is portrayed as a lesbian in the bulk of Lister scholarship is invaluable, however, and I include them, along with Jessica Campbell, later in my Lesbian chapter. The last essay that deals with Lister's sexuality is Charles Upchurch's essay, which spends a considerable amount of time sketching out the complex terrain of the history of sexuality and highlights the significance of 'politics' in 'identity politics'.[51] I appreciated their push to use Lister as a way to focus on the continuities of identity formation between time periods, rather than as a way to look at the differences.

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[47] Friday 22nd February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0104

[48] Jessica Campbell, 'Can we call Anne Lister a lesbian?', *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 354 - 366, p. 364

[49] Charley Matthews, '"I feel the mind enlarging itself": Anne Lister's gendered reading practices,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 367 - 381

[50] ibid., p. 375

[51] Charles Upchurch, 'Following Anne Lister: Continuity and queer history before and after the late nineteenth century,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 400 - 414

As you can see from this brief summary, Anne Lister scholarship is extremely focused on gender and sexuality. I was also initially drawn to the subject of Anne Lister due to her sexuality; she was the only explicitly lesbian writer of the nineteenth century I'd ever heard of and this was enough to dedicate nearly four years of my life to her writing. I had spent my undergraduate years writing about the veiled and shadowy forms of desire in the poetry of Michael Field (pseudonym for Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper) so it was appealing to find writing so explicitly lesbian from earlier in the same century. This has fuelled much of my research for this thesis and forms the foundation from which it seeks to launch. However, as I transcribed, it gradually became apparent that sexuality and gender were only two relatively small pieces of her daily life and that the intense focus on these topics had left a myriad of topics and goings-on untouched and unanalysed.

Diary Studies and Personal Criticism

Diary studies has a relatively short history and is strongly connected to second wave feminism (American and English). The first book that made a case for the significance of women's diaries was Estelle Jelinek's book *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980) that sought to highlight the androcentric interpretation of autobiography up to that point (one example being the correlation drawn between major political events and autobiographical styles, a pattern not evident in women's journals) and to counteract this by focusing critically upon women's autobiography.[52] The main bent of her introduction is to contrast the orderliness and coherence evident in men's autobiographical writing with the irregularity seen in women's and she places diary writing in a central position within this argument. She writes,

> Surveying quite a number of bibliographies from various countries and periods, one is struck by the number of women writing diaries, journals, and notebooks, in contrast to the many more men writing autobiographies proper. From earliest times, these discontinuous forms have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and

[52] Estelle C. Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (London: Indiana University Press, 1980)

> formless nature of their lives. But they also attest to a continuous female tradition of discontinuity in women's autobiographical writing to the present day.[53]

Arguably Jelinek's focus on the significance of diaries in the history of women's autobiographical writing is what then stimulated the wave of studies that took women's diaries as their focus later in the 1980s. I would also posit that her argument for 'a continuous female tradition of discontinuity' can be seen throughout critical studies on women's diaries, not necessarily as an overt thesis in every case but nearly always as a point of departure from which many works seek to justify the position of women's diaries within literary criticism and history.

The criticism and anthologies that followed on Jelinek's heels all had a relatively similar motivation, which was to recuperate women from history, out of their previous (silent) privacy and into the public domain. The quest to counteract an androcentric history of primarily white, male writing and voices. Harriet Blodgett serves as a good representation of these works and their agendas when she writes in the very first paragraph of her introduction to her anthology, *Capacious Hold-All* (1991), that women's diaries are 'central documents in the recovery of female history. Without distortion by an intermediary, they reveal what women take to be true about themselves, their world, and its representability. To all that has been hypothesised and predicated about women by men, they add what women can say and intimate about themselves.'[54] So, many feminists turned to women's diaries in search of women's subjectivity without the influence of a male gaze, or indeed a male pen (though there may have been women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the last edit fell, predominantly, to men[55]).

The political purpose behind these publications was one thing, but there was also an accompanying desire for intimacy, an expectation that the private would deliver the intimate. Blodgett again serves as a good example of this relation between critic and diary texts, as she writes 'the tradition of female English diary writing has been characterised rather by reticence and circumspection than by revelation and confrontation with the

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[53] ibid., p. 19

[54] Harriet Blodgett, *Capacious Hold-All: An Anthology of English-women's Diary Writings* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1991), Introduction, p. 1

[55] Lyndsey Claro, 'Women in the gentleman's career of publishing,' March, 2020 <https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/women-in-the-gentlemans-career-of-publishing> [Accessed 30/06/2023]

deepest feelings' and she warns readers, 'it is best not to hope for too many revelations from these women's diaries.'[56] She presumes that readers will also be seeking this intimacy within women's diaries. It would seem that intimacy is an attitude of reading and not necessarily intrinsic in diary texts. Significantly, when I compare Lister's journal writing to the texts that are included in Blodgett's anthology from the same period, the sexual explicitness aside, I do not necessarily find Lister's writing any more or less intimate. Lister's record of studying sounds very similar to Clarissa Trant's (1800 - 1844) and her emotional register can reach a similar pitch as Ellen Weeton's (1776 - 1845). I would say that in general Lister's writing tends to be less descriptive in general than many other women diarists of her time. However, her entries are more diligent and precise, such as her style of recording conversations, which can include many "she said" and "I said"'s, whereas other diarists tend to paraphrase more heavily. In this way, Lister's diary reads more like a report given as evidence, than the more novelistic, verbose styles that these other diarists generally employ. The process of transcribing Lister's diaries and noticing the way her style directs attention towards these details of everyday life, such as her regular report of clothes mended, turned me towards the ordinary.

Around the same time in literary studies, there was a related feminist call for different styles of criticism and these styles are both generated by and pushed towards life writing with a focus upon the significance of positionality in knowledge making. Nancy K. Miller explains this phenomenon concisely, writing: 'To the extent that one of feminism's principal subjects has been an interrogation of the production of knowledge as a highly contextual activity, it is not surprising that the personalisation of cultural analysis should emerge out of its zones of inquiry.'[57] In Miller's book, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and other Autobiographical Acts* (1991), she argues for a narrative criticism that is situational and personal, viewing theory within its soil, so to speak, rather than simply plucking the plant and pressing it within the pages; as she argues, this is an acknowledgment of the contextual roots of all knowing. This cross-over in genre, between academic writing and autobiographical writing, this blurring of relations (what is the studied and what is the study?), is what gains momentum alongside life writing studies, so that there is an intimacy

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[56] Harriet Blodgett, *Capacious Hold-All: An Anthology of English-women's Diary Writings* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1991), Introduction, p. 7

[57] Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 21

between the two acts, a drawing together of critical acts and autobiographical acts. Marlene Kadar takes this blurring of boundaries to its pinnacle, or inevitable conclusion, when she posits the idea of 'life writing as a critical practice.' Kadar hopes this practice encourages '(a) the reader to develop and foster his/her own self-consciousness in order to (b) humanise and make less abstract (which is not to say less mysterious) the self-in-the-writing.'[58] Again, we have a sense of the importance of positionality in knowledge production; she hopes we will not forget the situated "I" (or rather, forget ourselves) when we meet knowledge. She thinks this remembrance, this embodiment in reading, will double back onto the subject of study, so that as we remember we are a human, thus too, we remember that at the end of the written "I" is another human. She is pushing away from textual theory, away from poststructuralism, and towards a more intimate way of beholding the subject in the text.

After Miller, there is Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff's book of critical essays, *Inscribing the Daily* (1996), in which they suggest that 'the content and form of diaries disclose how we construct knowledge' and argue that '[b]ecause diaries have often been classified as private texts, they challenge us to question the boundaries between the public and the private; and they encourage us to assess the social, political, and personal repercussions of segmenting our lives, our texts, our culture, and our academic disciplines.'[59] So diaries are used as a way to question the boundaries between various discourses, most relevant here is the boundary between academic critical writing and that of personal diary writing. This distinction is one that I try in my own writing to partially blur.

Not all criticism in diary studies revolves around this emphasis on the personal. There are two works that stick out for me amongst these alternatives. There is Rebecca Steinitz's (2001) essay on the British printed diary, in which she explores the relation between commercial printed diaries in the nineteenth century and the way in which these diaries were used by the individuals who purchased them.[60] Her focus on the material aspect of diaries made me reflect on Lister's choice of diary. Lister does not buy a printed diary, which

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[58] Marlene Kadar, 'Coming to Terms: Life Writing — from Genre to Critical Practice,' *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. By Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 3 – 16, p. 12

[59] Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, 'Issues in Studying Women's Diaries: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction,' *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on women's diaries*, ed. by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 1 - 20, p. 2

[60] Rebecca Steinitz, 'Social Spaces for the Self: Organising Experience in the Nineteenth-Century British Printed Diary,' *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 16.2 (2001), pp. 161 - 174

would have been available in her time, but instead opts to get her own journal book made to order at her local bookshop, Whitley's.[61] These journals are blank and Lister organises them herself, for instance, she writes of her journal craft: "ruled my new journal book, vol. 8 both for the letter summary 3 pp. and for the index 18 pp."[62] Steinitz concludes her essay, after looking at three case studies of people altering their printed diaries, with the following: 'In these actual diary practices, we see the materialisation of subjectivities and textualities neither wholly constrained, nor wholly free, but rather occupying the ambiguous and multifarious spaces between constraint and freedom.'[63] In comparison, Lister's journal practice appears much less constrained, or at least, she is not constrained by the direct external organisational influence of a printed diary. However, she is not free but creates and sustains her own forms of constraint. Lister's decision to rule her own journal books and upkeep them with such dedication represents her own meticulous construction of her self in text.

The other work that greatly affected me, especially in the beginning of this project, was Anna Jackson's *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915 - 1962* (2010). Jackson's work reacts to the focus on journals as personal and intimate technologies and brings it back to the textual, as she writes of the diary criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, 'the attention is directed away from the diary *as diary,* as generic differences are elided in order to focus on content rather than form, on women's lives rather than texts, on *bio* rather than *graphy.'*[64] So she focuses instead on 'particular stylistic feature[s] associated with the diary: the dash, the sentence fragment, and the use of the personal pronouns "I" and "you."'[65] I was quite taken with Jackson's attention to form and style in the beginning of transcribing and even experimented with keeping a journal in the same style as Lister for a few days to try to better understand it: I learnt that it was difficult for me to replicate Lister's style because she is so concerned with recording precisely what she has done in a quantitative mode, such as the number of pages she has read, the time she arrived and left every place, the time it took to do activities, the exact money spent on items, who she saw, their names,

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[61] "Call[e]d at Whitley's the booksellers to pay for a blank book" Tuesday 29th April 1817, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, SH:7/ML/E/1

[62] Tuesday 23rd January 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0121

[63] Rebecca Steinitz, 'Social Spaces for the Self', p. 172

[64] Anna Jackson, *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915 - 1962* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 3

[65] ibid., p. 10

and the road names she walked down. My own journal style is more concerned with feelings and description, if I walk somewhere I'm more likely to write what I saw, such as a cute rat scurrying across the road, than the name of the roads I took on my route – a style more aligned with what Harriet Blodgett seems to have been hoping to find in nineteenth-century diaries. Also, Jackson's attention to 'the contradictory effects of the autonomy of the entry and the sequencing of the structure' made me pay attention to how Lister went about writing her journal when I began transcribing. She tends to log when she writes in her journal, such as, "wrote the journal of this morning",[66] and it was mostly a daily affair or as close to daily as she could get, such as writing up the last three days in one sitting. One exception was when she travelled to Paris in May 1819 and she opted to write the majority of her journal in pocket books, which she then wrote up into her journal book at later dates, though she deeply regretted this, as she writes two months after getting back from Paris, when she is still playing catch up on her journal writing:

> How difficult it is to make up for neglecting to do things in their proper season - how hard to redeem lost time! - Let this be a warning to me, and let me never so involve myself again - I see I wrote (on [142] Sat 19 June) on the margin of my pencil journal of Wed. 12 May, It is as extravagant to borrow time as to borrow money; every delay involves us more deeply, till the accumulation of interest is in either case ruinous - How true! May I never forget this and always profit by its remembrance[67]

The value she placed on keeping up to date and on top of her journal writing is a huge part of what makes her writing so special; it is rare to have such a meticulous record of someone's life. She also always adheres to the dated entry, as in, she will not write about yesterday under today's date. These stylistic features are important; however, I believe it is this attention to the daily and Lister's commitment to her diary record that makes her such a great case study for ordinariness. Perhaps, intimacy is not only to be reached through reading a diarist's 'deepest feelings',[68] but can be affected by its slow gathering of objects, people, and places, as well as its presence as a physical object that shows signs of someone's daily dedication and care.

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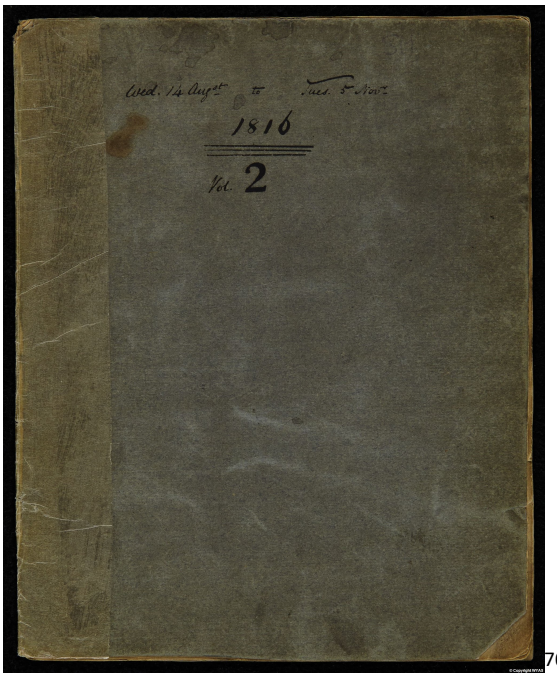
[66] Wednesday 17th May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0055

[67] Wednesday 28th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0075

[68] Harriet Blodgett, *Capacious Hold-All*, p. 7

Anne Lister's Journals and an Intimate Public of Literary Practice

When Anne Lister died at the age of 49 she left in her wake 27 volumes of journals. Lister began her first diary entry with “Monday August 11th Eliza left us”[69] on a sheet of torn loose-leaf paper in 1806, beginning the first of what would become, by 1816, a consistent habit of diary writing. This habit would last twenty-four years. The bundle of loose-leaf pages that follow tend to record social visits, letters sent and received and minimal detail. In 1816, she began her first systematic and serious attempt at journal writing:



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The title “Vol 2” suggests that Anne Lister desired these books to mimic published books and she tends to refer to her journal as "this volume" when reporting on her writing in it, so there is a preference to conceptualise her journals in this way. This exercise book is only filled with 14 pages, including an Index of activities and events, and a list of mentioned

[69] SH:7/ML/E/26/1/0003

[70] SH:7/ML/E/26/2/0001, there is no Volume 1, it must have been lost or destroyed.

books in the volume. It covers 14th August - 5th November and "Vol 3" continues from 6th November 1816 - 20th March 1817. Vol 3 grows in size to 48 pages, including the Index and works read. There is great care taken to create and polish these books to carry an air of published quality.

This sense of writing self-consciously within a published tradition continues and takes on a more official nature, so that when she purchases her first bound journal in 1817, she writes on the first page, '"I propose from this day to keep an exact journal of my actions and studies, both to assist my memory and to accustom me to set a due value on my time." Introduction to Mr Gibbon's Journal - A Lister.'[71] Or so it seems; the apparent chronology, however, is not as straightforward as the reader might assume. Anne Lister did not read *Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works* until Saturday 6th March 1819, two years after the first journal was written, when she read the preface in the Library. She then borrowed the book, as the title is fully written in for the entry of Sunday 7th March 1819, when she read 40 pages at home.[72] This is also the date given when the title is entered into her literary index as well.[73] The quote written on the first page of the first journal (21 March 1817 - 25 January 1818) is also written on the first page of the second journal (26 January 1818 - 10 April 1819), this latter quote is dated however, as being written on "Sat. Morn. 1 May 1819." In the entry for 1 May 1819, which is in the third journal (11 April 1819 - 22 November 1819), she writes, "Before and after breakfast (all the morning) writing out the list of books, pamphlets, etc. in the last volume of my journal."[74] So, during the process of continuing to write her regular journal entries in the third journal, she finished the second journal with the list of books read, and decided to write in the front of this journal the quote from Gibbon (oddly, she does not write the quote in the front of the third journal from which she is retrospectively working backwards from). The quote given in the first journal is not dated, but it is likely that she must have written it long after that journal's completion. The point of this summary of events is that it proves that she did not write these quotes as introductory intentions – that is, intentions of what she desired to *write* – but wrote them after the books

[71] SH:7/ML/E/1/0002

[72] SH:7/ML/E/2/0116

[73] SH:7/ML/E/2/0004

[74] SH:7/ML/E/3/0012

were completed, showing a process of editing and a desire to affect the way that her journals were *read,* even if that readership was somewhat ambiguous.

The factor that creates even greater ambiguity in her emulation of a published tradition is her use of a code, or what she calls her crypt hand. In terms of transcription, I have followed the lead of how Whitbread presents it in *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010), which is to use italics for when she uses crypt hand. Also, Lister's crypt hand does not use spaces, it is one continuous thread of letters, or punctuation, though it does sometimes have gaps between sentences or phrases, which I have copied. I opted not to add my own punctuation, believing that doing so would increase the risk of misinterpreting the text. This means you must work out the syntax yourself, just as I have had to do, never quite as easy as you would think. I have made these decisions because they retain the integrity of the original text and provide a clear, visual sign of when she passes in and out of her crypt hand and how she organises her thoughts on the page. This also works to best echo my experience of transcribing, as I faced the more drastic difference between her plain hand and crypt hand on the page, as well as the strange delay in fully comprehending what she has written and what I am typing out. I've also decided to differentiate her quotations from the use of secondary criticism by using double quotation marks within this thesis for any words taken from Lister's journal and single quotation marks for any secondary criticism, so that her words can hold a certain aesthetic presence on the page. I also think the use of punctuation that is commonly used for speech helps to enhance the direct and intimate quality of her first-person account.

Lister started to develop her crypt hand as early as 1806 in her collection of loose sheets, at first using a mixture of Latin and Greek, and then developing by 1808 a rudimentary version of the crypt she used for the rest of her journals. The symbols are made up of Greek letters, numbers to cover vowels (a= 2, e = 3, i = 4, o = 5, u = 6) and some added symbols for regularly used letter combinations, such as 'sh' = Λ. Its complexity lies in where it breaks the rules, for example, when she uses a number for a consonant, e.g. 8 = w. Lister did provide keys of her cipher to intimate others, such as Mariana Lawton and Miss Vallance, so that she could communicate more privately through her letters.[75] There was no key retained with her journals, however, and it was only deciphered in the late 1880s or

[75] She gave these women written out keys for her cipher, for example, in my period, she reports: "*half hour with V gave her the crypthand alphabet which* [Mariana] *has*" - Sunday 7th January 1821

1890s (the date is not exact) by John Lister and Arthur Burrell.[76] However, once these two discovered what was written in the crypt hand, they kept it quiet for some time. It was not until as late as 1937 that Arthur Burrell finally forwarded his copy of the key to the borough librarian, Edward Green.[77] This key can be found in Appendix A.

Originally the crypt hand was integrated with plain hand and only included her connections with women, whether they were sexual records, "I had Miss A *on my knee: kissed,*" or more emotional records, "went to bed before tea *of grief at [Eliza's] departure.*"[78] In the first lengthy segment of pure crypt hand in her first short volume in 1816, it is still very much tied to her sexual identity, as she says, "*Anne sat by my bedside till 2 I talked about the feeling to which she gave rise lamented my fate said I should never marry could not like men ought not to like women*."[79] However, by the time Lister began keeping her more considered journal volumes, she had broadened the scope of what she decided to include in her crypt hand, opening her first properly bound journal book with: "In the afternoon *mending my black silk petticoat and my black worsted stocking*."[80] This inclusion of clothes-mending in crypt hand is a recurring habit, as well as the habit of reporting gossip, such as, "Told my uncle and aunt what had passed *tho" not Mrs E*[dward]*'s speech only said how I disliked her manner and that I could call it like nothing but Unitarian"*.[81] Here we see the record of a conversation taking place is given in her plain hand and the details, which include her dislike, are given in her crypt hand. However, she does not always include gossip or derogatory comments in crypt hand, such as when she writes in plain hand about the Greenwood's, in particular "the old lady": "they are a sad vulgar set and Heaven forgive me if I wrong the mater familias, but I verily believe that when I have seen her she has often been more diligent in the potion way than for her spirits sake was necessary".[82] It would seem that when it comes to topics outside of her lesbian desires and relationships, there is

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[76] Jill Liddington, 'Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791 - 1840): Her Diaries and the Historians,' *History Workshop,* 35 (Spring, 1993), pp. 45 - 77, p. 52 and 74

[77] ibid., p. 53

[78] 28th October 1808 - SH:7/ML/E/26/1/0011 and 9th November 1808 - SH:7/ML/E/26/1/0010

[79] 15th August 1816 - SH:7/ML/E/26/2/0004

[80] 21st March 1817 - SH:7/ML/E/1/0002

[81] Monday 15th May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0054

[82] Saturday 3rd April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/2/0130

no absolute rule for what can be included in plain hand and what must be written in crypt hand.

We see this disorderly usage when she writes of the body. Other critics tend to include her bowels as a general rule for what she includes in her crypt hand (a particular detail I write about in the Period chapter), however, she can write of her bowels in plain hand, for example: "Felt much better this evening than in the morning when I was sickish and afraid of my bowels - having had 3 motions from getting up to our first going out, and one when we came in again".[83] Or, she can use crypt hand, such as, "*awoke before six with a good deal of pain in my bowels washing them more than usual with cold water did them good went to the necessary but did little yet have had no pain since and it is now after eleven*".[84] Both of these examples include similar levels of detail about the bowel complaint. It would seem that Lister changes her mind depending on the day of writing that entry, a good example of what Jackson calls the 'autonomy of the entry'.[85]

At its most arbitrary, Lister uses her crypt hand to discuss the food that she ate with her aunt while in Paris, writing: "Got to our restaurateur at 7 20/60 - *potage purée au crouton fricassée de poulet des pruneaus* [sic] *macaroons and* Les oeufs à la meige - very good and very pretty looking dish".[86] Note here the way the crypt hand runs across into the plain hand after she writes "*macaroons and".* It is impossible to know why she wrote most of what they ate in crypt hand for this entry, especially when most of their meals for this trip are given in plain hand. I can only assume it's arbitrary, though I would love a scholar to prove otherwise.

So, Lister writes her journals in hardback bound volumes, in which she draws out indexes and adds epigraphs as editorial afterthoughts, epigraphs which refer to published journals, and yet she also writes a considerable amount of information in a private crypt hand that could not be read by anyone but her and a few significant others. This ambiguity stretches to include her attitude of whether people were allowed to know of her keeping a journal. There is the instance in which she is upset with Tib for telling her friend Emma Saltmarshe about her journal and use of crypt hand:

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[83] Sunday 30th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0043

[84] Monday 10th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0060

[85] Anna Jackson, *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915 - 1962* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 17

[86] Friday 28th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0041 - in comparison, here is a plain hand example: "Potage Purée au croûton, boeuf à la sauce piquante, crême frite, des pruneaus, and strawberries" SH:7/ML/E/3/0042

> Took a couple of turns round the garden with Emma before Isabel arrived (rode behind William) - IN., much to my annoyance, mentioned my keeping a journal, and setting down everyone's conversation in my peculiar hand-writing (what I call my crypt hand) - I mentioned the almost impossibility of its being deciphered, and the facility with which I wrote it, and not at all shewing my vexation at IN.'s folly in naming the thing - *never say before her what she may not tell for as to what she ought to keep or what she ought to publish she has the worst judgement in the world*[87]

Though there is ambiguity about whether Lister is angry at the information being shared in general or Tib's decision to share it with the comment that Lister writes "down everyone's conversation". It seems like Tib is purposefully stirring trouble with such a remark, which is not helpful in the small town of Halifax where such gossip spreads quickly. Lister seems to deal with it by leaning into the remark with pride, rather than revealing either anger or embarrassment, and shows off about the complexity of her crypt hand (though, again, it is unclear whether she says this to Emma in order to reassure her that if such conversations are recorded, no one else can read them). The entry does suggest that Emma did not know of Lister's keeping a journal before this point, which means for three years Emma has apparently not known about it and considering Emma is one of Lister's closest friends in Halifax it does suggest strongly that Lister preferred to keep her journal private. Unfortunately for Lister, people did talk and five years later, many in her circle of friends and acquaintances did know that she kept a meticulous journal, and this knowledge affected the way that they socialised with her, as Lister reports in a conversation with her friend Mrs Waterhouse, "We had over the story of my not visiting Mrs Christopher Rawson. She [Mrs Waterhouse] said I was as bad as an officer for taking offence - she cared nothing about these things - but it was my journal that frightened people - she had made up her mind not to open her lips before me — Mrs R[awson] at the Saltmarshes' had abused my poor journal - wished I would destroy it."[88] Within my period, she does not make huge strides to keep her journal writing hidden. There are a few instances of her writing it while other people are in the room, some as intimate as Tib, but others not as close, such as when she stays at the

[87] Monday 16th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0081

[88] Thursday 25th March 1824, SH:7/ML/E/7/0116

Dalton's, some acquaintances from her York network, and records: "the girls came and sat with me ^in my room^ till I wrote the journals of Sat. yesterday and so far of this morning".[89]

Lister's journal highlights the ambiguity of what constitutes the private and the public, a traditional binary that I feel needs to be addressed when dealing with the manuscript diary, a genre that functions upon the meaning of the private. The first aspect to note is that 'private' was set up in a dualistic pair with 'public,' the etymology for each word always implicates the other in its efforts at definition. It is within this dualism that the two terms have evolved. Many scholars now take up the opinions elucidated by Habermas in his work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), which are well paraphrased by Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor,

> The first sense of the predicate "public," inherited from Roman antiquity, has to do with society as a whole, in opposition to what regards "private" citizens. In that sense we speak of the "public interest" or of the "republic"; the Latin expression *res publica* (the "public thing") designates the state or government, which concerns itself with matters of common concern. … The second meaning of "public" comes to us from the eighteenth century: it designates what is open, transparent, and accessible, in opposition to what is secret or that to which access is restricted. One speaks of the "publication" of a book; information is made "public"; the library is "open to the public"; and so on. The public sphere in this sense is composed of places for discussion and exchange among "private" citizens.[90]

Habermas also notes that these different definitions of public 'fuse into a clouded amalgam.'[91] The public becomes a clouded space, then, in the eighteenth century that is 'open to all,' but also has the implication of being politicised, a space where private citizens can gather and criticise matters of public concern. I write 'open to all' in scare quotes because this was true in the sense of a building (of touristic appeal) being open or closed

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[89] Monday 19th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0080

[90] Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor, 'Chapter 4: Public Sphere and Private Sphere,' *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* trans. by Jane Marie Todd, (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 36 – 40, p. 36 - 37; Maclure and Taylor are paraphrasing, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989)

[91] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 1

against the public, meaning that every person could enter, or not, as may be the case, but it is not true in the sense of a politicised space because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the public sphere was a space open only to men. In this sense women were not members of the public, and, as such, public came to be a gendered word. Instead, the private sphere was envisioned and propagated as a space for women to occupy. So, we see 'private' beginning to be associated with women. This may also explain the search by feminist scholars of women's private documents because it can be seen as a recuperation of the female domain, a seeking out of what women consider to be truly theirs; or the only way to produce a history that includes women.

It is worth noting that some scholars view the terms private and public as completely interdependent. The view is held that the private sphere is used to support the public sphere, or even more intimately, it is actually a part of the public sphere. It is regulated by the public sphere and is therefore visible and very much a public matter. Tricia Lootens questions the idea of the private with flair when she writes of 'the ambiguously historical claims of an increasingly implausible "private" or "domestic sphere," a fantasy space of "impossible purities" whose "heart" remains, by definition, safely sequestered from the workings of "Politics," writ large.'[92] The illusion is that the private is private. It would appear, ta-da, that it is actually public. The private sphere is a fantasy environment that women are expected to represent; *and*, equally, a public arena where women *could* engage in public affairs, though they may be swaddled (hidden) in domestic discourse or context.[93] This is the historical view. The same conclusion is reached with the less historically trenchant view of poststructuralism and investigations into ideology and cultural constructivism. From this viewpoint, the very existence of the private is questioned. Felicity Nussbaum, for instance, says 'diaries can only be relatively autonomous from the culture they inhabit, for there is no

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[92] Tricia Lootens, *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 1

[93] One example could be Elizabeth Barrett Browning and using her position as a mother/woman to build a strong foundation to fight for the abolition of child labour in her poetry, 'Barrett Browning came to use her domestic role, as invalid and more especially as wife, as a base from which to attack social injustice: that of race, sex, nation, class, family, and age. To put this a different way, she may have cross-dwelled in separate intelligibilities, but because she understood hegemonic consumption practices and audience fickleness, she used the very idealism which made her into a respectable angel of the house with moral charisma, as a basis from which to launch social critique.' p. 334, Linda Shires, 'Elizabeth Barret Browning: Cross-Dwelling and the Reworking of Female Poetic Authority,' *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 30.1 (2002), pp. 327 - 343

truly private language or practice.'[94] We see again the revelation that the private is actually the public, with the private simply being a fantasy concept. Nussbaum asserts that language in particular can never truly be private as it is a cultural device and as such imbued with cultural meanings.

In some ways, Lister certainly seems to be participating in the fantasy of the private, though for Lister this fantasy tends to incorporate the more public fantasy of her ambitions to eventually publish her writing. I interpret a sort of playfulness to her journal craft, in which she is producing for herself these volumes of books that she has authored, so that she has a collection of books that mimic her fantasy of one day having authored a collection of published books. She is, in one sense, living out her fantasy. I do not mean to imply by using terms such as 'fantasy' and 'playful' that she is not serious about this activity; rather I believe this playfulness was deadly serious and shows her commitment to experimentation and practice. Indeed, though the text of her journals may not be intended directly for publication, it seems fair to understand them as a training ground for her writing.

A concept that expands upon this blurring of the private and public in Lister's journal practice and incorporates this aspect of fantasy is Lauren Berlant's concept of an 'intimate public'. Berlant writes that

> the intimate public sphere of the U.S. present tense renders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere. No longer valuing personhood as something directed toward public life, contemporary nationalist ideology recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds.[95]

Obviously, her concept of an intimate public is quite tightly linked to the present citizenship (present in 1997) of the US, so my version of this concept is going to transfer and slightly transform it. My thoughts are that for Lister, she participated in an intimate public of literary practice, which included the practice of journal writing. So, rather than gaining citizenship in a national sense, she gains literary citizenship by investing her time and energy in the personal act of journal writing, an act directed toward the literary sphere. If anything, the

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[94] Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 29

[95] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 5

act of writing itself, the personal trial of seclusion that the act demands, has always relied upon the fantasy of an intimate public. Writers must imagine a community for which their writing grants them citizenship; indeed, they must depend upon an illusion of company. It is an affective process in this way, generated largely by feeling, as Jay Prosser interprets in his conversation with Berlant, we might understand an intimate public as 'strangers formed into communities by affective ties'.[96] I see this in Lister's way of relating to her writing idol, Edward Gibbon. She not only includes a quote from his journal as epigraphs in two of her own journals, a personal act that links their two independent and personal acts of journal writing into an intimate public, but she also creates more affective ties with him elsewhere, such as when she writes:

> I have done no Hutton all this last week - alas! I might say with Gibbon (vid. his journal 16 august 1762 p. 67/726 vol. 2 miscellaneous works) "while every one looks on me as a prodigy of application, I know myself how strange a propensity I have to indolence" - yet I feel I have gained ground in arithmetic very considerably since this time last year -[97]

In this example, she empathises with Gibbon's sentiment that he is not as productive as others think he is, that in the privacy of his own literary practice, he is sometimes indolent. Both of their acts of studying, or rather their lack of studying, are private, as is the writing of this indolence into their journals, yet here, by comparing, indeed, stylistically *speaking with* Gibbon she brings their private acts into a community. It is an imagined conversation and an imagined affinity, but it undergirds her personal acts of studying and writing.

In this understanding of her journal practice, her crypt hand is a layered complication. At surface level, Lister's decision to create and then implement a cipher can be understood as another private literary practice that pays homage to the study of ancient languages and philology. It may not be understood by everyone but its presence in the text indicates a level of ability in these other languages, as well as her capacity for ingenuity. We see an element of this when she turns Tib's indiscretion into an opportunity to show off, she mentions, "the almost impossibility of its being deciphered, and the facility with which I wrote it." She is an adept scholar of language and the cipher shows her geekery. Underneath

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[96] Lauren Berlant and Jay Prosser, 'Life writing and intimate publics: A conversation with Lauren Berlant,' *Biography,* 34.1 (Winter 2011), pp. 180 - 187, p. 180

[97] Monday 12th April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0004

the surface, the content of her crypt hand is a little ambiguous within this theoretical framework of an intimate public. On the one hand, her crypt hand is generally written in a more emotional register than her plain hand, which though suggestive of the sentimental novel popular at the time (she reads Leontine de Blondheim, for instance, and is very moved[98]), tends to be a personal act that does not lean so obviously towards the particular intimate public of literary practice. Indeed, for Lister, the crypt hand gives her a space to write down that which she rarely affords herself the opportunity of sharing with anyone at all. The personal act of writing in her crypt hand can be viewed as an intimate act without the public sense of working towards a literary sphere, as she writes after expressing her sad feelings on receiving a letter from Mariana inviting her to meet up in Manchester when she can't really afford to: "*I am very low the tears gush as I write but thank god I generally feel relief from thus unburdening my mind on paper*".[99] These personal acts seem solely intimate, a process of catharsis rather than literary practice. However, then there are moments within her crypt hand when she most sincerely and purposefully writes in a literary way, such as when she writes a letter to Mariana and records the following:

> *about half a page of crypt the inditing which took me about two hours so difficult ^am I to please in writing^ professions of love I must say they age generally well and often beautifully done so as to rouse the feelings and the passions and yet are most nicely wrapped up I can certainly make love as well as most people but I really feel what I say to π and begin to love her with all my former tenderness and devotion -- nothing out of crypt that might not be seen the whole letter took me from eleven to almost four*[100]

She reflects on her own writing prowess here, a moment of self-congratulation for her "*often beautifully done*" "*professions of love*". The significance here is that her crypt hand is not solely an intimate act, as she sends this letter of well written love-making to Mariana. In this way her crypt hand can be understood as simply a lesser-known language, no less public than English – a cultural device, as Nussbaum would have it – which can certainly be seen now when so many scholars know the cipher and can read her crypt hand with ease. This example also shows that her crypt hand does not prevent her from writing in ways that

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[98] Wednesday 14th February 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0005

[99] Saturday 30th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0106

[100] Saturday 31st March 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0018

move toward the literary sphere, indeed, in many ways it is where she can be the most literary. Her crypt hand can be purely intimate, or it can depart into the intimate public of literary practice; it does a slightly haphazard dance between the two. In many ways her lesbianism prevents her from participating as fully as she would have liked in the intimate public of literary practice, though her decision to use a cipher rather than simply exclude these moments of emotion and "*professions of love*" from her journal practice indicates a level of defiance and resolution: these sections of her text may not be suitable for her present day but they are no less worthy of history and a future intimate public. And here we are, two hundred years later, with a community known as Code Breakers and a transcription project that will render her journals entirely accessible and readable to a global intimate public of readers.

My Methodology: Attunement through Transcription

> To become attuned is to be drawn into a responsive relation—to experience an affinity that is impossible to ignore yet often hard to categorize. Being attuned is not primarily an issue of representation, of the "aboutness" of the work of art, but its presence[101] – Rita Felski, *Hooked* (2020)

And so, we come back around to Sontag's notion that '[a]rt is not only about something; it is something.'[102] Rita Felski in her most recent publication seems to be echoing Sontag in her push for recognising a work of art's presence, the way it takes its place in the world and interacts with people along affective lines of attachment and attunement. Felski further explains that attunement

> is not a feeling-about but a feeling-with: a relation that is more than the sum of its parts. In contrast to what we might call container theories of the

[101] Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 41

[102] Susan Sontag, 'On Style,' *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 21

> emotions—a person having an inner feeling about an external object—attunement is about things resonating, aligning, coming together.[103]

The transcription project of Lister's journals will soon render the necessity of transcribing in order to study her text obsolete. Soon, to transcribe will be a choice, a decision to cross-check a transcription, perhaps, or a labour of love to learn her crypt hand. Much will be gained in this shift, so much material will be available and easily processed for analysis, but there will also be a loss: there will no longer be so many scholars undergoing the textured process of transcription. I found the process of transcription brought me into alignment with Lister in a way that simply reading did not achieve.

Felski's notion of attunement includes attention to process, to 'acclimatising', and also a recognition of the work done by others to set the stage of attunement.[104] Before I came to the tedious task of transcription, I had already been attuned to Lister by reading Whitbread's edited version of the text, by watching the TV series *Gentleman Jack,* and by reading the majority of the pre-2019 scholarship on Lister. These encounters with Lister had created in me a 'state of readiness' that Felski posits is necessary for attunement to occur.[105] Alongside this preparatory attunement towards Lister, I had been reading up on critical practice. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2003) and Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) hit me with particular force and seemed acutely relevant to the arguments I'd come across in life writing studies, especially Marlene Kadar's idea of 'life writing as a critical practice.'[106] In *Touching Feeling* I was enamoured with Sedgwick's positionality, how she suggests we move away from prepositions such as 'beyond' in criticism, which she perceived as 'the bossy gesture of “calling for” an imminently perfected critical or revolutionary practice that one can oneself only adumbrate.' Instead she offers 'beside', choosing it 'because there’s nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them' and '[i]ts interest does not [...]

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[103] Rita Felski, *Hooked*, p. 42

[104] ibid., p. 50-2

[105] ibid., p. 52

[106] Marlene Kadar, ‘Coming to Terms: Life Writing — from Genre to Critical Practice,’ *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. By Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 12

depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations'.[107] This form of imperfect and affectively grounded critical positioning resonated with Marlene Kadar's theory of personalising the critical stance, to be beside a text suggests a spatial nearness, which I suppose, in my mind, I believed implied a nearness of two first person written subjects: the journal text's first person and my critical first person, Lister and I. This was only consolidated by Felski pointing out to me that the popular mode/mood of critical detachment in academic critique was simply a default style and was not the only one available to me. She highlighted that this form of critique was written in a 'rhetoric of defamiliarisation' and it got me thinking about my own rhetorical pose.[108] I wondered if it would be possible to work with a rhetoric of vulnerability.

The culmination of these ideas affected my choice to transcribe the diaries from this particular period of Lister's life. I'd already decided that transcribing three years seemed an appropriate sample size and an achievable aim, so after some consideration, I opted to choose the three years when Lister mirrored my own age during the project, which is when we were 28, 29, and 30 years old. There was a neatness to this idea, as she was born in 1791 and I in 1991, so the periods of time would be a clean two hundred years apart. Unfortunately, we're not born in the same month - she in April and me in August - but we are both fire signs, Aries and Leo, which grants me some amusement and queer kinship. My rationale for choosing this was the hope that it would bring us beside one another. It would lessen the gap of time between us, for though we may live in incredibly different times, I would transcribe and know that she'd been on the earth for as long as me. This choice seemed to eradicate barriers towards relationality and lessened the effect of my usual recourse to defamiliarisation.

So, I entered into the process of transcription in a state of relationality, seeking to attune to the subject in Lister's prose. It was not easy, however. Lister's plain hand is heavily abbreviated, so much so that the plain hand in many ways is more difficult than the crypt hand when first faced with the text. Though deciphering could be slow work, at least I knew it would be correct, whereas her plain hand had no key and offered more opportunities for error. There were a few words that took me some time to figure out, such as her abbreviation of "ditto", a word that I didn't expect Lister to use, as it sounded too

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[107] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 8

[108] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 7

contemporary to me. In the beginning, the crypt hand was a strange unravelling, as she uses no spaces or punctuation and when I did not know the language so well, I would transcribe each letter and then only separate them into words afterwards, so that the meaning would only gradually unroll across my page. Gradually, by practice, I had learnt her alphabet so well that I could read the words as fluently as the English alphabet, so the words would jump out at me, and I would understand the meaning more instantaneously. By July 2020, after 7 months of transcribing nearly every weekday, I'd got to a point when I reported in my own journal that 'I can read it very fast, way too fast for me to type, it's the typing that trips me up.'

My journey of transcription was long. I transcribed three years, which totals 440,918 words, and it took me about a year and three months. An example of my transcription can be found in Appendix B. In the first two months when transcribing was still relatively difficult, it was the act of reading, deciphering, and copying that took most of my attention. I thought more about the technical side of things, such as her style of writing or how long it took me to transcribe. However, once I became fluent the contents of the text began to take over. There was a shift in how I related to her and I began to attune more radically. To compound this process, during the same time, of course, there was the global pandemic of Covid-19, which had forced me to work and transcribe at home. I lived in a shared house and at dinners, which suddenly became a very communal affair, as no one could leave, the goings-on of Anne Lister became valuable conversation. What had she done today? We would then discuss her, as if we were gossiping about a friend, or, more accurately, exchanging notes on a client (as my housemates were made up of a counsellor, a health advocate for asylum-seekers, and a personal assistant for care leavers). During the pandemic, my whole household attuned to Lister. She became part of our everyday routine.

It was a process that I tend to think of as sedimentary, a gradual layering that happens through time. There is a phenomenological aspect to this sedimentation; it is an embodied process of duration and affect. Sara Ahmed discusses in her book *Queer Phenomenology* how bodies are shaped by history and draws on the 'model of history as bodily sedimentation'.[109] She works this into a theory of 'the work of repetition', how as people repeat the same gestures, the same acts, again and again through time, the repetition masks the labour behind these gestures and acts, so that they become 'natural' or

[109] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 56

'originary'.[110] I think there is a level of sedimentation to my experience of attunement through transcription, what began as labour soon felt natural and easy. The figure of sedimentation also aligns with the nature of the diary, with its episodic form. Chris Roulston writes, 'Lister's richly ambivalent text produces a sedimented narrative of the self that resists a linear autobiographical trajectory.'[111] Sedimentation proposes that simply because things occur in series and build up chronologically through time does not mean that the end product is linearity. The linear implies notions of unity and coherence that a journal like Lister's cannot quite manage to present. Sedimentation can be used, then, as a way to signal the passing of time while avoiding the implication of unity – the metaphor of sedimentation brings to mind the varied and haphazard ocean floor with all its texture and irregularity.

The effects of this sedimentary attunement meant that I had a grasp on Lister's life, day by day, week by week, that felt extremely thick and intricate. This version of Lister that I had the privilege of getting to know had the seeming effect of 'opening my eyes', a sort of clarity of perception, an epistemology that was only arrived at by an ontological effort. I now appreciated Suzanne Bunkers' need to ask the question: 'What are the reader's ethical responsibilities: both to the diarists and to the present-day readers who will learn about the diaries and their writers based on the reader's interpretation?'[112] I had all this knowledge about Lister because I'd transcribed so much of her own writing and I knew that many people who would read my thesis (my examiners primarily) would not have read the primary text, let alone spent as much time with it as I had done. I felt an ethical responsibility to represent her as correctly and closely to the text as I could. I was frightened that my rhetoric would push me into saying an untruth, that I would misrepresent her in some way, and it would be undetectable to my readers. I found Helen Buss' opinion helpful in this regard, she writes that '[f]or a reader of archival documents [...] a reading ethic that involves reader responsibility as well as reader pleasure, a sense of reciprocal activity of text and reader, a respect for the writer's subjectivity — in other words, an ethic of love — is essential.'[113] I

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[110] ibid., p. 56-7

[111] Chris Roulston, 'The Revolting Anne Lister: The U.K.'S First Modern Lesbian', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 17.3-4 (2013) pp. 267 - 278, p. 268

[112] Suzanne L. Bunkers, '"Faithful friend": Nineteenth-century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries,' *Women's Studies Int. Forum,* 10.1 (1987), pp. 7 - 17, p. 7

[113] Helen M. Buss, 'A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing,' *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on women's diaries*, ed. by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 86 - 103, p. 88

found something deeply reassuring in Buss' notion of 'an ethic of love'. I wanted to respect Lister's subjectivity and not tear her life apart with analysis, especially as it would be such a cheap move considering she couldn't come back from the dead to sue me for libel. An ethics of love also chimed with my idea of using a rhetoric of vulnerability.

The significance of this rhetoric of vulnerability is its admittance of rhetoric. The way I write in this thesis is still persuasive and tends to construct analysis in a particular direction. I am still trying to convince you of my point of view. It does not pretend to be innocent. I do not mean to contend with a 'rhetoric of defamiliarisation' and I am not replacing or disavowing this mode of scholarship. I am simply offering another way. I believe this way is more fitting to my project, to an archival subject – that is, a woman who lived and not simply a narrator in a fictional text – and to my experience of transcription. I write in first person, for the most part, though sometimes this slips in and out of third person as otherwise it doesn't read very well and, as I introduced in the beginning, I like style. I find that writing in first person tends to encourage a sense of conversation that moves away from a hard-line, statement-heavy writing and towards more nuanced and tentative ways of dealing with the text, as well as with other critics. There are also elements of myself in this thesis, especially in the opening chapter on lesbians. I have skin in the game and it is important that you know this. I am not neutral, nor do I do neutral work.

The Chapters Ahead

My first chapter is on whether we can call Lister a lesbian. It's my most personal chapter and probably comes the closest at enacting this rhetoric of vulnerability. I move through key texts in lesbian criticism exploring the ways that lesbian as a term is insistently difficult to define. Then I look at how Lister scholars have chosen to define Lister and their reasonings for doing so and end with my own interpretation of the text. My second chapter continues with this theme of sexuality and looks at the way that Lister and her lesbian relationships are so often portrayed. She is either a rake and seducer or a 'successful lesbian' who attains and is happy with her choice of partner. I move away from these more sensationalist representations and towards a more ordinary plane. I explore her relationship with Isabella Norcliffe, a relationship that changes and fluctuates through time and that is held together

by something other than sexual pleasure and excitement. My third chapter seeks to bring Lister's body to the foreground and I open with a gambit to construct a theory of the quotidian body. However, immediately I crash upon the rocks of the realisation that no one has noticed her menstruation, including myself, and as such, this notion of a quotidian body is largely read as male or lacking a uterus. This chapter seeks to undo some of the stigma around uteruses and periods by focusing on Lister's cycle and her learning of female anatomy. My final chapter walks away from the majority of Lister scholarship with their general interest in Lister's interests, in her reading and her learning and her fucking, and turns towards the moments when she is not interested or is lacking things or people to interest her. I explore her dawdling, her boredom, and her loneliness – these gaps and disconnections that go into making an ordinary life.

Lesbians

How to define Lister's sexual identity? And why it matters

This section is going to be difficult to write. There is no right answer, as there rarely is within literary studies, but there are feelings of value that are uncomfortable to navigate; uncomfortable to whom? you might ask. To me, I answer awkwardly (oh how the personal can make you wince). I have tried on many occasions to argue with myself that the debate over Lister's sexuality doesn't matter, that it's not a debate worth spending much time over, and yet, really, it does matter very much and I have argued for its insignificance, not because it is truly insignificant, but because I wish to avoid the hard labour of writing out something so complex and so meaningful.

So, what exactly am I talking about here? What is the debate?

Some critics, and the general public, understand Lister to be a lesbian. This label is a huge part of why she attracts interest. We see this particularly in the contention that was caused when a plaque was put up by the York Civic Trust outside Holy Trinity church in York, which read: “Anne Lister 1791 - 1840 Gender-nonconforming entrepreneur. Celebrated marital commitment, without legal recognition, to Ann Walker in this church. Easter, 1834.” The point of the plaque was to honour the commitment made there between Lister and Ann Walker, but it was understood by many in its choice of wording to be another historical device guilty of lesbian erasure. A petition to have the plaque recognise Anne Lister as a lesbian was created and ended up with 2,500 signatures. Now the plaque reads: “Anne Lister 1791 - 1840 Lesbian and Diarist; took sacrament here to seal her union with Ann Walker Easter 1834”.[1]

The "fact" that Lister was a lesbian was what drew me towards her as a research subject; drew me because I identify as a lesbian and I was curious about what I perceived as

[1] Helen Pidd and Patrick Greenfield, ‘Anne Lister: Plaque wording to change after 'lesbian' row’, *The Guardian,* (Sept., 2018) <*https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/03/plaque-for-first-modern-lesbian-to-be-reworded-after-complaints*> [accessed 16/02/2021]

my history, or my historical narrative. However, to call someone from the past a lesbian is not a simple task in academia; and to call Lister a lesbian is not as straightforward as one (being me) might hope. So, I will be covering three debates in this section: firstly, why using the term "lesbian" can be difficult; secondly, how other scholars have chosen to label Lister; and thirdly, exploring the text and my own interpretation. My main aim in careening through these topics is to open up the idea of nuance, of complexity and, at times, confusion, of non-answers, of frustration.

In Martha Vicinus' essay 'The History of Lesbian History', she provides a biographical case study of Edith Ellis, Havelock Ellis' wife, and, talking of his difficulty in defining lesbianism, she writes:

> He attempts to include all possibilities and can settle on no one defining characteristic. Never afraid of inconsistency, he frames lesbianism as an emotion, a sexual act, a general reversal, and either situational or innate. It is striking how much we are still indebted to these different and contradictory propositions. Yet my rereading of Ellis has made me more sympathetic to his achievements; I now feel that his very indecisiveness is precisely what characterizes lesbian history, down to the controversy of when, how, and if it is appropriate to use the word "lesbian."[2]

It is in this place of indecisiveness that we must begin. I would agree with Vicinus that there is a degree of uncertainty that plagues the usage of "lesbian", so that even when I settle on a definition, it feels like it's built on sand. Critics have given various definitions of "lesbian". We start with the rather hyperbolic, and now slightly amusing, definition provided by Radicalesbians in their 1970 'woman identified-woman' manifesto, 'What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.'[3] A powerful idea (if a

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[2] Martha Vicinus, 'The History of Lesbian History,' *Feminist Studies,* 38.3 (Fall, 2012), pp. 566 - 786, pp. 566-7

[3] Radicalesbians, (1970) <http://lzigelyte.digitalscholar.rochester.edu/queertheory/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Woman-Identified-Woman.pdf> [Accessed 27/06/2023]

tad nonsensical), and one with political fervour, but rather useless when approaching definitions in academic prose. I also don't think I could call Lister a lesbian based on this definition alone: she does not display such rage, priding herself on her capacity to enact restraint and decorum in all matters. In her book *The Apparitional Lesbian,* Terry Castle provides a rather more reassuring definition:

> if in ordinary speech I say, "I am a lesbian," the meaning is instantly (even dangerously) clear: I am a woman whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to my own sex. Usage both confers and delimits meaning: the word is part of a "language game," as Wittgenstein might say, in which we all know the rules.[4]

She appeals to a commonsensical approach, to the vernacular, and to social situations. And I do agree that she's right in this regard: if I tell someone I'm a lesbian over my hummus and oatcakes, they don't say, "Oh, how would you define that?" No, they accept it and try to act as inclusive as possible (all deeply suggestive of my middle-class privilege). This definition has some use, though unfortunately this writing is not 'ordinary speech' but lofty academic prose and, as such, this simplistic definition comes up against a host of snags and glitches. I also feel that though the term lesbian may indeed be "obvious" in ordinary speech, the *identity* is still mired in the muddy pool of the discourse I'm about to expound upon - which is to say, it is still *an apparitional position* to occupy.

Since I read Castle's book, I have found myself haunted by her interpretation of how lesbians have been treated in culture, both within academia and the Arts at large. She writes,

> The lesbian remains a kind of "ghost effect" in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot – even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the centre of the screen. … It is too easy to think of her as distant and strange and standoffish: as alienated from the real or "everyday" world the rest of us inhabit. The lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden

[4] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 15

> from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away and she is dire.[5]

Castle has hit upon a metaphor that seems suitable no matter which way I choose to look at the problem of the lesbian. There is always this sense of ghosting, of leeching upon the substance of the word (and 'ghosting through assimilation', such as with terms such as queer, gay, or homosexual[6]). As she makes note of later, the ghost is paradoxically both present and not present at the same time, and I find this very true of the term 'lesbian': it is both potent and undermined at once, scary and harmless, a phantom of possibilities forever forced to remain as such. Albeit to say, I can get carried away with this metaphor and it has surely taken hold of my relationship to the term 'lesbian'.

'Lesbian' is also etymologically troublesome. Paula Blank writes a fabulous essay on the way etymology is used in contemporary critical practice, using 'lesbian' as an example to elucidate her arguments. She brings to our attention that Erasmus wrote the entry 'Lesbiari. To behave like a lesbian' in his *Adages* (c. 1500): 'The infamous vice, which is performed with the mouth, called fellatio, I think, or irrumatio, is said to have originated with the people of Lesbos, and among them it was first of all something which women had to perform.'[7] So, interestingly, this is a definition that is often missed out, including in the *OED*, where they only include the definitions relating to the isle of Lesbos, to Sappho, or to female homosexuality.[8] Blank uses this lost meaning to trouble the way that etymology is understood and used in contemporary work. She makes the comment that people don't tend to have this meaning of 'lesbian' in mind '[y]et the possibility that older meanings of words are in some way irrevocable, that language is a peripatetic, interanimating plexus held in common among all of the writers and readers who participate in it, is a notion that

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[5] ibid., pp. 2 - 3

[6] ibid., p. 12

[7] Paula Blank, 'The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice', *Modern Philology,* 109.1 (August 2011), pp. 108 - 134, p. 108 – her reference: 'Erasmus, *Adages* 3.7.70, in *Collected Works*, vol. 35, *Adages III iv 1 to IV ii 100,* trans. Denis L. Drysdall, ed. John N. Grant (University of Toronto Press, 2005) I have transliterated Erasmus's Greek.'

[8] "lesbian, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2022, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/107453> [Accessed 20 May 2022]

disseminates widely in contemporary critical literary discourse.'[9] Indeed, my whole examination of how 'lesbian' is used, or not used, in academia is also following the notion that such interpretations must always be present in any dealing with the word 'lesbian', that I couldn't possibly discuss the term without addressing the myriad meanings of the word; and here I am, including her input to make sure that I have upheld the 'interanimating plexus' of language.

Blank offers an etymological argument that

> "lesbian" goes back to Lesbos… because we keep talking about the word as if it were an island of language, curiously untouched by the full range of its past and therefore its present meanings. We treat it as an island, perhaps, because our vernacular lexicon has relatively few terms for female same-sex love and desire; apart from slang words such as ‘‘dyke,’’ or ‘‘femme,’’ or ‘‘butch,’’ ‘‘lesbian’’ is practically all we have, and we are protective of it. Though we may alternatively call ourselves ‘‘gay’’ or ‘‘homosexual,’’ such terms are, for some, invariably and problematically gendered male. … My own desire has not been to limit or reduce further the vocabulary we have by making ‘‘lesbian’’ problematic as well, even as I hope to have exposed the complexities in continuing to use it. But perhaps the risks we take in further queering ‘‘lesbian’’ may be a source of a further pleasure, of a kind—the feeling of taking control of a language that is ours by surrendering to it as also not ours, the satisfaction of knowing more about where it has been and whom it has been with, and thus, perhaps, what it might yet mean to us.[10]

My knee-jerk reaction to her opinion that 'we' talk of 'lesbian' as an island of language is to say, No, we don't, or perhaps, Yes, but we talk of it as an invaded island, an island never fully 'ours', consistently under threat, challenged at every corner. I appreciate her inclusion of the more emotive admission that 'lesbian' is 'practically all we have' and that 'we are protective of it', though I feel pity that this is the case and yet 'we' find ourselves doing the critical work of challenging this much needed word, as if somewhere out there in the midst of historiographical criticism a civil war was triggered and we were left to be divided and conquered. We undo ourselves. Blank hopes that this opening up of 'lesbian' to its past meanings will also help us understand what it might mean in the future (which chimes in

[9] ibid., pp. 109 – 110

[10] ibid. p. 134

with Butler's idea of the provisional, spoken of below) but I find this such a strange argument to make. Some words change meaning over time, and whether it is believed this change is led by language itself or by society or a combination of the two, the knowledge of this change is accepted, however, it is not necessarily a point that is made very often about a particular word - weight is seldom brought to bear on the provisionality of a word's meaning. So, I find myself pondering, what is this acknowledgement of temporality doing? Is it strengthening the word, weakening it, defending it or attacking it? Though it makes me uncomfortable to say it, I think it is weakening it and, under the guise of defending it, actually slowly attacking it.

Snags and glitches.

Lesbians didn't do too well out of the social constructionism that was so popular in the 1980s. The theory that people's identities and behaviours were produced by language, and the structural systems produced by and through language, didn't give lesbians much of a chance to 'exist' in pre-sexologist times, even if ironically the label chosen to define the sexuality was derived from ancient Greek. The reliance on textual proof meant that it was almost impossible to believe that females could be sexually active in times before the late nineteenth century, let alone females who were sexually active with other females. This is shown most clearly by Faderman's work in her book, *Surpassing the Love of Men,* a work that is deeply significant in lesbian criticism and history and provides a wealth of information on women who loved women. However, it falls at the hurdle of sex:

> These romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, since women in centuries other than ours often internalised the view of females as having little sexual passion. Thus they might kiss, fondle each other, sleep together, utter expressions of overwhelming love and promises of eternal faithfulness, and yet see their passions as nothing more than effusions of the spirit. If they were sexually aroused, bearing no burden of visible proof as men do, they might deny it even to themselves if they wished.[11]

[11] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1981, reprinted 1991, 1997), p. 16

and,

> Because women of their [genteel] class and temperament generally did not engage in sex outside of marriage, it probably occurred to few of them that the intense emotion they felt for each other could be expressed in sexual terms – but that emotion had all the manifestations of Eros without the genital component. Perhaps the primary difference between the salons of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England and the salons of Paris in the 1920's where lesbian love was openly expressed was that as a result of the late nineteenth-century sexologists, women in the 1920's knew they were sexual creatures and behaved accordingly. Before that time, good women knew that only bad women were sexual creatures. What these good women felt for the women they loved was, therefore, described as "passionate" or "romantic" *friendship.*[12]

There is a level of nuance in Faderman's work, which I think it is important to appreciate. She doesn't come in with a sledgehammer – so many smatterings of 'perhaps' and 'probably' keep her firmly rooted in tentative hypothesis – but her comments on sex between women are almost more damaging because they come under the guise of balance and rationality; it is a convincing perspective, building a logical argument reliant on proof. There is little proof of a 'genital component' in many relationships between women (in the present as well as in the past), so it is reasonable to err on the side of caution, but her suggestion that 'few' women could understand their own bodies before sexologists came and instructed them seems a wild departure from common sense in the service of evidence-based research. Though I also understand the weakness that befalls any assertion made on the grounds of 'common sense', yet, here, there is simply too much responsibility given to the work of a few men in the late nineteenth century.

However, this attitude, that knowledge of sexual possibilities must come from external sources only, rather than be internally generated and externally enriched, has long precedence. There are many examples of it throughout history. Emma Donoghue includes Mary Wollstonecraft's warning in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) 'that 'as many girls have learned very nasty tricks, from ignorant servants, the mixing them thus

[12] ibid., p. 90

indiscriminately together, is very improper'.'[13] Then, in the early twentieth century, there were the discussions by MPs over whether to include 'An act of indecency by females' under section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, in which Lord Desart, Director of Public Prosecutions, says, 'you are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamed of it. I think that is a very great mischief'.[14] Then, of course, in 1988, there was Section 28: 'Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material', the idea that homosexuality could be taught persisted.[15] The first two examples are directed at women exclusively, as through most of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was believed that women especially needed to be taught their sexuality (that they were 'sexual creatures'), and then as feminism lifts women out of their exclusive claim to sexual naivety, the idea that sexuality can be taught spreads across all genders. Heterosexual men and women unite to prevent homosexuality.

So, we see a simplistic view of social constructionism at work in our understanding of sexuality even back in the eighteenth century. A view that rests upon the understanding that a person's sexuality must be taught, which suggests there must be information communicated to this person. This information or evidence is viewed as central to this view of socially constructed sexuality – this somewhat ethereal information, not possessed by any one person per se, and often, in British contexts, seen as arriving from outside the Educated, White, Privileged world, usually from lower class or foreign sources – and therefore without such information, these sexualities can be said to not exist. A tool for repudiation. Keeping this in mind, I ask, what can evidence show us or tell us really? Only recently has scrutiny been directed at evidence-based research, before this shift in perspective, many critics fell into the trap of championing the concept of romantic friendship over the sexually explicit alternative of lesbianism. Fortunately for me, Lister highlights the dangers of relying too heavily on evidence when making theories about our past (always unpicking the knots that critics have tied tight around lesbianism).

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[13] Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668 – 1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), p. 139

[14] *Earl of Desart,* Hansard, House of Lords, 15/08/1921, col. 573.

[15] Local Government Act 1988, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted> [Accessed 16/06/2023]

Lister used to exchange letters with her lover Mariana, who was married to Charles Lawton, and there was an incident (outside of my time frame) in which two of these letters were intercepted by Charles and he had a hissy fit about it, causing him to fall out with Lister and make it impossible for her to visit Mariana at her home. Mariana manages to find one of these letters and writes to Lister asking what to do about it, and Lister asks her to send the letter back, which she does, and this is what Lister writes about it:

> Letter from M- (Lawton) *half sheet enclosing the lett she has rescued from* δ *I am heartily glad to see it safe in my own hands again it is bad enough but not quite so bad that I could not defend it pretty tolerably better than* π *has any idea of tho' it is warmly affectionate yet luckily it is not absolutely impassioned at least I could lay it all on ^the excess of mere^ friendship --*[16]

So, we see that Lister's defence of this arguably incriminating letter is to mask her affection with friendship, or "*the excess of mere friendship*", as she puts it. She knows that this is possible, that it is a cover story with weight and credence, pointing towards the idea that this was perhaps done by other lesbians in her period, and that it was done so well that the cover story soon became simply *the* story.

It didn't take long for critics to point out flaws in Faderman's theory of romantic friendships. Donoghue, for instance, writes 'Faderman's thesis still helps to make sense of the many early texts which present female friendship, even its jealousies and embraces, as sexless and innocent. But there are other texts that this theory distorts or simply fails to address'.[17] And Donoghue goes on to analyse a myriad of different texts, from poetry, novels, and plays to medical texts, court cases and diaries, that Faderman has either missed out or analysed differently or that have only recently come to light. The sort of distortion or misstep that Donoghue refers to is well illustrated by the following paragraph:

> To emphasise how socially acceptable love between women was in this period, Lillian Faderman points out that Hester Thrale was a close friend and

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[16] Monday 25th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0037

[17] Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668 - 1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), p. 19

> visitor of the Ladies of Llangollen. She suggests that Thrale must have made a clear distinction between their virtuous love and the illicit passions between women which she attacked in her diary, because the Ladies 'seemed to follow to the letter the prescriptions for romantic friendship', including scholariness, retirement from corrupt society and a spiritual communion with nature. … Recently, however, Liz Stanley has unearthed an unpublished diary in which Hester Thrale describes the Ladies of Llangollen as 'damned Sapphists' and claims that women were reluctant to stay the night with the Ladies unless accompanied by men. So it seems that romantic friendship had no symbolic refuge, not even Llangollen Vale, in which to hide from occasional suspicions of Sapphism.[18]

In her book, Faderman does include newspaper articles to suggest that the Ladies of Llangollen lived in troublesome territory, but she then uses Thrale to prove that their friends and acquaintances did not believe their relationship to be sexual, as though the slander was simply a media issue and not reflective of real people's views. Liz Stanley's evidence perfectly undermines this supposition. It is also well known in Lister criticism that Lister doubted the "innocence" of the Ladies of Llangollen;she writes in her diary after visiting them:

> *I cannot help thinking that surely it was not platonic heaven forgive me but I look within myself and doubt I feel the infirmity of our nature and hesitate to pronounce such attachment uncemented by something more tender [illegible] still than friendship*[19]

Even from Lister, we get the moral trepidation, or homophobia, at the idea that there's a 'genital component' to their relationship. So even for another lesbian, there is what Donoghue describes as 'doublethink' occurring: the Ladies of Llangollen are both a romanticised representation of romantic friendship and a debauched, secret, sexual, sapphic liaison.[20]

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[18] ibid., p. 149 - 150; her references, Faderman, *Surpassing,* p. 125; and, Liz Stanley, 'Epistemological Issues in Researching Lesbian History: The Case of Romantic Friendship', in Hilary Hinds, Anne Phoenix and Jackie Stacey, eds *Working Out: New Directions for Women's Studies,* Falmer Press, 1992, pp. 161-72 (p. 163)

[19] Saturday 3rd August 1822, transcript 6 from the Calderdale archive

[20] Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668 - 1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), p. 150

Susan Lanser's work provides both criticism of Faderman's romantic friendship storyline, as well as providing some clues as to how these women negotiated their existence within such troublesome territory. She discusses how middle- or upper-class women utilised class and gender to protect themselves when trying to live out a divergent sexuality and in one essay she calls this:

> "compensatory conservatism," women whose erotic orientation might be seen as directed toward other women ("gentry sapphists") exploit the symbols of class status to strengthen the divide between the virtuous body and the immoral one. Rather than mere passive beneficiaries of a class-based bifurcation, in other words, these women were sometimes active agents cultivating their class status as a screen.[21]

And, on the topic of an over reliance on 'the cover story', she writes in a later essay, '[i]n mid-eighteenth century England, […] a fine line of perception separated chaste female intimacies from suspicious liaisons, and proprieties of class and gender helped to keep female friendships on the safe side of the line. I submit that scholarship has sometimes also toed this line, accepting the period's public fictions for private truths.'[22] So we have a gentle push back against Faderman's sexless history from scholars, though this history of history that she represents doesn't die away but lives on as an ever-present line of argument that must forever be pushed back (as if it's a weed that won't die). Lesbian history scholars in particular like to begin with this starting point, as if they are enacting a repeated coming-out story within scholarship every time or reliving the victorious 'discovery' that women from the past did happen to fuck other women.

So, there is the snag of having to repeatedly fight for 'lesbians' to exist within the past - an ongoing debate, which I'm sure will never be quite finished. Another ongoing glitch is with the term 'lesbian' itself, or the debate of the sign, as I'm going to niftily call it, which is also linked in with the debate between queer theory and lesbian theory, arguably the

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[21] Susan S. Lanser, 'Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts,' *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 32.2 (Winter, 1998/9), pp. 179 - 198, p. 189

[22] Susan Lanser, 'Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire,' *The Huntington Library Quarterly,* 2002, 65.1/2, pp. 257 - 276, p. 259

former causing 'lesbian' to begin (or intensify) its glitching. In this debate, it is only right to begin with Butler.

Butler warns against hunting and pinning down specific definitions (what would now be termed "gate-keeping" in "ordinary speech"):

> Is it the *specificity* of a lesbian experience or lesbian desire or lesbian sexuality that lesbian theory needs to elucidate? Those efforts have only and always produced a set of contests and refusals which should by now make it clear that there is no necessarily common element among lesbians, except perhaps that we all know something about how homophobia works against women - although, even then, the language and the analysis we use will differ.[23]

I think this is a salient point to make about any identity, and I guess, about identity politics in general. Once one starts solidifying identity categories, the political and social power of that identity begins to wane, largely, and pragmatically speaking, because there are not enough bodies to gather under that sign. However, this is exactly where much contention has arisen in academia and where the idea that lesbian theory is pitted against queer theory has grown. It is a fine line between retaining, as Butler suggests, the understanding of 'lesbian' as a 'provisional' identity, and slowly arguing it out of existence.[24] Butler is not blind to the panic that has arisen from this contestation, as she writes the questions that so many have suspiciously, and angrily, asked:

> But *politically,* we might argue, isn't it quite crucial to insist on lesbian and gay identities precisely because they are being threatened with erasure and obliteration from homophobic quarters? Isn't the above theory *complicitous* with those political forces that would obliterate the possibility of gay and lesbian identity? Isn't it "no accident" that such theoretical contestations of

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[23] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* ed. by Henry Abelove et. al., (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 310

[24]'In avowing the sign's strategic provisionality (rather than its strategic essentialism), that identity can become a site of contest and revision, indeed, take on a future set of significations that those of us who use it now may not be able to foresee.' ibid., p. 312

> identity emerge within a political climate that is performing a set of similar obliterations of homosexual identities through legal and political means?[25]

In an equally paranoid attitude, Butler's response to such questions is to suggest that no one knows how the sign 'lesbian' will be used in future, no one knows whether it will be used for politically oppressive causes, so we should keep it provisional so we can safeguard ourselves.[26] I think to keep in mind that 'lesbian' is an open category, inclusive of new configurations of how various people understand themselves under the sign, is a necessary and positive way to use and understand the term 'lesbian', so I agree with Butler's emphasis on the provisional. The confusing part is that I both agree and disagree; herein lies the rub. 'Disagreement' is possibly too strong a word, it is more a niggling sense of unease at the effects of this form of critique. I think that to question the term 'lesbian' tends to linger on in the imaginary in a way that chips away at the identity and its ability to offer empowerment for those who wish to use it. It is one thing to constantly redefine what constitutes 'lesbian', to argue for new boundaries and new inclusions, but another to put the sign itself under pressure. It appears to me that Butler is questioning the signifier, whereas many other theorists make do with (re)defining the signified. As a critic of the poststructuralist age, I understand the apparent need to critique signs, but I think it is naive to believe this critique has no negative effects upon the sign and those who use it. In this case, though it seems sensible to argue for the idea of the provisional in using 'lesbian', I feel like it is also another way to cloak the sign in the ghostly garb of the apparitional.

Essays on lesbian theory tend to repeat the complaint that queer theory is against them, though essays on queer theory that are clearly and directly against lesbian theory do not exist. It would seem that the complaint is not due to direct attacks on the idea of the 'lesbian', per se, but in response to the logic of queer theory; or, perhaps, in reaction to small erosions on the term such as Butler's above. The idea that queer theory and lesbianism, or lesbian feminism, are at odds is again an ambivalent area. Garber argues the following:

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[25] ibid., p. 311

[26] 'That the identity-sign I use now has its purposes seems right, but there is no way to predict or control the political uses to which that sign will be put in the future. And perhaps this is a kind of openness, regardless of its risks, that ought to be safeguarded for political reasons. If the rendering visible of lesbian/gay identity now presupposes a set of exclusions, then perhaps part of what is necessarily excluded is *the future uses of the sign.'* ibid., p. 312

> The debate between lesbian feminism and queer theory (or, as it is often more broadly labeled, postmodernism) presents a simplistic either/or choice between two terms that are mutually implicated. Queer theory labels lesbian feminism essentialist (an academic code word for unsophisticated if not stupid), but even a cursory reading of foundational texts makes clear that lesbian feminism is a basically social constructionist project.[27]

This is a good example of the types of debate present in lesbian theory. There are interestingly no references given to the claim that 'Queer theory labels lesbian feminism essentialist', which supports my impression that this is mostly repeated rumour, rather than actually present in queer theory texts. What I want to focus on, however, is Garber's understanding of lesbian feminism and queer theory being 'mutually implicated'. She goes on to argue that the work of lesbians of colour in the 1970s was not essentialist but instead was imbued with a sense of 'fluid positionality' that lay the seeds for the queer theory that came later. I agree with her on these points, I believe there is a much deeper cross-over between the two theoretical schools than is largely admitted to, and queer theory is very much the unruly child of lesbian feminism (if you'll permit me to be a little linear here). However, the way that critics view the two as pitted against one another, largely on the basis of essentialism, does damage to lesbian feminism whilst leaving queer theory largely unscathed.

The way that queer theory and its affiliated queer culture has been gently eroding the term 'lesbian' since its conception in the early 1990s is seen most starkly in the 2022 volume of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* in which they made a call for papers with the question: 'Is lesbian identity obsolete?' They got such a flood of responses that their special issue became three issues.[28] The fact this question could be asked reveals much about the current situation for the term 'lesbian'; is it the beginning of the end? It may not yet be obsolete, as the essays in these issues suggest, but there is a threat to its continuance.

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[27] Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 1

[28] Ella Ben Hagai & Nicole Seymour, 'Is lesbian identity obsolete?,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 26:1 (2022), pp. 1-11, p. 1

Within the first issue of this volume, there is an essay that provides some examples of how lesbians view their identity in comparison to a queer identity (something ironic here, the way that queer theory began by trying to oust identity politics and somehow got transformed into its own identity). The essay made a call for lesbians to respond who preferred the term 'lesbian' to 'queer', so it is not supposed to be generalisable but to simply offer up these views for analysis. I think they're useful to include here in order to begin building a case for the importance of using the term 'lesbian' in relation to Lister, which it appears I seem to be angling for… but we shall see. A couple of the notable points, useful for their simplicity of expression, are:

> Respondents' sense of connection with a long history of lesbianism was a noteworthy theme identified in our data.[29]

The 'long history' most of these women are referring to is not the one that spans back into the early nineteenth century, but the one that dates back to when 'lesbian' became a political and social identity; and this history is longer compared to 'queer' which is the other identifier that they're considering in this qualitative research. The history they refer to is the lesbian activism and lesbian groups that span the 1970s to 1990s. Even though the history they are thinking of here doesn't date back into the deep past, the fact that women prefer the term 'lesbian' because they believe lesbianism to have a long history still shows the value placed on history in choices over identity terms. This is also reflected in academia, for example when Vicinus writes about her, and other lesbian scholars', decision to write on same-sex desire, 'We believed profoundly that ideas mattered and that history could change lives, because it had changed ours. Faced with a fierce backlash against homosexual rights, this history has become even more necessary today.'[30] So history is viewed as precedent, a personal guide to present and future lesbians; and this is where much contention arises because as lesbians try to construct this lesbian history, others criticise them as being ahistorical and for decontextualising their subjects.

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[29] Jessica Megarry, Catherine Orian Weiss, Meagan Tyler & Kate Farhall, 'Women who prefer "lesbian" to "queer": generational continuity and discontinuity,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 26:1 (2022), pp. 53-72, p. 58

[30] Martha Vicinus, 'The History of Lesbian History,' *Feminist Studies,* 38.3 (Fall, 2012), pp. 566 - 786, p. 589

Construction of lesbian history is also used as a political tool. It is never enough, it would seem, for a community to exist in the present, they have to legitimise themselves with the truth of their existence by proving their existence in the past; complete newness is politically impracticable. And speaking of the political utility of the term:

> Some said that using the term “lesbian” is political because it carves out a space for discussing issues specific to women who love women, which they suggested can be disappeared in both heteronormative and queer settings. The latter claim was based on the sense that queer (when used as an umbrella term) can obfuscate differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, as well as competing political interests.[31]

So, we return to the idea of 'lesbian erasure', which was used as the cause for creating the petition for Lister's plaque in York. Here, they use the term 'disappeared' and I think it's significant that the women who participated in this survey see that this is not only experienced in heteronormative spaces but also in queer spaces, which, again, links in with the plaque petition, as this was to fight against calling Lister 'gender non-conforming', a queer aligned label. I would say the concern over this form of disappearing is much more to do with feminism than it is to do with sexuality, which is why lesbian feminism is a necessary political community. The niggling fear is that anyone choosing to use the gender term 'woman' still feels that they are not allowed to take up space or attract too much visibility, and this is (and always has been) doubled when they also decide that they will choose to use the term 'lesbian', or woman-identified woman, or woman-loving-woman, or wlw. How dare someone choose to reify the hegemony of binary gender categories and also centre their whole desiring self at someone else who chooses to reify the binary gender categories? Is one such feeling of guilt that a lesbian might experience in a queer setting. This guilt is then processed by a body conditioned to be a woman, which manifests in different ways for different women, but may be crudely generalised here to include putting others first, mothering others in the (queer) community, and listening and not speaking, which are all great traits but only if they are also balanced by chances to make ones' own needs heard. This is not necessarily the case for all people who identify as lesbians, though I do think

[31] Jessica Megarry, Catherine Orian Weiss, Meagan Tyler & Kate Farhall, 'Women who prefer “lesbian” to “queer”: generational continuity and discontinuity,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 26:1 (2022), pp. 53-72, p. 60

many lesbians will have to cope and wrestle with internal feelings of guilt and disempowerment even if they are managing to be 'loud and proud.' So, a woman can be denied strength in a heteronormative setting and can be undermined in a queer setting. A difficult terrain to navigate.

So, 'queer' can sometimes be criticised for obfuscating differences, and so can 'lesbian' (no term is safe!), and this is another argument against using the term. It is not necessarily a bad one either; if anything, this argument is one of the most appealing. Halberstam writes in his book, *Female Masculinity* (which argues that females have played a significant part in creating/constructing masculinity for everyone), that

> before the emergence of what we now understand as "lesbian" identities, same-sex desire worked through any number of different channels. If it seems both obvious and undeniable that probably many models of same-sex desire did exist, then why have we not busied ourselves in imagining their variety? It is my contention that many contemporary lesbian historians cannot extricate themselves from contemporary understandings of lesbian identity long enough to interpret the vagaries of early same-sex desire. Accordingly, we have any number of analyses claiming to find lesbians or protolesbians in any number of different historical periods without proper consideration of the sexual and gender forms in question.[32]

So now 'lesbian' is an umbrella term, which whitewashes all sexual activities between 'women'. This is a pertinent point and does throw up some interesting factors to consider. I am a fan of variety, always, another sign of my poststructuralist conditioning. I foam at the mouth when I come across words such as 'variety', 'multiplicitous', 'pluralism', and 'nuance'; more is more. I agree with Halberstam that it is worth exploring the vagaries of same-sex desire, though I do wonder at his meaning when he calls for a 'proper' consideration; what would constitute a 'proper' consideration in his opinion? I also don't quite agree with his claim that lesbian historians don't attend to variety in their interpretations of the past; indeed, I think lesbian historians are largely forced to attend to the variety of sexual and gender forms, due to the lack of any singular identity present in the past that does neatly fit into the term 'lesbian' 'as we now understand it' (another point I'll get on to soon). Halberstam later criticises Donoghue's decision to use 'lesbian':

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[32] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 50

> Some historians still try to hold on to the label "lesbian" as a way of classifying a whole range of pre-nineteenth-century sexual practices between women. Emma Donoghue, in *Passions between Women,* writes: "Lesbian does not have the specific connotations of such terms as tribade, hermaphrodite, romantic friend, Sapphist, and Tommy and so can encompass them all." Of course, it is true that this is often the way that "lesbian" has been used, as almost an umbrella term for all sexual activities carried out between women; however, this use of the term "lesbian" erases the specificity of tribadism, hermaphroditism, and transvestism and tends to make lesbianism into the history of so-called women-identified women.[33]

He is arguing that Donoghue's decision to use an inclusive term erases the specificity of other forms of sexuality, which I do understand, having just done the same myself above with the term 'queer'. There is always this debate over any overarching terms in identity politics: I guess, when does the umbrella term start to leak and end up drowning all the other terms? Perhaps such debates are self-perpetuating and generally self-defeating; but they do trigger very strong emotional responses (evidenced above by the simple but cutting adjective 'so-called'), no one likes to feel silenced and unfortunately many queer (umbrella usage) critics are fighting over representation within history in an attempt to become visible in the present. Halberstam's choice to pick out Donoghue here is, in this sense, particularly unfortunate, as she wrote in her introduction:

> *Passions Between Women* has not been written simply to increase our understanding of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain. Many readers will be more interested in lesbian existence today, and one aim of this book is to illuminate the different elements that have gone to make up our far from unified 'community'. In the past few decades it has proved difficult to make connections across ideological barriers; perhaps we can make them across time instead. Celibate friends, SM dykes, women who get mistaken for men whether they like it or not, singles and couples and threesomes, separatists, prostitutes, in-your-face activists, respectable closet-cases, those of us who also like orgies or weddings or study groups or men or domestic bliss: we can find our origins here. If we take the long view, learning that we

[33] ibid., p. 51

> all have a share in the past and none of us can own it, perhaps we will not fight so bitterly over the present.[34]

The intentions of these two critics align; they both wish to bring a variety of sexual and gender forms from the past to light in the present so that we can have a better understanding of the variety that has always existed amongst us. Yet, their choice of identity labels has caused one to criticise the other and create a dynamic of enmity that seeks to destroy the nuance that both critics aim to highlight in their work - this nuance disappears behind the debate of the sign, and this is one of the reasons why the choice of sexual label for Lister is so important. It is not something to be taken lightly. Or rather, I want you to know that whichever sign I decide to use, I will still be aiming for 'proper' consideration of Lister's sexuality and gender.

Of course, 'contemporary understandings of lesbian identity' are 'far from unified' and yet the myth of this unity seems to undermine some queer (umbrella usage) historical texts, in that they approach the past from what they believe is a solid position. No one says this better than Sedgwick.

> One way, however, in which such an analysis is still incomplete—in which, indeed, it seems to me that it has tended inadvertently to *re*familiarize, *re*naturalize, damagingly reify an entity that it could be doing much more to subject to analysis —is in counterposing against the alterity of the past a relatively unified homosexuality that "we" *do* "know today." It seems that … [this] has provided a rhetorically necessary fulcrum point for the denaturalizing work on the past done by many historians. But an unfortunate side effect of this move has been implicitly to underwrite the notion that "homosexuality as we conceive of it today" itself comprises a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces. Unfortunately, this presents more than a problem of oversimplification. To the degree that power relations involving modern homo/heterosexual definition have been structured by the very tacitness of the double-binding force fields of conflicting definition … —to that degree these historical projects, for all their immense care, value, and potential, still risk reinforcing a dangerous consensus of knowingness about

[34] Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668 - 1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), p. 24

> the genuinely *un*known, more than vestigially contradictory structurings of contemporary experience.[35]

Sedgwick points out that it was perhaps 'rhetorically necessary' to come from a place of certainty when denaturalising the past. I agree with this and wish to briefly draw attention to the part rhetoric plays in these works on the past. It is difficult to avoid rhetoric in writing a literary critique on any text. Rhetoric in many ways *is* the critique; I have been taught to persuade with words, persuade you towards agreeing with some of my opinions on a topic (and these opinions will be questioned and undermined if they are contradictory). Rhetoric is most effective when it is simple and so I can appreciate the pull to simplify by solidifying a topic into a known entity. Indeed, it is extremely tricky to retain a sense of complexity, or 'overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces', let alone attempting to include a sense of 'the genuinely *un*known' when writing a critical text. The point she makes, however, that we do not know what sexuality is today, that we do not agree, that there is no consensus, that it is still unknown in its sheer variety and continual change is yet another reason to think carefully about the use of sexual identity terms and their effect when writing about Lister.

Now I've careened haphazardly through the snags that keep me up at night with eyes staring blankly at the blackout darkness of my room, I want to move on to Lister in particular. I will start by exploring the ways that other scholars have chosen to discuss and define her sexual and gender identity, in order to help me negotiate my own interaction with the text.

It seems best to begin with how other Lister thesis writers have chosen to label Lister's sexuality. Euler (1995) chooses to use 'lesbian', explaining: 'I feel that we must deal with the language (and the identified subjectivities) as they are constituted within our own

[35] Eve Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 44-5

time period, the late twentieth century.'[36] And then provides the definition of lesbian that she has decided to work with:

> I will use the word "lesbian" in this dissertation to mean women whose bodies/consciousnesses touched in passionate/sexual ways. I recognize that this approach is controversial: but I think this kind of simultaneous definition keeps lesbian history more open, in that we can study all kinds of patterns of women loving women while simultaneously embracing the erotic. Furthermore, I maintain that "lesbian," (like "class" and "gender") represents both a subjectivity and a discourse. While I am interested in the historical development of the modern lesbian identity, I also recognize that subjectivities are not stable, and that discourses can be contested.[37]

She also adds a footnote: 'I must be able to use an intelligible symbol, or word, for my work in this dissertation. I do not mean by this that every time any women have ever touched each other in any culture that it has always carried the same meanings.'[38] If anything this footnote does more to reveal the dismay and desperation caused over the debate of this sign than the more cool and collected rhetoric of her main argument. So, Euler chooses to stand by her choice of term when looking into the past and analysing history, and she also decides upon the more open and inclusive definition of 'lesbian'. I appreciate the clarity of her position and think it is well discussed, though it has to be said that she is writing in a period when the full weight of queer theory had not yet taken full possession of critical studies, so the controversy that she must overcome is arguably less nebulous and many-pronged as it is today.

Euler also uses 'stone butch' as another label for Lister – we can call it a sublabel here – which interestingly has not been repeated since in Lister criticism, a possible suggestion of (internal) homophobia (butch women, as more visible and read as lesbian, tend to invite the most homophobic responses) or a sign of the term's decline (see Finn Mackay's study for an insightful read on how 'butch' was used and understood in the UK in

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[36] Catherine Euler, 'Moving Between Worlds: Gender, Class, Politics, Sexuality and Women's Networks in the Diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Yorkshire, 1830 - 1840', Thesis, University of York, 1999, White Rose portal, Web. 30/06/2023, p. 38

[37] ibid., pp. 38-9

[38] ibid., p. 38 footnotes

2017[39]). Euler defines this sublabel in a footnote: '"Stone butch'' is a term which comes from 1950s America. It indicates a woman whose sexual practice includes only making love to other women and never allowing them to make love to her.'[40] The two causes for Euler's choice of sublabel are Lister's alignment and enactment of masculinity and Euler's lack of evidence that Lister ever permitted another woman to make love to her. This sublabel sits funny with me, the 'stone' not the 'butch', mainly due to its specificity and the lack of evidence to support it. The detail that Lister provides over her sexual encounters is never consistent and due to her choice of wording, particularly that of the ambiguously used "*kiss*", it is impossible for critics to be quite so certain on what Lister actually prefers during sex. Euler does provide evidence from the text to support her choice of 'stone butch' but it is not quite sufficient for me. This is not to say that I totally disagree; I think there are times within the text when it would be suitable to name Lister a 'stone butch', but the use of it invites criticism that seems to weaken rather than strengthen any analysis of Lister's sexuality.

Rowanchild (1999) pretty much echoes Euler in her choice of term and its explanation, though she still must, as we all must, undergo the long road to expound upon the debate over the history of sexuality and choice of terms. She writes after summarising this debate:

> Occasionally in this chapter, I employ the term 'lesbian' in relation to Lister and her circle. Despite the reservations of some writers about its historical application, it offers, I propose, no greater difficulties than other historically located terms like, for example, marriage or childhood, whose specific meanings have also shifted over the centuries. Current meanings attached to childhood might be said to bear little relation to experience and identity before the mid-nineteenth century and yet we use the term comfortably as a general designation without feeling that readers will be perplexed by historical misunderstandings. Here I use the word 'lesbian' as a convenient shorthand for women who have sexual relations with, and whose central

[39] Finn Mackay, 'Always endangered, never extinct: Exploring contemporary butch lesbian identity in the UK', *Women Studies International Forum,* Volume 75, July–August 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102241> [Accessed 30/06/2023]

[40] ibid., p. 290

> emotional focus is upon, women, while recognizing that its meaning is subject to variation.[41]

What continually crops up in these statements about the term 'lesbian' is this attempt at denial of an issue: her use of 'it offers, I propose, no greater difficulties than other historically located terms', is wishful thinking that acts to confuse more than clarify, as she has just spent three pages discussing how it is actually a great difficulty. Sure, we (lesbians) all hope that it will not create difficulties, that it is indeed no different a term than 'class' or 'childhood', but the fact of the matter is that it has been made to be different and we cannot escape this, nor deny it. The insertion of her 'I' in this statement shows how this is her own viewpoint, her own desire, and that she is aware of the need to signal this when making this statement; she is setting herself aside from the debates, saying, This is a debate I must recognise but I do not agree with. The snag that I feel lurks beneath this drawing of opposing forces, the subject against the debate, is that it gives a false impression that the subject has an unproblematic relation with the label 'lesbian', that the subject is somehow outside of this debate and negotiation of the term 'lesbian'. I am picking this out, not so much to criticise these scholars, but more as a reminder to myself, as I am just as guilty of trying to present a confident, assured relation to the sign 'lesbian', which I do not actually experience but simply wish to be true. I wish the debate wasn't there, but it is, and it affects the term 'lesbian' and how it is used, especially in academic discourse.

Orr's (2006) argument on Lister's sexuality very strongly adheres to the idea of history and context; she argues that 'Anne's representations of her own sexuality and gender were, like the figure of the congenital invert or romantic friends, historical constructions.'[42] And Orr spends several paragraphs summarising how other scholars have defined Lister's sexuality and after each paragraph gives a sentence like this one: 'A decontextualised self, removed from specific social, textual and historical meanings, could only be explained in modern definitive types that had the potential to overwrite Anne's own historical sexual or gender identifications.'[43] So, Orr's gripe is with the tendency of scholars to try to argue Lister into a contemporary, or modern, understanding of lesbian sexuality

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[41] Anira Rowanchild, '"My mind on paper"', p. 164

[42] Danielle Orr, 'A sojourn in Paris', p. 28

[43] ibid., p. 29

that she believes singles Lister out in an othering process (marking her out as separate from her own time) that is not productive for lesbian history. She concludes:

> Thus, the most crucial consideration in my work has been to attend to Anne's words. Anne's sexual history was part of our lesbian history, but her own stated sexual orientation was as a lover of the 'fairer sex'. Anne did not name this sexual identity; rather, she used terms that described her sexual desire. To let Anne's writings speak to her understanding, I have employed generic terms like 'homosexuality' or 'same-sex' that describe, not define, her sexual practices in Paris.[44]

There is much to what Orr argues that is convincing and important to consider. I also greatly respect her decision to lead by what Lister writes herself, rather than imposing contemporary theories onto her that don't necessarily fit. I also wish to lead with this methodology: Lister first, then a consideration of theories – ironically, and to my chagrin, this has not felt possible in this chapter due to the nature of the topic, though I try to adhere to it in the chapters that follow. I also understand Orr's ethics here, this desire to protect Lister and respect her by letting her speak for herself, it is certainly how I have felt in transcribing and trying to then attend to Lister scholarship. However (always and forever however), Orr's attempt to split the contemporary moment of lesbian history from the historical moment of Lister's writing and self-expression creates a confusion – a confusion that perhaps is inevitable when addressing this topic. I think this confusion largely arises from the impossibility of separating Lister *then* from how Lister is read *now*. This crops up in Orr's argument when earlier she's written 'Anne was able to construct her own homosexual identity'[45] and then she writes above that Lister did not name this identity, she simply described her desire; so, did Lister have a sexual identity or does she have one now or neither? Then, there's the strange contradiction in the way Orr believes Lister to be significant to lesbian history but is tentative (nigh afraid) in naming Lister a lesbian. There's a doubleness happening here in the same strain as Donoghue's expression of 'doublethink' mentioned earlier: she is both claiming her as a lesbian and disclaiming her as a lesbian simultaneously. And, more, I am very wary of the way that Orr thinks that 'homosexual' or

[44] ibid., p. 58

[45] ibid., p. 37

'same-sex' are more 'generic terms', which is true, but mainly in that they include men, which seems irrelevant to a discussion about Lister. Also, I would say that 'homosexual', in particular, *is* used to define, so is not free from the same trouble that 'lesbian' provokes. Keeping this in mind, I feel an uneasiness in how Orr has made this decision and that she does feel *safer*, shall we say, in choosing terms that do not directly refer to women, or women's sexuality; to me, and I may be getting overly defensive here, it seems that she avoids using 'lesbian' because it has stigma attached to it. So she speaks of Lister within a lesbian scholarly tradition and she speaks of Lister as showing us an example of a woman's homosexual identity from the nineteenth century, but she avoids, as if the action will set her thesis on fire (is using 'lesbian' for a historical project academic suicide?), calling Lister the l-word.

Those are the three theses dedicated to Lister, and now I shall turn to other critics. Clarke (1996) manages quite stylishly, I think, to dodge the debate on which terms to use; she simply writes at the beginning of her essay, 'Although she did not use the word lesbian, at age thirty, she wrote, "I love the fairer sex and thus, beloved by them in turn my heart revolts from any other love but theirs."'[46] Thus she uses Lister's own words to create some form of finality, adeptly turning Lister's phrase into a particular definition of 'lesbian'. Clarke, then, uses 'lesbian' without quandary for the rest of the essay. Wonderfully slick. She presents the opinion that Lister did not necessarily take any ready-made sexual identity available, but instead created her own lesbian identity based on an assortment of scraps and cultural morsels, writing, 'she invented her own fragmented lesbian identity and confused the categories of masculinity and femininity.'[47] The part I find slightly intriguing here is the idea of a 'fragmented lesbian identity'; what does she mean by that? I think she intended it to mean that the ready-made identities available, such as the Sapphic role, were somehow not fragmented but whole; I'm presuming they're considered 'whole' because they come from others (rather than self-made) with an agreed upon, and consistent, understanding. I guess this is intriguing because it highlights the strange bind of identities, or what they impinge on us by their use, which is the assumption that they must be regulated in some way, that there is a sense of what constitutes a certain identity and if someone diverges

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[46] Anna Clarke, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 7.1 (1996) pp. 23 - 50, p. 23

[47] ibid., p. 50

from these parameters that they must therefore be a fragmented version of that identity. Clarke reveals by this simple inclusion of the adjective 'fragmented' that she assumes 'lesbian', as it was understood when she wrote this essay, to be a consistent and congruous identity. And, as I've introduced in the first section of this chapter, no one can agree upon 'lesbian', then and now. It is already and always fragmented.

Halberstam (1998) takes a completely different approach to Lister's sexuality. It is refreshing for the variety it provides. As I've introduced above, he wants to move away from 'lesbian' and what he sees as the lack of variety that such a label promotes, or produces, and towards 'many models of same-sex desire'. The track he follows is that Lister is an example of a 'female husband', choosing to emphasise her masculine gender expression as a mode of sexuality over any simplistic understandings of Lister as a woman who loves women (simplistic to whom? one might ask…). This means that his arguments are all geared towards gender 'as' sexuality, which I agree opens up the conversation a little, though as I said above, though he words things differently, he is still covering the same ground as many lesbian scholars. I also find the way he chooses to phrase his arguments a little too heavy handed, to give you an idea of what I mean, he writes:

> Lister's tribadic practices, the restrictions she places on her lovers' sexual access to her body, and her self-identification with masculinity should be read for what they are - signs of an active and functional but preidentitarian female masculinity embedded within a highly ritualized marriage culture and struggling with the active cultural biases against female masculine expression.[48]

'should be read for what they are' – oof! '*should*'... '*are'*... I can't help myself, I'm already turning away (again, another note to myself: please, Anna, stay away from such imperatives or absolutes, even if you really feel them). This is an opinion, and as Halberstam has taken time to elucidate, there is nothing too sure about any of this sexuality stuff, yet he can't help himself from being pushed by the flow of his rhetoric into a strongly worded finishing statement. This is not to say that I fully disagree with what he's saying, the idea of Lister being 'preidentitarian' is a useful concept to keep in mind, distinguishing, as it does, our time from Lister's. It is different from the concept of 'protolesbianism', which is how some critics

[48] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 72

have interpreted her sexuality, as 'pre' cuts the past from the future, whereas 'proto' suggests a linearity and progression that, I believe, for one thing, bestows too much significance on Lister and her experience. However, 'preidentitarian' still implies that the notions of identity that we have now are solid and fully formed, as though our experiences of trying to form identities, or communicable Selves, occurs without the sort of clumsy creativeness and confusion that Lister exhibits in her journals; possibly we will always be 'preidentitarian'.

However, perhaps I am being much too harsh here. Halberstam, after all, argues for what he terms 'perverse presentism', which is precisely what I have accused him of *not* doing above, though perhaps that is suggestive of how difficult it is to consistently represent 'perverse presentism' in your prose. He explains 'perverse presentism' as:

> By naming my own model of historiography as perverse presentism, to use a very Sedgwickian formulation, I am questioning in the first instance what we think we already know, and then I move back toward the question of what we think we have found when we alight on historical records of so-called lesbian desire. […] Building on Sedgwick's axiom, I propose a perverse presentism as not only a denaturalization of the present but also an application of what we do not know in the present to what we cannot know about the past.[49]

I think this is a wonderful way of trying to write about the past, especially when it comes to anything to do with identities, and it is very much in line with what I also feel to be true; or rather, in line with my concern over avoiding erroneous certainties. The one adjustment I would like to make is that using such a historiography does not mean that one has to abandon the term 'lesbian', as Halberstam argues, but rather that one has to be clear about what one is doing with the choice of that term. Which is to say, I agree that we do not know what a 'lesbian' might be for everyone, that it is an unknowable term in this sense, and that therefore we certainly cannot know what a lesbian is in the past, *but* that what I do know is that 'lesbian' is a significant political and community-producing term that can have productive effects now, if used with inclusivity in mind – and that by writing this down and

[49] ibid., p. 53

clarifying this understanding of the term 'lesbian', I am managing to uphold 'perverse presentism'.

Susan Lanser writes of Lister as a 'self-acknowledged sapphist'[50] in her essay 'Befriending the Female Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts' (1998), in which she sketches out her notion of 'compensatory conservatism', spoken of above. Lister unfortunately does not agree with 'sapphic', as she shows, when discussing the topic with Mrs Barlow in Paris, "*got on the subject of saffic* [Sapphic] *regard said there was artifice in it it was very different from mine would be no pleasure to me I liked to have those I loved near me as possible* etc. etc."[51] For Lister, she believed that "*saffic regard*" must include the use of a dildo, or an '*olisbos*', which she disliked.[52] It was another way for Lister to support her morally superior natural inclination and consistency that she championed for herself, which I will discuss in more detail below when I get onto my own interpretation of the text. Interestingly, in this essay Lanser does not feel the need to address this choice of term, though in her later essay 'Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire' (2002), she gives her rationale for using this term in a rather long footnote, which is actually too long to include as a quotation here. The decision to include a justification here, even if it is relegated to the footnotes, shows how even in those four years, criticism on sexuality was becoming more concerned with labels (for women, at least). The main point that I think is understandable for her choice of term is that it 'underscores the class-specific nature of [her] inquiry', as she explains that in her research she has not found it 'to describe women below the gentry class.'[53] I respect this decision, though, due to the overt evidence in the text that Lister actually dislikes this term, I feel uncomfortable using it to label her.

Roulston (2021) decides to read Lister as 'queer', rather than a 'female husband' or a 'lesbian'. I find her way of interpreting Lister's sexuality very helpful, and due to the fact that this particular essay has been written recently, it is up-to-date with the various ways that

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[50] Susan S. Lanser, 'Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts,' *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 32.2 (Winter, 1998/9), pp. 179 - 198, p. 189

[51] Saturday 13th November 1824, Calderdale, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/E/8

[52] Stephen Turton, 'The Lexicographical Lesbian: Remaking the Body in Anne Lister's Erotic Glossary,' *The Review of English Studies*, 73.310 (2022), pp. 537–551, p. 548

[53] Susan Lanser, 'Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire,' *The Huntington Library Quarterly,* 2002, 65.1/2, pp. 257 - 276, p. 260

Lister has been identified, so we get an example of how Roulston has processed these interpretations. She explains her choice as such:

> in the case of the Lister diaries, the very fact that an array of sexual and gender identities has been attributed to Lister — from lesbian to an example of female masculinity or gender nonconforming — points to Lister herself as a figure of rupture. In other words, Lister remains largely unclassifiable within contemporary terminology. In light of this, I propose to read Lister as queer not as a way of affirming her modernity but rather as a means of deconstructing assumed sexual categories as they relate to the past. I propose to follow Doan's definition of queerness as a process rather than an identity, a form of "queerness-as-method" rather than "queerness-as-being." Reading Lister as responding to her era in an ambivalent fashion rather than as a fully coherent and legible agent produces a series of queer moments — both in their nineteenth-century sense of odd and strange and in their contemporary sense of nonnormative — that fragment and destabilize as much as they establish and affirm Lister's exceptionality. Such an approach requires actively preserving the lens of historical alterity, defamiliarization, and archival distancing while acknowledging the pressures of present-day classifications.[54]

I am particularly drawn to her conceptualisation of Lister as 'a figure of rupture', the idea that the evidence Lister provides of a person living a daily existence cannot but rupture any attempts we might make to confine her to any single identity. Lister is not easy to classify in her time or in ours and there is certainly no grand narrative to her amatory or sexual experiences. Roulston's decision to focus on 'queerness-as-method' niftily side-steps issues that identity politics can create, as well as keeping Roulston's focus on Lister's *process* of interpreting and reinterpreting her desires and behaviours, including where inconsistencies and confusions are evident, rather than on trying to pin down arguments for solid understandings of Lister's self. However, I still feel uneasy about what I interpret as a giving up on using the 'lesbian' signifier. I also think that choosing to use the term 'queerness' still keeps the debate within the realm of identity politics and has the effect of championing the term 'queer' over any other term. It makes me wonder why 'lesbianness' cannot be used, in

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[54] Chris Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation: Anne Lister and the Ancients,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 30.1, January 2021, pp. 112 - 135, p. 114

much the same way that Bennett came up with the term 'lesbian-like'.[55] I presume again the reasons given would be under the persuasive appeal for inclusivity, which I hope I have already explained is not denied by the term 'lesbian'.

The most recent writing about Lister's sexuality came out in the 2022 issue of *The Journal of Lesbian Studies.* Heed and Hagai write in the introduction that '[t]he figure of Anne Lister allows us to explore the malleability, the resilience, and the boundaries of what the term ‘lesbian’ might mean to us and its kinship with gender nonbinary identities'[56]. Obviously, *The Journal of Lesbian Studies* is not going to publish a load of articles that throw out the term 'lesbian' and write themselves out of existence. However, it is refreshing to read a similar line of thought, that Lister can be called a lesbian and that this can help throw light on how malleable the term can be, as well as showing how it does not have to exclude other queer interpretations of her/them. The articles in this issue work to bring nuance to the issue of Lister's sexuality and gender in a way that helps me to relinquish some of my protective rhetoric.

Jessica Campbell's essay 'Can we call Anne Lister a lesbian?' discusses many of the same lesbian critics that I have looked at above. She differs from my (meta)critical stance, as her essay is aiming to qualify Lister as a 'lesbian' in the modern sense of the term, whereas I explore and cast suspicion on the incessant need to do such justification and qualifying when trying to apply the term 'lesbian' to a figure from the past. Her essay is doing different work, no more or less important than my critical stance. She still comes out with some moments that are very similar to some of the reactions I've had above - for instance, I appreciate her comment: 'The queer tent is getting awfully crowded', such a wonderfully colloquial way to articulate the caution I expressed earlier about the queer umbrella.[57] And I love her direct acknowledgement of other interpretations here: 'Notably, Lister always figures herself in the role of husband, here and in later journal entries discussing her relationship with Ann Walker; my argument in favor of calling her a lesbian is not intended

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[55] Judith M. Bennett, '"Lesbian-like" and the Social History of Lesbianisms, *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 9.1, (Jan - April 2000), pp. 1 - 24

[56] Jennifer Reed & Ella Ben Hagai, '*Gentleman Jack* and the (re)discovery of Anne Lister,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 303 - 308, p. 306

[57] ibid., p. 362

to exclude other readings of her as a transgender man or any other modern identity.'[58] It is so easy when arguing over identity to fall into closed off rhetorical cages and the simplicity of this sentence is a breath of fresh air.

It is in Charley Matthews' essay, '"I feel the mind enlarging itself": Anne Lister's gendered reading practices,' in which Lister is argued to be a trans person. Matthews' makes the case:

> Naming Lister trans is not intended to replace or challenge any reading of them as lesbian or queer. The opposite is intended: this paper advocates for what Liz Stanley (1987) calls “reverse archaeology” (p. 29), which rather than trying to strip back the layers of lifewriting to find some essential truth, instead allows the layers of possible meaning to accumulate. My intention is instead to contribute another brick molded by my positionality as a trans person to the architecture of collective knowledge about Anne Lister.[59]

The use of Stanley's concept of 'reverse archaeology' is a lovely way to methodologically handle the various interpretations of Lister's sexuality and gender. Stanley, in her essay 'Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope? The case of 'power' in Hannah Cullwick's relationship with Arthur Munby', explains the kaleidoscope effect in relation to biography as follows, 'you look and you see one fascinatingly complex pattern; the light changes, you accidently move, or you deliberately shake the kaleidoscope, and you see a different pattern composed by the ‘same’ elements.'[60] So her point is to be aware of her own positionality and her own changes of mind when dealing with the fragments that go to make up a biography; there is no essential truth revealed by lining up the elements just so, there is only the ongoing process of putting the pieces together in one configuration, using one interpretation, and then pulling them apart and noticing they could also fit together like this, and so on. Stanley presses for the importance of a feminist perspective in arranging the pieces and Matthews uses it to support their trans perspective in arranging the pieces of Lister's writing into a trans interpretation. Matthews also very clearly expresses that their

[58] ibid., p. 360

[59] Charley Matthews, '"I feel the mind enlarging itself": Anne Lister's gendered reading practices,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 367 – 381, p. 369

[60] Liz Stanley, 'Biography as microscope or kaleidoscope? The case of ‘power’ in Hannah Cullwick’s relationship with Arthur Munby', *Women’s Studies International Forum*, (1987), 10(1), pp. 19–31, p. 30

interpretation is not intended to challenge a lesbian interpretation and then also uses this methodology to argue for these different interpretations to accumulate, or gather, rather than to continually cancel each other out in a succession of linear truths. There is no other way to say it, but I *like* this; it feels to me like it manages to handle the multiple interpretations of Lister's identity self-consciously and respectfully in a way that is affirmative and inclusive.

So, it is time to address my own interpretation of Lister's sexuality. There are two factors that are important to remember when reading this section of the chapter: (1) the term 'lesbian' is never without complexity and a certain elusive quality, whether desired or not; and (2) the narrative I will weave is entirely from my position as a lesbian (which, remembering point (1) is not simple or clear). As Matthews paraphrases from Donna Haraway, 'all produced knowledge is inflected by the scholar's identities, embodied experiences, and critical positioning.'[61] The difficulty I find myself pitted against is my own irresolute and trembling grasp of the term 'lesbian'. I hate being overly personal in an academic paper, especially this format of an examined thesis, however, as Maggie Nelson comments about critics writing on sex, I do not wish to leave my sexuality 'an unexamined aporia',[62] especially as it is highly relevant to my own interpretation of Lister and the text. So, a short description of my sexual identity.

In terms of gender, my parents always accepted my masculine gender presentation. I largely wore my brother's hand-me-downs for most of my youth; I was not forced to wear dresses or be girly or play with particular toys (both mothering baby dolls and killing people with toy guns were acceptable). My idols were Princess Diana and Arnold Schwarzenegger. I have an internal acceptance of my female body and an opinion that it does not mean I have

[61] Charley Matthews, '"I feel the mind enlarging itself"', p. 368

[62] 'Such arguments also tend to rely on bringing critical consciousness to bear on *other people's* sexual behaviour, desires, beliefs, or experience, while leaving the author's own an unexamined aporia.[...] Not very many people want to discuss their sex lives in public, and who could blame them? But training one's sights on those of others without reciprocal vulnerability repeats a toxic dynamic that has long haunted feminism.' Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021), p. 81-2

to present any one way. This is certainly one of the main reasons I find it easy to identify as a woman: I was taught by those closest to me that a woman could be, and look like, anything. Obviously, I still lived in the outside world and was, and still am, affected by external reactions, but I have the strength to cope with any negativity that I am faced with because I know I am accepted by those who nourish me.

In terms of sexuality, which rests on this foundation of being 'a woman' (my definition being capacious), things are more complicated. I always liked girls and women but it took me some time to figure out what that meant. Only in university did I figure out that I was certainly exclusively gay and not bisexual. Then, I came into my full lesbian existence, in the sense that I had my first girlfriend, and everyone knew I was gay. In general, I have always used the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' with relative interchangeability, though 'gay' certainly has less stigma attached and always felt more inclusive; linguistically it is more flexible too, which helps. However, lesbian has always felt quite homely and like it did the job of explaining to others, and to myself, the direction of my desires and my joy. More recently, as 'queer' has grown to replace 'gay' as a collective term, I will sometimes use it, largely in a social sense, as it connects me to a broader community that use the term 'queer' now, such as the new popular and successful social community in Sheffield, Peak Queer Adventures. My friendship groups include those who identify as lesbian, straight, mainly-straight, fluid, queer, gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, transmasc, non-binary, polyamorous, asexual, otter, and butch twink. Sometimes for fun, I explain myself to others as a twink, as I'm masculine presenting but quite camp and feminine in behaviour. People enjoy it and so do I; there can be pleasure in playing with these labels.

In my day-to-day life, due to my gender presentation, my sexuality is sort of worn on my sleeve. I look like a teenage boy from a distance or from the corner of your eye as you look over a counter or as you enter a toilet and see me washing my hands, until you realise, Oh no, it's a grown lesbian woman. In this way, my sexuality is part of my daily life but also so natural to me by now at the age of 31 going on 32 that the tension and resistance I experienced in my youth are largely unfelt; I glide through life and tend not to think about it. Well, that was until I started a PhD on Anne Lister, 'the first modern lesbian', and read so much lesbian and queer theory and realised that, though the term 'lesbian' in my everyday life was largely a non-issue, it seemed to be boiling at a crisis point in academic writing. It was strange to come up against so much lesbophobia, and most of the stuff I was reading

was written before TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists) came along and dragged the term 'lesbian' through the mud.

So, to summarise, I am a largely masculine presenting woman, and cis-gendered in the sense that I do not experience gender dysphoria, who uses the words 'lesbian', 'gay', 'queer', and sometimes 'twink' as identity markers. I am white, educated, from a poor family, a child of divorce but brought up with love and attention, masculine-privileged, and part of a friendship network of queer people and queer allies. I know that these experiences affect the way I read and interpret Lister and her own navigations of gender and sexuality. Though I will try my best to keep my analysis open and critical to all the ways the text can be read, I will inevitably have blind spots, now you know where these might be, you can help fill them in; the work of interpretation should always be a collaboration (otherwise there's no point writing this thesis).

Lister is not silent on the issue of her sexuality, though she never uses a specific noun to define an identity. There is a story she tells quite consistently though, and I would venture to say, however, that the number of narratives possible is certainly not infinite and the story I tell is one of the most plausible or fitting amongst a small handful of alternative stories, such as trans or queer stories. One of the most used quotations in support of her lesbian sexuality is the following:

> *burnt all Caroline Greenwood's foolish notes* etc. *Mr Montagu's farewell verses that no trace of any mans* [sic] *admiration may remain it is not meet for me I love and only love the fairer sex and thus beloved by them in turn my heart revolts from any other love than theirs*[63]

[63] Monday 29th January 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0122

Caroline Greenwood is a local Halifax woman who liked Lister but who, as you can see, Lister was not fond of in an amatory way.[64] She burns her notes because she doesn't like her and they are "*foolish*". The action of burning Mr Montagu's letters, however, is in order to eradicate any evidence of a man's interest in her because it is "*not meet for me"*, that is, it is not suitable or fitting for Lister. This part is usually omitted when people use the quote about her loving only the fairer sex, though I feel like the action of burning evidence of a heteronormative love narrative adds weight and context to her follow-on statement. This statement is pretty clear in its expression of lesbian identity, showing an exclusive romantic interest in women. Lister's decision to purposefully curate her own archive so that it is solely representative of her close relationships with women is also noteworthy; somewhat ironically it seems to show that she didn't want any confusion over where her romantic interest lay if her documents were to be read by others. However, it is true that she does not say anything about being a woman and liking women - she is simply an "*I*" and a "*me*" - so though the direction of her desire is directed towards "*the fairer sex*" exclusively, it is arguable that she may not identify as "*the fairer sex*" herself, which pops the term 'lesbian' into some doubt.

In my three-year sample, the terms, or themes, that she most frequently uses to describe herself, along identity lines, are when she refers to "*my oddity*" and when she talks about the "*consistency of my nature*". The intriguing element I would like to point out before I dive into some close reading is that in general she does not use her journal to muse upon her own identity within my period, and that the times when she writes in the most detail about her sexuality and gender identity are when she is reporting on what she has told someone else. She does use her journal to muse about the women she is attracted to, writing about whether they like her or how much and whether she should do anything or forget about them and study. This suggests that she has a level of internal peace and acceptance around her habit of loving women but that it is only socially that the question of identity or labelling is necessary for her to expound upon. The fact she writes these

[64] e.g. "my aunt sent a note this evening to Cross-hills, to ask Mrs and the Miss Greenwood's to drink tea here any day this week, and William called for an answer when he went for IN - my aunt read the note which turned a long rigmarole from Miss Caroline to me, taking no notice of my aunt's invitation ^vid. P. 157^ - A 12 sheet more foolishly filled I have not seen for some time, and my aunt and Isabel as well as the rest laughed exceedingly - *surely the girl must like me in spite of all the stiffness of my manners to her in fact her jealousy of Miss Brown she was something unlike absolute indifference –"* Monday 16th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/ 3/0081-2

conversations down does suggest that she thinks these conversations are significant, however they do not appear self-generated and, within my time frame, are usually triggered by others. There is a nuance here in how identity functions for Lister: it is both significant and affects how she socialises and also somehow beside the point, a matter that must be triggered externally in order to be included in her journal, otherwise she just wants to get on with the business of loving.

Most scholars will use Lister's term 'odd' to describe her at some point in their writing, whether it is in passing or as a more central theme of their discussion. In many ways, the term has more in common with our present-day associations of 'queer', in that she uses it to mean non-conforming in a more general sense, as well as its more specific sexual sense. The longest excerpt that I have of Lister writing upon her "*oddities*" is when she reports on a conversation with Miss Brown. I will copy most of it here, as it delivers so much contextual information that surrounds this term, and allows for a more thorough insight into her understanding of what we might call her sexual identity:

> *I have always an umbrella or some thing and I never frighten myself I am stronger than you think I should not mind one man why have you not your umbrella I bade her keep the secret put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my out my* [sic] *clasp saying I should use it as well as I could this led to the subject of my oddity I owned I was very she would never meet another such peculiar feelings peculiar circumstances made me what I was and I trusted some circumstances would excuse me she said I was very agreeable everybody even those who had only seen me five minutes allowed this she never heard anyone say otherwise tho' everyone thought me very odd she liked my oddity I said I was aware of <u>that</u> and knew that all ladies did like it it was my oddity that made me so agreeable* [...] *speaking of my defending myself I said I was often mistaken my voice was so deep beside tho' my manners were mild and perhaps rather gentle in company yet I knew not how it was there must be a something it was often unpleasant six women attacked me once in going to the mail at midnight and a drunk man mistook me for twenty miles alluding to my last journey to Langton when two men were in the house at Northbridge one said <u>ah Sir I made your waistcoat</u> I had given up singing my voice had been mistaken at a supper party (at Doctor Belcomes by Jack Raper) for a mans parted at the front gate with a cordial shake she likes me and my oddity*[65]

[65] Thursday 25th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0006

Lister's oddity is her own; when she writes upon it, she tends to possess it with 'my'. The term "*my oddity*" is included four times within this single entry: Lister is insistent. Here the oddity is singular, suggesting a cohesion to her particular form of oddity, as if the oddity is herself more intimately – though, as you see in the last line, "*she likes me and my oddity*", there is a distinction between her oddity and herself: she may possess this oddity but it is not herself. Sometimes the oddity is not singular; she uses it elsewhere in the plural, for instance, when talking about Mrs Belcombe, she writes, "*I believe* [she] *likes me very much not perhaps the worse for my oddities*"[66], and in a later conversation with Miss Brown, she writes, "*talked off all my oddities*"[67] and then, in conversation with Emma Saltmarshe, "*brought on the subject of my own oddities of which Emma seems aware but to which she does not appear to object in fact she thinks me agreeable and likes me*".[68] Whether her oddity is looming and fully formed or a more messy bundle of oddities, they are her's; she does take ownership of them and there is a level of consistency and acceptance in the way it comes through in her writing, insistently her's. However, this oddity that she must possess is confusing, "*I knew not how it was there must be a something*", an elusive quality that though it may have something to do with her deep voice and her walk, or the figure she cuts from afar in the dark, does not fully make sense to her.[69] In general, it seems this something is related to masculinity, even if it is not exactly masculinity. As we see in a later conversation she has with Mariana, masculinity is involved but doesn't quite explain it fully: "*speaking of my manners she owned they were not masculine but such was my form voice and style of conversation such a peculiar flattery and attention did I shew that if this sort of thing was not carried off by my talents and cleverness I should be disgusting".*[70] Lister tries hard to be ladylike, her manners are mild and gentle, and "*yet*" there is "*a something*", and it is "*unpleasant*". We see the difficulty and danger of her "*oddity*": it causes her to be "*attacked*"

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[66] Saturday 20th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0116

[67] Thursday 2nd December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0009

[68] Monday 2nd July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0039

[69] Her deep toned voice comes up elsewhere and does seem to be one of the most notable or recognisably odd or singular things about her that marks her out as different: e.g. "*mentioned my deep toned voice as very singular the girls said they were afraid of me but could like me because* [Mariana] *did"* - Wednesday 22nd March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0040

[70] Wednesday 9th February 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0030

at its worst and is unsurprisingly the first example that she gives, and it causes her to be mistaken for a man at its most mild, so embarrassing that she alters the way she interacts in certain social situations, choosing not to sing at some dinner parties.[71] She excuses her oddity to Miss Brown by saying, "*I trusted some circumstances would excuse me*", she did not choose this way of being but "*peculiar feelings peculiar circumstances made me what I was".* She knows that she should not be proud of her oddity but settle for tolerance and acceptance. She writes of Mrs Belcombe and Emma liking her despite her oddities, and she later explains away her oddities to Miss Brown.

This sense of the negative side to the term 'odd' is seen when she uses the term for others, such as when she writes of Mrs Gaskhill, "She seems to be a regular bas bleu - does not like the conversation of ladies - is altogether odd, and a unitarian in religion, and all but a radical ^(reformer)^ in politics".[72] To Lister, none of the attributes she lists about this woman are positively intended. Lister is a Tory and Anglican who, at this time, did not believe in reform, especially the idea of giving the right to vote to women.[73] To call someone a 'bas bleu' or 'bluestocking' was not a good thing for Lister or her circle of Tory friends, as she writes elsewhere about a conversation she has in York, "*someone who did not know me said to Mrs John Raper of me one must not speak to her she is a blue stocking I dont know replied Mrs R but she is very agreeable".*[74] In Lister's network of Tory, landowning, and aristocratic people, to be called a bluestocking was to be ostracised and shunned. Interestingly, we see the wife of Mr John Raper, the man who marked Lister out as singing like a man, come to her defence against an outsider here, and, as she says, she doesn't know if Lister is a bluestocking or not "*but she is very agreeable*". To be a bluestocking is to be shunned by many but not by all, very much like Lister herself. However, when Lister uses it

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[71] She does sing, but only with certain company, e.g., "*Tib and I staid half hour after the rest singing and playing"* - Saturday 7th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0089

[72] Friday 24th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0040

[73] Lister's diaries have quite a lot of information about the Peterloo Massacre and the ongoing reform meetings, which reach Halifax, as she says, "the reform infection seems to have reached us" Weds. 18th Aug. 1819 - she also attends three days of the Hunt trial in Manchester, first day: Monday 20th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0039. She writes of women's right to vote: "^(“Rights of women”) is a curious list of authorities in support of the rights of women to take part in these reform meetings - to vote for ^representatives^ in the house of commons, and, in short, to be in every sense of the word members of the body politic. What will not these demagogues advance, careless what absurdity or ruin they commit!" Monday 6th Dec. 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0011

[74] Thursday 23rd March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0040

against Mrs Gaskhill it is for the purpose of shunning. It interests me here that she writes that Mrs Gaskhill is "altogether odd" just after she has included the comment that she "does not like the conversation of ladies", which seems like a wonderful flip of what 'odd' can mean, or a Listerian queering of a term. Lister is odd because she appears masculine to others and has a "*penchant for the ladies*",[75] whereas to Lister, Mrs Gaskhill is odd because she does not like ladies; it is to Lister, in this case, that Mrs Gaskhill appears odd. When she writes of Mrs Gaskhill, odd is used to mean difficult to understand and different (to Lister), which seems to be what it largely means when she, and others, apply it to herself. She is different to others and yet agreeable.

The other thing to note in the way Lister frames herself and her oddity is the fact that she does indeed possess it, it is hers and hers alone, as she says to Miss Brown, "*she would never meet another such*". Lister is quite insistent that this oddity marks her apart from everyone else, even other women with similar masculine traits or lesbian desires. Lister writes of how Tib is compared to herself along masculine lines, such as these discussions that take place with Miss Vallance in October 1818:

> *it seems she had thought Tib always played the man with me in which I think she was undeceived she told me the second walk we had together in the wold field about Tibs manners being masculine that the men did not like it* [...] *I asked her the other day if she thought me masculine she said no in nothing but my manner of walking*[76]

and

> *I said it was a victory to me to think that she had not discovered my real character but fancied Tib the most masculine of the two she denied this and declared she knew the contrary all along*[77]

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[75] Friday 8th November 1816

[76] Tuesday 20th October 1818, Calderdale Archive Transcription project, SH:7/ML/E/2

[77] Friday 30th October 1818, Calderdale Archive transcription project, SH:7/ML/E/2

These examples show how the two of them are both seen as masculine by others, though it would seem that Lister believes that she is the more masculine of the two, an important distinction. Lister is relatively at ease with considering Tib masculine like herself, though not as dominant as herself, but when it comes to sexuality Lister's opinions are quite confusing:

> *I should not have liked Tib's sleeping with her Tib asked why and pressed me till I said I knew that grubbling was practised among girls and from what I had heard Tib say I should have suspected this but was sure V* [Miss Vallance] *was incapable of it I mentioned Tib's saying ^two years ago that^ V was irresistible that if she Tib had never known me she should have been in love with she was the only girl she had ever seen she should have been in love with* etc. etc. *I said if she had told me of falling in love with men I could have forgiven it but to speak in such a way of such a girl as Miss V I could not understand the feeling was morbid and shocked me she pretended to compare her ^feelings to^ wards myself I said I was quite a different character but if she could possibly confound the two all connection between Tib and me should cease*[78]

So here, Lister is aware that girls use their hands to stimulate each other's genitals ("*grubbling*") and yet she does not think Miss Vallance is capable of such things, though Miss V is having sex with Lister during this time, which indicates that Lister is separating herself off from "*girls*"; she is implying that sex between girls is different than sex between a girl, like Miss Vallance, and herself. Then she expresses some confusing sentiments. She expresses that it would be alright if Tib had talked of falling in love with "*men*" (plural, general, heterosexual), which implies that Lister aligns herself with men and so Tib would exhibit consistency if she had fallen in love with 'other' men. She also makes the additional distinction of what sort of girl Miss V is, "*such a girl as Miss V*", which perhaps indicates that Miss V is too feminine for Tib, which is confusing due to Lister's understanding that Tib is also considered masculine like herself, so I would expect her to understand or expect this dynamic between Miss V and Tib. These confusing expressions of morbidity could be explained as internal homophobia, or, as Rebecca Hamilton writes of Lister's reaction to Miss Pickford (another masculine lesbian), 'there is also a possible manifestation of shame,

[78] Sunday 19th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0102

discomfort, and disgust at seeing herself reflected in another'.[79] Tib's attempt to compare her feelings towards Miss V with her feelings towards Lister, reads to me like an attempt to connect over their shared sexuality and create a sense of solidarity and community; however, Lister denies the similarity and goes to the length of threatening to end their relationship on that premise. Tib's bid for community is entirely rejected: they are not the same; Lister is not like the girls who grubble or Miss V or Tib. This extract in particular and Lister's way of setting herself apart from other women who love women, especially considered alongside her alignment with men, does somewhat dampen my argument for calling her a lesbian on two grounds: one, lesbian is a communal label, shared by all women who love women; and two, Lister is not aligning with women here, she is identifying more strongly with men and not girls, so arguments for non-binary or transmasc or transgender identities would fit more snuggly here.

Her oddity is her own and no one else's. It is masculine leaning, something about the way she walks or talks or the quality of her attention, marks her out as not quite ladylike but more "*^softly^ gentlemanlie".*[80] The other ways she discusses herself is with a particular emphasis on consistency: she has always liked girls, always been liked by girls ("*she liked my oddity I said I was aware of <u>that</u> and knew that all ladies did like it"*) and in this, for Lister, there is an excuse for her "oddity" as something natural. She speaks of having "*a penchant for the ladies"* in 1816 with Anne Belcombe and again uses the same term in November 1819 when speaking of Major Fawcett's showing off, writing, "*he little guesses that my penchant is another way"*.[81] The *OED* defines penchant as, 'A strong or habitual inclination; a tendency to do something; a taste or liking *for* a person or thing.'[82] This idea of habitual inclination comes up again when she writes of a discussion with Miss Vallance who is having cold feet and doubting the morality of what they are doing, *"in another case it was punished with death I said I understood her argued about my consistency my nature the*

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[79] Rebecca Hamilton, '"Impossibility of its being deciphered": Anne Lister, her "crypt hand" diaries, and the contrast between voicing and silencing,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 338 - 353, p. 350

[80] "*she thinks me making up to Eliz I am certainly attentive to her but cautiously without any impropriety that could be laid hold of yet my manners are certainly peculiar not all masculine but rather ^softly^ gentlemanlie I know how to please girls"* Wednesday 4th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0088

[81] Sunday 7th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0109

[82] "penchant, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/140011. Accessed 16 June 2023.

eearly [sic] *bent of my inclination".*[83] Here she fights against Miss Vallance's reference to the death penalty given to males who engaged in sodomy – which was quite prevalent at the time, for example, A. D. Harvey writes, 'in one year, 1806, there were more executions for sodomy than for murder'[84] – with the argument that she is consistent and has been the same since she was very young. That this argument seems to be enough to counteract Miss Vallance's concerns triggered by the death penalty is telling of the efficacy of the argument, not just for Lister, but for those around her. The consistency she speaks of is what most appeals to my lesbian radar; she has always liked women and this desire has oriented her toward certain directions and certain spaces throughout her entire life, as Sara Ahmed writes:

> If we presume that sexuality is crucial to bodily orientation, to how we inhabit spaces, then the differences between how we are orientated sexually are not only a matter of "which" objects are orientated toward, but also how we extend through our bodies into the world. Sexuality would not be seen as determined only by object choice, but as involving differences in one's very relation to the world — that is, in how one "faces" the world or is directed toward it. Or rather, we could say that orientations toward sexual objects affect other things that we do, such that different orientations, different ways of directing one's desires, means inhabiting different worlds.[85]

It is this consistency of orientation that I think, for me, best represents Lister as a lesbian in the way that I understand it, as a way of life and as an identity. I also have always been consistent in my desires towards women and though I recognise that many women exist on a more fluid spectrum of sexuality, I am limited to my single direction of desire, and it provides solace to know that Lister, two hundred years ago, also consistently and unwaveringly sought the love of women. There is a precedent for people like me then. So, though Lister may not want company in her possession of her "oddity", I still wish to claim her, if not for her (why bother, she's dead), then for myself (thankfully still alive). It is the

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[83] Friday 17th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0101

[84] Harvey, A. D. "Prosecutions for Sodomy in England at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1978, pp. 939–948, p. 939

[85] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 67-8

sexual emphasis of her consistency, the orientation of her desire, that I think best supports calling her a lesbian, though I also can see the evidence that would support naming her trans or nonbinary. And I don't see why these labels need to be exclusionary - perhaps Lister is best described as a trans lesbian or a nonbinary lesbian, if we pull apart the gender identification from the sexual orientation? For me, though, if I may be so permitted by the examiners, I'm going to call her a lesbian, with all the uncertainty and confusion and openness that the term encapsulates, as I hope I have made clear. So, here it goes: Anne Lister is a lesbian.

Tib

During my three-year sample, Lister had four relationships. She had an obsessive crush on a local woman in Halifax called Miss Brown, and they became very friendly, taking private walks over the moors and talking "*nonsense*", though it stopped there due to Miss Brown's marriage to Mr Kelly.[1] She had a brief sexual affair with Miss Vallance – a woman staying with the Norcliffe family, an old friend of their dead Emily – while staying at Langton Hall in autumn 1820. She reconnected with her long-term lover Mariana Lawton (née Belcombe) and they exchanged an STI, as well as an "*irrevocable promise*".[2] And, during it all, she continued her friendship and sexual relationship with Isabella Norcliffe, or Tib, as she called her. I had hoped to discuss all four relationships in this chapter, but it soon became apparent that such a task was beyond the scope of a single chapter. The amount of material available for each relationship is incredibly rich and complex and the narrative tends to take over from the critical. In order to create some order and take control, I have chosen only one relationship to discuss here, and that is the relationship between Lister and Tib, the '*other* love of Anne's life', as Whitbread writes in her introduction.[3]

I have chosen to focus on her relationship with Tib because it does not fit into the sorts of representations that tend to circulate around Lister's romantic or sexual relationships. Before I get onto the task of discussing this particular relationship, I wish to roughly outline what I mean by this. There are two main representations that appear to lurk around Lister and Lister criticism. The first is the perception of Lister as a 'rake' or 'seducer'. The second is the positive representation of her as some form of 'successful' lesbian. I argue that these representations, though not unfounded, have a tendency to screen, or obscure, the moments, scenes and emotions that do not fit into them. The aim of this chapter is to trouble these representations and point towards what Lauren Berlant calls, 'all that's ill-fitting in humans'[4], using Lister's relationship with Tib to do so.

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[1] '*if any one had heard us they would have said we had talked a great deal of nonsense'* Saturday 6th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0108

[2] 23rd July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0045

[3] Helena Whitbread, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister,* edited by Helena Whitbread (London: Virago Press, 2010), p. xxiv - my italics.

[4] Lauren Berlant, 'Starved,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2007) 106.3, pp. 433–444, p. 435

Hence, hence, ye *Bugbears*, I am free,
And will enjoy my much-*lov'd Liberty*,
Tho' *Musty Morals* teach the contrary.[5]

The word 'rake' was in currency since at least 1693, when Richard Ames' poem 'The Rake: or, the Libertine's Religion' was published. According to the *OED,* it comes from the word 'Rakehell, n.', meaning 'An immoral or dissolute person', which derived from the phrase: '***to rake (out) hell***: (usually in the context of describing a person as villainous or immoral) to search through hell. In later use also ***to rake hell with a fine-tooth comb***'[6] and these versions of the word date from at least around 1540. The word seems to march out of hell, and rather than losing meaning, it appears to accrue it, adding to its association of a person with bad morals the notion of this person putting their morals aside in order to seek liberty – 'I am free', says the narrator of Ames' poem – and, also, lest we forget, to become stylish. It is interesting to note that considering 'rake' was in currency during Lister's period, she does not use it once in the 11 volumes currently transcribed, between 1818 - 1829. So, she does not describe herself as a rake or anyone else in her journals, or record anyone else calling her a rake. This is not to be ignored, as it shows this exact role is not entirely self-fashioned or intended by Lister, and that, as far as we can know, this exact role was also not perceived of her by her contemporaries. Perhaps, the word was much more offensive than it has become.

It is Terry Castle who first describes Lister as a rake in her book, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993). The effect of this early conceptualisation of Lister and how she behaves in her romantic and sexual relationships is difficult to assess but it is certainly still clinging to her three decades later. Castle argues the following:

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[5] Richard Ames, 'The Rake: or, the Libertine's Religion. A poem.,' London: 1693. <https://www.proquest.com/books/libertine/docview/2141221993/se-2> [Accessed 03/04/2023]

[6] "rakehell, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/157657> [Accessed 3 April 2023] AND, "rake, v.2." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/157649> [Accessed 3 April 2023]

> In the transgressive figure of the rake, whose obsession with women is so great as to put him at odds with his society - he has no "job" or social function other than his lust and often breaks the law in order to achieve his ends - the lesbian finds, as it were, her heterosexual twin: the outlaw male whose subversive longing in some way mirrors and licences her own. Precisely by drawing on the myth of a Byron or Don Juan, of the man ruled by his desire for women, inventive nineteenth-century women like Anne Lister found a way "into" their own transgressive desire: the one kind of sexual unorthodoxy sanctioned the other.[7]

Castle's theory is that Lister, amongst other lesbians of her time, would have taken the image of the rake, or the male libertine, as a way to understand her own disallowed desire for women. The rake is cast as a law breaker and goes against the permitted forms of courtship, as does the lesbian lover (though, as we know, no laws acknowledged lesbian desire). Castle also brings in the influence of Byron to explain Lister's behaviour, believing that Lister, even if unconsciously, was emulating him, writing, 'she identified with him both in his role as arch-romantic and as the most notorious womaniser of the early nineteenth century.'[8] The idea is not outlandish, Lister certainly enjoys Byron's poetry and knows that he, and his work, is not accepted in all polite society. She defended his work, writing about a review in *The Pamphleteer*, that it "condemns Don Juan of course, but does justice to the genius shewn in the work - that such power should be so abused!"[9] Lister was very passionate about her opinion that Byron's poetry was fine language and that he should not be so badly criticised and condemned. One could argue, as Castle did, that her defence of Byron's poetry is a symptom of her 'subliminal Byronic fixation', though I would argue that the parts of him that she identified with were more his claim to talent and genius in the face of a society who misunderstood him, than his reputation as a womaniser, or, at least, these are the sentiments recorded in her journals.

Lister does not write in support of Byron's character, nor does she make any direct comparison of herself to Byron in the 11 transcribed volumes, he's only referenced in relation to his work. Interestingly, at the news of his death, she writes, “Who admired him as

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[7] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 104

[8] ibid., p. 103

[9] Wednesday 13th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0082

a man? yet ‘he is gone and for ever!’ — the greatest poet of the age! and I am sorry”.[10] The suggestion here is that she may not have agreed with his behaviour as a man, but she did not think this should affect her opinion about his work. Castle links them by their 'sexual unorthodoxy' but I would link them by their mutual ambitions: it is Lister's strong opinions about how his work should not be judged in light of the prejudice against his character that best mirror, perhaps, her own concern that her work (i.e. her many possible writing projects) and her intellect should not be judged in light of the fact that she was a woman.

Castle's decision to use the strong image of Lister as a rake is not without evidence. Lister does act with a certain level of liberty, especially when it comes to her sexual relationships with women, and she does do it with self-awareness. Her relationship with Miss Vallance during her stay at Langton in autumn 1820, for instance, is certainly a relation navigated upon role playing and she is aware of the term "libertine" and how such a character behaves, as shown when she records the following conversation with Miss V:

> *she asked if I had ever spoken of her lightly I mentioned candidly the only time I had done so it was when Tib long ago said that do what I would I could never get V to yield to me that I answered trust me Tib V is not so very much better than all other women - I owned that my conversation on that ominous Saturday had been rather libertine but that I had done it to try her to see what lengths I might go what liberties I might take and that she had behaved very properly and had come off with credit*[11]

Lister portrays in this conversation that she is invested in the moralistic double standard of her period, that women must show restraint and reluctance in sexual situations and men are permitted to be sexually assertive. Lister does not align with women in this dynamic, so it is for her to play the sexually assertive role. She frames it as a test here, as a way to sidestep the immorality of her speech. The interesting part to me is the way she "*candidly*" confesses this conversation with Tib to Miss V and then also "*owned*" her behaviour as "*rather libertine*". She displays a level of transparency about this role playing that seems to undermine the dominance of her position as the sexually assertive part. Previous to this conversation in which Lister feels she can be so candid, the dynamic between herself and

[10] Wednesday 19th May 1824, Volume 7, Transcription from Calderdale Archive

[11] Thursday 16th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0100

Miss V has been a complex and confusing drama. Lister wrote of Miss V back in October: "*I am weak against the arts of this understanding practiser of blandishment she is a deep I am half persuaded but she shall get nothing out of me farther she has done I will play her own game".*[12] This game playing, as Lister thinks of it, is a confusing terrain. She speaks often of scenes and the parts that they both have to play, such as, "*a good kiss I staid just half hour and then left her just beginning to cry* etc. *and act a good scene of remorse which I took with proper pathos",*[13] and, "*V seeming quite low and every now and then in tears a capital remorse scene in which I played my part as well as she*".[14] The trouble is that Lister is very aware that the double standard does not hold for Miss V, in the sense that Miss V wants sex and has been pretty active in playing her role in such a way as to obtain her desire (we might refer to Miss V as a 'power bottom' today). The reality of living out these parts is therefore mired in unease. There is a discrepancy between these fictional parts and the reality of living them out. Lister's concern is that Miss V is trying to create a situation in which Lister would be bound to V as a life companion, as she writes,

> *I know I excite her not a little and as she says she has feelings as well as other people and cannot resist me but she plays her part as dexterously as she can I scarce know what to make of her but cannot help thinking she is rather a deep hand and would be glad enough to catch me but I am an old bird and probably as wary as she*[15]

These games are fraught with suspicion for Lister, even though she reassures herself that she is "*an old bird.*" Her anxiety and distrust continues for the rest of the month until the end of November, when things start to shift. In what seems rather typical of Lister, once she has made her "*conquest*"[16] and the relationship becomes more mutual and settled, with them both agreeing "*to be mutually cautious in our conduct and to gull all around us*",[17] Lister

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[12] Tuesday 17th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0091

[13] Tuesday 24th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0094

[14] Wednesday 25th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0094

[15] Wednesday 25th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0094

[16] Wednesday 8th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0097

[17] Saturday 28th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0095

starts to fall more seriously for Miss V and considers her as a possible life companion. She writes:

> *she will have as much as the N*[orcliffes]*'s unless they come in for this estate she is an interesting girl and if her connections had been everything to my mind I do believe I should have been convinced she could make me happy but what am I about gaining the girl's affections loving her myself more or differently from what I intended and alas perhaps getting into a scrape she certainly begins to like me* [...] *she came to give me a kiss and then go back and in truth she kisses sweetly she is beautifully nice and sweet and clean and fresh and loveable*[18]

Their relationship seems to have passed through the tense power play at the beginning, full of suspicion and wariness, and slunk into a more domestic register. Lister recognises that her feelings have changed into something more intense and she may get "*into a scrape*", by which she means, if the relationship gets too serious, she may find it awkward to navigate herself out of it. She is considering Miss V's income, however, and the idea of her as a serious option for a life partner is certainly on Lister's mind. Fundamentally, the role of the libertine is only fictional, one to *play* with, for Lister, and though she tries to play the part well and maintain some level of control in doing so, it is a difficult feat and mired in doubt and anxiety. Ultimately, she plays it only for so long, until she becomes more intimate with Miss V and can no longer control her own feelings. Lister cannot quite live up to the ideal of the libertine.

It is also true that Lister values her liberty quite highly and, though part of this liberty is used to enjoy a busy sexual life, her freedom of sexual behaviour is also perceived by her as necessary to find a life companion. She writes about liberty, for instance, in regards to her relationship with Mariana Lawton: "*she seems to consider my last letter as containing a promise on my part now this I certainly did not mean and she ought not to take it so for I still feel myself as much at liberty as ever".*[19] However, once their relationship is settled with an "*irrevocable promise*", she writes, *"said how much happier I felt to have lost my liberty than I*

[18] Thursday 30th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0106

[19] Wednesday 30th August 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0078

should to have kept it".[20] The use of 'liberty' in this sense seems more in relation to Lister's freedom to seek out intimacy with other women in order to find someone to settle down with, than for liberty's sake itself. Lister does not necessarily demand to be at liberty in her pursuit of women forever. True, it could be said that her approach to searching for a life-companion is very rakish. Indeed, during her loyal period with Mariana, after this promise has been made and she's agreed to lose her liberty, she writes about a conversation with Tib: "*talking of my sleeping with Eliza Belcombe said I should not like it and that I was much altered of late in all these matters Tib laughed looked incredulous bade me not say so and added it would be unnatural in you not to like sleeping with a pretty girl*'.[21] Both Tib's reaction and Lister's inclusion that she "*was much altered*" point towards this opinion of Lister's character as someone who can't say no to sex with "*a pretty girl*": she is actively promiscuous.

It is this image of Lister that then follows her into the twenty-first century. Caroline Eisner's article, 'Shifting the Focus: Anne Lister as Pillar of Conservatism', gives a particularly biased view of Lister. Eisner writes that Lister 'transformed herself into a womaniser so as to become not a victim, but rather a victimiser'; and argues that '[w]omen were tokens of her success, and their dowries of high social standing, beauty, and innocence merely trophies of war'.[22] Eisner takes Castle's more positive rendition of Lister as a 'transgressive' or 'subversive' rake and adapts it into a more negative, highly moralised version of her as a 'victimiser' who only views women as 'tokens'. This reads more like slander than a balanced interpretation of Lister; largely, I cannot agree with Eisner's decision to cast the women that Lister sleeps with as 'victims': simply because we do not have their words does not mean these women were without agency of their own, and much of Lister's writing would support the idea that the majority of these women knew what they wanted and gladly played the game of seduction in order to obtain their desires.[23]

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[20] Monday 23rd July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0045

[21] Monday 28th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0097

[22] Caroline L. Eisner, 'Shifting the Focus: Anne Lister as Pillar of Conservatism', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies,* 17.1 (2001), pp. 28 - 42, p. 31, 33 respectively

[23] see, for example, how Lister perceives Miss Vallance's behaviour: '*she is a deep I am half persuaded but she shall get nothing out of me farther she has done I will play her own game'* Tuesday 17th October 1820, SH:7/ ML/E/4/0091 – Lister exhibits double standards in how she views women in sexual relationships with her, but her relationship with Miss Vallance does seem, in general, to support the idea that Miss Vallance wanted a sexual relationship and acted the part of the woman in their courtship narrative in order to achieve it.

Most recently, Angela Stiedele uses the representation of Lister as a 'seducer' in her biography, *Gentleman Jack, A biography of Anne Lister: Regency Landowner, Seducer and Secret Diarist* (2018). The tradition of viewing her as a violent seducer, or 'victimiser', with all the moral condemnation that that affords in today's society, concerned as it is with issues of consent, continues in this work. It is most obviously delivered in these sentences, written in Stiedele's conclusion:

> Despite all this, Anne Lister was *a beast of a woman*. Like all her lovers, I could not escape this conclusion, and yet nor could I let go of her.[24] [my italics]

Though there is something vernacular and amusing about this assessment, it is rather unfair. None of Lister's lovers, as far as we know, viewed Lister as a beast, or even as particularly evil or immoral. Her lovers certainly got jealous of Lister's behaviour towards other women, and would accuse her of vanity or folly, but Lister never recorded a lover accusing her of anything as offensive as a 'beast' or its moral equivalent(s).[25] Most concerning, is that Lister is not just described as a beast but "a beast of a *woman*", which seems steeped in troubling sexism to me. It sounds as if Steidele holds an ideal of what a woman is supposed to be and this woman can't do certain things, such as exhibiting desire, pursuing desire, being ruthless in her approach of such pursuits, or, indeed, being judgemental, sometimes insensitive and harmful to others, or otherwise flawed, as all humans have a tendency to be – I feel like the most damning thing you could really say about Lister's approach to relationships is that she can, at times, be disappointing.

These narratives surrounding Lister as a rake or seducer are not, as I have said, entirely unfounded; however, I do feel that they have three effects: (i) the decision to lead

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[24] Angela Steidele, translated by Katy Derbyshire, *Gentleman Jack, A biography of Anne Lister: Regency Landowner, Seducer and Secret Diarist* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2018), p. 331

[25] '*stupid day [Mariana] just before dinner rowed about my want of pride in taking notice of or rather seeming pleased with the attention of Mrs John Raper vanity was my leading passion anyone might have my friendship who would praise me* etc. etc.' Monday 27th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/0041, and, ''Note from Miss Maclean - or blank 12 sheet enclosing a leaf torn out of her pocket book containing according to my request a written promise that if I would visit them in their island of Coll in the year 1833, that she would return with me into Yorkshire. *[Mariana] came up to me and seeing this written promise was very angry at my folly in exorting it and a jealous fit almost knocked me down but we soon made it all up*' Monday 24th December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0089

with these narratives means that any evidence in the journals that do not support these straight-forward claims, tends to be left out or simply left unnoticed; (ii) the use of such terms can force prose into a certain moralistic rhetoric that, again, tends to bias evidence towards supporting these black and white, wrong or right, judgements; and, lastly, (iii) they are reductive, in as much as they flatten and argue away any contradictory or ill-fitting behaviour, and turn Lister into a two-dimensional, fictional character, rather than a living and breathing and writing woman who, try as she may have, could not conform to any single role.

The other representation that causes me less concern but is still worth bearing in mind due to its effect on our criticism when discussing Lister, is the turn towards positivity, of depicting Lister as a 'successful' lesbian, or queer. This, in some ways, can be seen as a development of the representations of 'rake' and 'seducer', as it builds upon the agency attributed to her by using these terms. Largely, this representation has come about in more recent years due to the broadcast of the series, *Gentleman Jack* (2019), which in its first season depicted the romantic plotline of Lister and Miss Ann Walker. This plot followed a traditional, costume-drama romantic story-arc, ending in a 'marriage' scene, a happily-ever-after finish.

Chris Roulston discusses the way the series subverts these traditional narratives due to the queer source text of the Lister journals in her essay, 'From text to screen: *Gentleman Jack* then and now.' However, it is not the subversion that interests me, but the way Roulston interprets the series as one that delivers a positive message. In Roulston's interpretation of the series:

> the eight episodes are structured as an Austenian courtship narrative, with Lister's initial seduction of Walker, followed by Walker's hesitancy and refusal, and concluding with the couple's reconciliation and mutual commitment. In narrative terms, Lister occupies the role of a Mr. Darcy or a Mr. Knightley, except of course that she is a woman. This both anchors and

> disrupts the romance narrative, with the effect of ensuring a mainstream audience—reflected in the show's six million viewers—while offering a moment of queer historical utopia on screen.[26]

There is certainly some truth to this assessment of what the series is doing. The structure of the main romance plotline between Lister and Ann Walker does follow a traditional courtship narrative. I would also add that Lister, in the famous proposal scene on the mountaintop, resembles Heathcliffe more than a Mr Darcy in her dishevelled appearance, continuing this version of her as a rakish character. However, the 'moment of queer historical utopia on screen' is less obvious to me. The way the ending scenes play out juxtaposes an overt heterosexual wedding in the village of Halifax with the discrete ritual of Lister and Ann Walker exchanging rings quietly in a carriage, whilst alone, and then taking the sacrament in church together. The decision to juxtapose the visible ritual of a heterosexual wedding with the invisible ritual of a queer 'wedding' both suggests the significance of the latter ritual as being equal or comparative to the former whilst simultaneously emphasising the latter's lack of recognition and celebration by society. It is the way it shows this lack that I find difficult to correlate with 'a moment of queer historical utopia', if we understand a utopia as '[a]n imagined… system, or state of existence in which everything is perfect, *esp. in respect of social structure, laws*, and politics' [my italics].[27] There are no social structures or laws involved in the representation of Lister and Walker's wedding here, rather, the lack of societal involvement in this version of a wedding is precisely what is highlighted.[28] The placement of Roulston's 'queer' in this sentence leaves wiggle room: perhaps she meant that the utopia itself was queer and in this way may not in fact need social structure or laws to be involved, that it is a queering of what we think of as utopic. Either way, Roulston is correct in the positivity that the ending scenes do still manage to affect in the viewer, with their upbeat piano music and the several smiles that are

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[26] Chris Roulston, 'From text to screen: *Gentleman Jack* then and now,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 309 - 322, p. 319

[27] "utopia, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7153815023>[Accessed 5 April 2023]

[28] Indeed, in my 3-year period, AL even suggests that taking the sacrament together (with Mariana) is a lesser form of binding than a wedding ceremony: '*we have agreed to solemnize our promise of mutual faith by taking the sacrament together when we next meet at Shibden not thinking it proper to use any still more binding ceremony during* [Charles'] *life'* 28th July 1821

exchanged between Lister and Walker; a romantic, happy ending is still delivered by the ending scenes of this queer romance.

"Pink-tinted glasses": looking and affirmation in *Gentleman Jack',* written by Nicole Lyn Lawrence & Sarah Bertekap, also notices the positivity clinging to the representation of Lister in the series of *Gentleman Jack*. They hypothesise that the series is engaged in an 'affirmative project', one that they see as eliding class, economic and gender inequalities 'in the desire for positive representation.'[29] It is not only these inequalities that the series downplays, but also the many, many years of struggle and unhappiness that Lister had to endure to finally get a woman to agree to live with her. This is done both in Wainwright's decision to focus on Lister's relationship with Walker in the first place, rather than choosing any other stretch of her life, as well as in the time-constraints given by the format of a TV programme in which it was not practical to show the actual length of time it took to get this agreement from Walker or the actual number of times that Walker changed her answer. Lister's unhappiness is shown just enough in the series to create drama but then it is appeased, and arguably rewarded, by her union with Walker in the highly romanticised ending scenes.

Lawrence & Bertekap reference Sara Ahmed's work on 'the happiness turn' to suggest that *Gentleman Jack*'s 'affirmative project' exemplifies 'the current cultural desire to turn away from “unhappy queers”'.[30] In her chapter, 'Unhappy queers,' Ahmed suggests that the 'unhappy queer' is not born unhappy but is made unhappy because the happy people, that is, those who conform to heterosexual aspirations of the good life, are unhappy with them for not conforming also and so reject them and condemn them in various ways that leads the queer to then become unhappy, thus also proving to the happy people that to choose not to conform means to choose to be unhappy. The queer is not unhappy by virtue of being queer but by virtue of being seen to be queer and then ostracised: it is the world of happy people that makes the unhappy queer. Thus, Ahmed writes, '*We must stay unhappy with this world*.'[31] Ahmed argues that 'the illusion that same-sex object choices have become accepted and acceptable (for example, that civil partnerships would mean queer

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[29] Nicole Lyn Lawrence & Sarah Bertekap, '"Pink-tinted glasses": looking and affirmation in *Gentleman Jack', Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 323 - 337, p. 326, and 333 respectively

[30] ibid., p. 326

[31] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 105

civility) both conceals the ongoing realities of discrimination, nonrecognition, and violence and requires that we approximate the straight signs of civility.'[32] So applying this to *Gentleman Jack,* the decision to show a queer proposal and a queer version of a wedding to end the first season, could be said to 'approximate the straight signs of civility,' casting the queer as happy only insofar as they can follow the lines of straight happiness. The show gives us a version of a happy queer, whose happiness is only recognisable to the extent in which they mimic straight signs of happiness.[33]

This is not to say that the show is not welcome in its positive turn, indeed, most viewers, myself included, are desperate for representation of lesbian couples that are not made to suffer or are killed off by their impossible desire. There is a place for both forms of representation, happy and unhappy, but I can see the value in Ahmed's troubling of what constitutes happiness in the first place, what is recognised as happy and who gets to corroborate or dismiss different forms of happiness? I would like to bring this theme of thought through into my exploration of Lister's relationship with Tib in my period. The most striking factor to notice from the get-go is how Lister writes about aspirations for the good life, following these heterosexual aspirations, in her wish to find a life-companion, for instance, she tells Tib, "*I must have someone who had the same authority in my house as a wife would have in her husband's house".*[34] I wish to look at how these aspirations rub up against the reality of her situation as a queer person in a straight world and how this search for a certain form of happiness is played out within her relationship with Tib. This positive narrative of a lesbian seeking marriage is one that I want to be as delicate with as possible, as I don't wish to undermine Lister's version of happiness. I do, however, want to use her relationship with Tib to show how such purely affirmative approaches to queer lives, especially in relation to their romantic or sexual relationships, can work to overshadow how difficult it could be to find someone appropriate in a world that did not have the social or

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[32] ibid., p. 106

[33] 'The recognition of queers can be narrated as the hope or promise of becoming acceptable, where in *being* acceptable you must *become* acceptable to a world that has already decided what is acceptable. Recognition becomes a gift given from the straight world to queers, which conceals queer labor and struggle (see Schulman 1998: 102), the life worlds generated by queer activism. It is as if such recognition is a form of straight hospitality, which in turn positions happy queers as guests in other people's homes, reliant on their continuing good will. In such a world you are asked to be grateful for the bits and pieces that you are given. To be a guest is to experience a moral obligation to be on your best behavior, such that to refuse to fulfil this obligation would threaten your right to coexistence.' Ibid., p. 106

[34] Saturday 10th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0069

economic support for such connections. The affirmative approach also tends to attribute too much agency to Lister, as do the representations of 'rake' or 'seducer', representing her as more in charge of her own happiness project within her romantic life than she ever really was.

So now I have outlined the theoretical context that will inform my analysis, let me introduce the relationship that I have chosen for this chapter. Lister met Tib while staying at the Duffin family in York in 1810 and their friendship lasted Lister's entire lifetime. Tib was the eldest child of Thomas Norcliffe Dalton and Anne Wilson Dalton, who changed their name to Norcliffe in 1807 when Thomas inherited Langton Hall. As such Tib was economically of higher standing than Lister, though their shared rank as landed gentry threw them into the same social milieu. Many describe Tib as being six years older than Lister, but as Lister says, exact as ever, "*Tib was five and a half years older than*" her.[35] So in April 1819 when my sample begins, Lister was 28 and Tib was 34. In 1819, their friendship had already lasted 9 years and they had endured much together. In particular, I would like to highlight the amount of grief they both lived through, as a way to showcase the extent of their intimacy that perhaps is not often evident in representations of Lister's relationships. In January 1810, just before Lister met Tib, her brother John died at 14 years old, and later that same year in April, Tib's brother William died at 15 years old. Lister sent a letter of support to Tib in May, writing,

> I know you well enough not [to] be mistaken in the hope that your strength of mind is sufficient to support you with becoming fortitude under every affliction, and, though you are younger than me myself in the experience of sorrow, that you are more than any equal in that unshaken firmness and calm resignation with which we ought all to bear the chastisements of providence.[36]

[35] Tuesday 28th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0105

[36] AL writes to Tib and offers her condolences in a letter dated 2 May 1810, SH:7/ML/22

It's interesting to note Lister's opinion that Tib is younger than her "in the experience of sorrow", suggesting the more complex way that maturity was conceptualised by Lister. We also get evidence of the way that their grief provided points of connection right from the beginning of their friendship. Then, in 1813, Lister lost her brother Samuel at age 20, and Tib lost her sister Emily in 1817 at age 18, and the death of these two siblings hit them both particularly hard. They also lost a parent each: Lister lost her mother in 1817 and Tib lost her father in 1820. Their relationships with these respective parents were both far from happy or content and they would speak about such family relationships in depth, feeling comfortable to share their honest opinions with each other, whether they were gladly received or not.[37] Even from this description of their relationship, it is difficult to cast Lister as a rakish figure, and as you shall see, much of their dynamic doesn't support this characterisation.

Between April 1819 - April 1822, Tib stayed with Lister at Shibden Hall twice for three months apiece, the first visit between 24th June - 27th September 1819, and the second between 21st January - 19th March 1822. I have selected these two visits to focus on because they neatly bookend my sample and provide evidence of how this relationship changed over time. The following analysis will structure itself upon the scaffolding of this chronological sequence. In terms of the focus of my analysis, the most striking element of their relationship is the way that sex functions. It is not always wanted and it can be bad or "tolerable", and yet they still continue - if less often - to engage in a sexual relationship over many, many years. In this relationship, Lister's sexual engagement and practice are very different from how she has been represented elsewhere. She is not a rake and she does not feel successful. I use this more uncertain lesbian relationship to explore sexual pleasure and the assumptions made about sex in theoretical writing.

[37] see this entry for an example of such conversations: Tuesday 17th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0082

One of the most important circumstantial elements in how Lister considers Tib is the status of her relationship with Mariana Lawton. In general, if Mariana is perceived by Lister as unavailable and not possible as a life-companion, then Lister turns towards other women in search of a replacement for the position that she sees Mariana as occupying. It is Lister's preference for Mariana over Tib that informs how critics have then interpreted this relationship. Tib is seen as secondary to Mariana, as lesser, and therefore, not given quite as much attention in either criticism or adaptation, such as this rather brief description made by Jessica Campbell: 'Isabella Norcliffe, an old friend whom Lister ultimately rejects as a de facto marriage prospect but with whom she is glad to have sex nonetheless.'[38] The choice Lister makes on-and-off (though mainly off) about Tib being an unsuitable prospect for a life-companion seems to prompt critics to dismiss Tib in such crude ways; arguably with their power of hindsight Tib's rejection seems like a sure and consistent circumstance and not mired in the doubt and uncertainty that Lister actually endured. Prior to Tib's visit in June 1819, Mariana and Lister had been separated by Mariana's marriage to Charles Lawton in 1816. They don't see each other after the honeymoon, which Lister accompanied Mariana on, and only exchange letters for these two and a half years. The letters are not affectionate enough and the combination of this lack of warmth and Mariana's married status, lead Lister to lose hope of their future union. Thus, in July 1818, Lister writes, "*in fact I have always loved her* [Tib] *in spite of all and now that circumstances have so far alienated me from π* [Mariana] *Isabellas* [sic] *fondness fortune and connections if her temper be grown rather more tractable will make me happy I almost begin to feel that we shall get together at last*".[39] This quotation perfectly summarises Lister's opinion of her relationship with Tib. The use of "*in spite of all*" after her rather hyperbolic declaration that she has *always* loved Tib shows the friction that pursues many of her attempts to write Tib into this romantic narrative. The list of reasons why Lister should be happy with Tib are quite methodically (list of three) and rationally given.

When Tib comes to stay at Shibden on 24th June 1819, Lister is available and open to the idea of Tib as a life-companion. She meets Tib with a certain expectation and a reasonable level of optimism. She writes on Tib's arrival, "Grown fat - never saw her looking

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[38] Jessica Campbell, 'Can we call Anne Lister a lesbian?', *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 354 - 366, p. 358

[39] Monday 27th July 1818, SH:7/ML/E/2/0049

so well", and they talk a lot and have good sex the first night: "*two very good kisses last night talking and kissing till after one*".[40] Interestingly, Lister then chooses to bring back an old symbol after the third night together, writing, "*kiss last night this mark @ stands for it I have used it to denote the same in my journal written at lawton in 1816*".[41] Her reference to using the symbol in 1816 cannot be cross-referenced, either because we are missing the Vol. 1 journal that may have included it, or because Lister has actually misremembered (which seems unlikely due to her careful indexing and use of references). The only sex in 1816 that is recorded in her journals is sex with Anne Belcombe (Mariana's sister) and Lister does not use the symbol then.[42] The last known use of the symbol (before her decision to bring it back) is on 28th December 1817 with Mariana.[43] Lister saw Tib in September 1818 and had sex but did not use the symbol for these sexual encounters either.[44] This evidence persuades me that Lister originally only used this particular symbol in reference to sex with Mariana specifically, and it seems like she may have brought it back into use as a way of further transferring her affection and hopes from Mariana onto Tib. She doesn't stop here, either, but adds to this symbol the next day, writing, '@ *with a dot after it means a good kiss ^last night^'.*[45] The fact she decided it was necessary to log and track when the sex was particularly good with Tib is intriguing and, as with many of Lister's writing decisions, is given without any real explanation. It may have been a decision made without much consideration, but it does tend to highlight both a need to track her sexual encounters in a quantifiable way and a way to emphasise and take notice of (also in a quantifiable way) those sexual encounters with Tib that were especially pleasurable. There is a need here to write into existence a version of reality that reads as positive and affirmative, it is worth remarking that she does not create a symbol that refers to bad sex, only the act in general, without judgement, or good sex.

During this three month stay, Lister records that she had sex with Tib 42 times in total, 25 of which were sex and 17 of which were good sex. The symbols almost act as a

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[40] Thursday 24th and Friday 25th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0065

[41] Sunday 27th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0066

[42] See index, SH:7/ML/E/26/3, transcription from Calderdale Archive.

[43] SH:7/ML/E/1/0067

[44] See for example, SH:7/ML/E/2/0070

[45] Monday 28th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0066

thermometer gauge for the state of their relationship: she and Tib are doing well overall and connecting particularly well during this stay. However, the symbols also act to screen or overwrite how Lister is really feeling about their relationship and the actual experience of these sexual encounters. The way Lister feels about Tib is not as neat as the symbols would suggest, it tends to oscillate during this visit, taking a downward turn near the end of Tib's stay. A choice example of how the symbols create a rather reductive representation of their relationship is given in this entry made on 17th September (NB. Lister has recorded having sex with Tib both the day before the following entry and the day afterwards):

> *Tib sat in my room all the morning writing and trying on a pair of stays she interrupted me desperately and I shall not be sorry to have my room once more to myself I can never do much good at study when she is with me and I am weary of this long stoppage I have had to all improvement she had a little head ache last night after getting in to bed and did not want a kiss she said it was so much trouble and she was always so exhausted she laughed and said she thought she was growing old she does not make me feel the loss much she often lies like a log and makes so little exertion in general during a kiss that I am a long while about it yet she likes me but does not suit me she is very impatient of contradiction self sufficient about her information and as violent as she is often incorrect in her view of things she says I am always contradicting her the fact is our opinions constantly vary and she is ver* [sic] *superficial I only hope to make up for lost time when she is gone besides she has no idea of keeping up her dignity professes to have no pride ^not that of family^ would associate with anyone she thought pleasing and by no means would relish the sort of elegant society I covet to acquire she is the image of her father in every thing and I think does and will often let herself down this besides all other things does not suit me*[46]

Simply put, this entry is a rant. It is a long and detailed outpouring of various observations and negative judgements, some of which have made it into previous entries, especially the comments made about Tib's violent temper. But the one comment that has not been mentioned before during this visit is the one she makes about sex. This is the first time Lister has said that Tib "*lies like a log*" or indicated any dissatisfaction about the sexual encounters they have had during this visit of such seemingly good sex. It is such an unexpected and contrary piece of information that it's tempting to view it as an over-exaggeration made in

[46] Friday 17th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0094

anger and impatience. This may be the case; however, her use of "*often*" to give us an idea of frequency and the additional detail she provides about how Tib barely makes any effort compared to the amount of effort Lister puts in, rather lead me to understand that this is an attitude that Lister has held for some time. So, we have a tension between two different representations of their sexual encounters.

This co-existence of Lister's tracking of sex and good sex, as affirmative narratives, and her confession, for want of a better word, of the actual negative experiences that such sexual encounters can include suggest a disconnect between the representation of, or desire for, sex and the actual experience itself. Leo Bersani writes in his famous 1987 essay, 'Is the Rectum A Grave?',

> There is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it. I don't have any statistics to back this up, and I doubt (although since Kinsey there has been no shortage of polls on sexual behavior) that any poll has ever been taken in which those polled were simply asked, "Do you like sex?" Nor am I suggesting the need for any such poll, since people would probably answer the question as if they were being asked, "Do you often feel the need to have sex?" and one of my aims will be to suggest why these are two wholly different questions.[47]

There is a difference between wanting or anticipating sex, or feeling the need, as he phrases it, and the actual sex act. I don't wish to imply that Lister does not like sex at all, because, actually, this is not the case with her, she exhibits again and again in her journals her enjoyment of sex; what I do wish to imply is that if we understand that the desire for sex and the sexual encounter are two different things, then Lister provides an example of how these two entities can become confused and muddled, allowing her to construct, via her writing, a positive sexual narrative.

This theoretical formulation and Lister's use of tracking leads me to notice an underlying assumption made about sex: when Lister records that sex has taken place, the assumption made is that this is a good thing and that this was a pleasurable, positive experience. Put simply, the assumption is that sex is pleasurable and that sexual pleasure is good (possibly part of the good life, then and now). This assumption has been noticed by other critics on sexuality, C. E. writes a particularly virulent essay on the topic titled,

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[47] Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 3 - 30, p. 3

'Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism,' where she writes:

> If it was once radical and marginal to assert an essential, or simply available, goodness to sex, it is now central, institutional. Far from the domain of some radical set, it is at once an ideology of patriarchy and of the majority of its opponents, a disparate, heterogeneous collection of discourses united in common aim. It is the optimism that insistently, cruelly returns us to the work of fucking.[48]

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that, as with many generalised viewpoints, sexual optimism has not come out of thin air into the mind of some patriarchal git somewhere, but has been generated by a combination, via communication, of many different humans and their feelings about sex and their experiences to create a general, shared view: because sex *can* be pleasurable, we desire to have sex in the hope that it will produce pleasure. I am not arguing that sexual pleasure does not exist, but rather that the way we conceptualise sex has, as C. E. suggests, tipped into a political or institutional imperative that can affect the way we then respond to texts such as Lister's journals, and how we theorise the sex or sexual narratives within these texts.

To add a little more depth to this critical observation, I would like to include Maggie Nelson's response to C. E. in her chapter, 'The Ballad of Sexual Optimism,' in which she writes:

> If sexual optimism means the totalising conviction that sex, desire, or pleasure is essentially good, essentially healing, essentially empowering, essentially political, essentially any one thing at all, I, too, reject it. There are major drawbacks to making an attachment to sex central to any politics, in part because of sex's arguably amoral nature, in part because anything posed as an imperative inevitably invites its rejection, and in part because sex varies in its meaning and importance to people, with that importance fluctuating over the course of a life.[49]

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[48] C. E., 'Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism,' (2012) <https://www.liesjournal.net/volume1-02-undoingsex.html>, [accessed 07/03/2023] (para. 2)

[49] Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021), p. 76

Nelson's emphasis on variance is crucial to my understanding of Lister's sexual record keeping. Perhaps the meaning of sex with Tib varied over time for Lister, so that while she would record the good sex taking place, she could also write without being hypocritical that the sex had "often" been bad. She could keep an affirmative sexual record of the sex taking place, signalling its importance to her in this decision to track it, and then later, or at different times, record a sense of dissatisfaction with her sex with Tib. In other words, Lister exhibits a 'benign' variance (a nod towards Gayle Rubin's conception of "benign sexual variation") in the importance she assigns to sex and the meaning she gives it in her relationship with Tib over time.[50]

When Tib leaves Lister in September 1819, Lister is very sad. The night before Tib's departure she writes, "*I felt very low shed a ^silent^ tear or two and did not get to sleep till one",* and once Tib has left the next day, she comes back to her room and writes, "*everything looks forlorn and deserted".*[51] Lister is both fed up with Tib being there and sad to see her go, as is the complex nature of this relationship. However, in the interim period between Tib's visit of 1819 and her visit of 1822, much changes, namely Lister and Mariana's relationship is re-established. In July 1821, Lister and Mariana make "*an irrevocable promise*", a promise that means Lister does not see herself as having liberty to pursue other women anymore, a promise that means that she views Mariana as her wife. She is very passionate about their relationship, writing in August 1821, "*I do feel wedded to her now and my mind is settled and satisfied the thought quickens my pulse and I feel at this moment that she is and ever has been and ever will be the only real object of my love".*[52] They also

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[50] 'It is difficult to develop a pluralistic sexual ethics without a concept of benign sexual variation. Variation is a fundamental property of all life, from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human social formations. Yet sexuality is supposed to conform to a single standard. One of the most tenacious ideas about sex is that there is one best way to do it, and that everyone should do it that way.' Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,' Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 137 - 181, p. 154

[51] Sunday 26th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0097, and, Monday 27th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0098

[52] Thursday 2nd August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0048

exchange an STI, which Lister becomes very preoccupied with, writing about the status of her condition and the medication she has administered in every entry.

To cap things off, before Tib's arrival at Shibden in January 1822, Mariana had visited Shibden for two weeks only 9 days before. The way Lister writes of Mariana's departure is somewhat similar to how she had written about Tib's departure: "*π and I had parted tolerably but the sight of my room was melancholy I sighed and said to myself she is gone and it is as tho' she had never been I was getting very low and therefore sat down to write out my journal*".[53] The reference to a certain form of emptiness when looking at her bedroom is repeated in both expressions of desertion. The faint repetition of expression may signal that the absence of these women is less about them as individuals and more about the loneliness that their absence produces – the silence, the physical absence of their things and their bodies from her bedroom – which may suggest that though Lister expresses a preference for Mariana, the preference is not always a factor in her reaction to either woman, that her emotions (and the low mood that turns her towards her journal) don't always heed this idea of preference.

However, the strong connection that she has with Mariana during this visit does mean that when Tib arrives, Lister is in a very different frame of mind compared to when Tib last visited. Lister writes on the day of Tib's arrival, "*melancholy enough at the thought of going to bed with Tib I cannot even affect any warmth towards her*".[54] The odd part here is the idea of obligation or duty implied by Lister. There is an expectation that she must go to bed with Tib if Tib is visiting, which implies that sex is doing more than simply fulfilling a desire to experience pleasure in this relationship, but is part of a social contract or a social dynamic that functions somewhere to the side of this sexual optimism. She then writes the next day, "*had a poorish sort of a kiss of Tib last night but was a long while about it she was tired and overcome with a bad cold and lay like a log in fact she did not seem to have much ^tender^ inclination*".[55] The log comparison is used right from the beginning during this visit, but most interesting is the information that Tib is full of cold and not into the idea of having sex either: so neither of them desire sex, yet they're both having it anyway. There is something entirely underwhelming in this report of sex that wonderfully challenges so much

[53] Monday 7th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0092

[54] Monday 21st January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0096

[55] Tuesday 22nd January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0096

criticism that exists around the concept of Lister's romantic life, and of sex, or sexuality more broadly.

In many cases in criticism, sex is spoken of with a certain level of drama and intensity, especially in many texts that deal with the psychoanalytical in some respect. Culture and criticism pay such acute attention to when sex delivers an overwhelming experience – overwhelmingly bad or overwhelmingly good, or simply overwhelming and excessive in its discordant relation to articulation – that it is easy to forget that sex can be as banal as spreading butter on your toast. Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant write about negativity in sex in their dialogical book, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, and they discuss this idea of drama or dramatising sex, I'd like to trace out this dialogue:

> LB: I tend to dedramatise the experience of being a sexual subject in the ordinary, while Lee sees the subject's reeling experience of his subjective negativity as a drama that becomes dramatised.[56]
>
> LE: Lauren would see the word "traumatic" as an instance of my making grandiose what she invites us to dedramatise, while I would worry that dedramatisation is the emptying out, the attempt to neutralise the force of that encounter itself.[57]
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> LB: I think [...] that what motivates me to insist on a project of dedramatizing the very intense aim of remaining in attachment is not to deny the drama but to address it tenderly, nudging it to a new place the way a border collie would, not reproducing the intensity of the grand foundation for the world it has become, because only under those conditions of seeing dramas in their ordinariness will the virtue squad not be able to use dramas of threatened sexual security to reproduce the normative good life. To dedramatize the sexual encounter, to think of "benign variation" as sometimes really benign and not a disavowal of story's inevitable negativity, is to dedramatize disavowal and call it what it is, our partial understanding of what we're doing when we take up a position in proximity to the drives that bring us, once again, to becoming undone by wanting something, for example, by wanting sex.[58]

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[56] Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 6

[57] ibid., p. 9

[58] ibid., p. 14

I'd like to draw attention to how they debate the decision to dramatise, or not, the encounter of sex, the way there is an affective investment made by both of them in their individual positions. Edelman's point of view is that sex is generally a dramatic confrontation with the limits of relationality and he is concerned that to say otherwise, to disallow recognition of the traumatic in the subject's experience of sexual encounter, is, from what I can deduce, to take away its power and to enforce social limits upon what can be expected or allowed during a sexual encounter. Berlant's point of view is that any act of dramatising sex, using such trigger words as 'trauma' or 'shock', can provide ammunition for what she calls 'the virtue squad' in applying the very social norms that Edelman is afraid will be produced if we don't recognise the drama within sex. There is a difference of opinion but only to a degree, as Berlant says, she does not deny the drama but sees it within the scene of the ordinary.

Berlant links this drama towards this idea of becoming undone by sex, which they visit many times within their dialogue. It is this agreement that sex is a site of subjective splintering and multiplicity and nonsovereignty that is, in my opinion, dramatic, and is an association that supports the sexual optimism-negativity dynamism that they are theorising. I wonder if a dialogue on sexual banality would have been more fruitful in producing different conceptualisations of the sexual encounter and our work to understand relationality. Perhaps, the most interesting thing about sex is how it *can* be so much a part of the everyday, the daily, the habituated activities of what constitutes a life, the unquestioned utter lack of drama – I am, of course, pointing towards Georges Perec's formulation of the endotic, in opposition to the exotic.[59]

Though, perhaps, I am erring off course and not paying enough attention to the text: arguably, Lister's melancholy *is* dramatic, which would imply that the sex she feels obliged to have is also dramatic. However, the emotion she has at the thought of sex is different, as I have argued above, from the actual event of the sexual encounter, and I would say that the melancholy that she has before sex is not evident in the way she describes the sexual encounter after the fact. Instead, the sexual experience is described mundanely, using the conversational phrasing of "*poorish sort of a kiss",* an informal, imprecise, roundabout way of assessing an activity, with no heaviness of tone or mood given with Lister's typical

[59] Georges Perec, 'Approaches to What?' [1973], *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* trans. By John Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 2008)

emotional vocabulary such as "melancholy", "low", or "sad". Then the additional detail that Tib was "*tired and overcome with a bad cold"* is pragmatic and simply observant. Lister's insult that Tib "*lay like a log"* is the most dramatic element of the description, holding as it does a teaspoon of contained derision; but the way it is housed within the context of this other phrasing renders it merely a derisive quip. This quip does not splinter Lister's subjectivity, or have 'something to do with experiencing corporeally, and in the orbit of the libidinal, the shock of discontinuity and the encounter with nonknowledge.'[60] This is a complaint about Tib not moving enough during sex and making Lister do all the *work.* The drama of some internal exceeding of limits is not happening, rather she is trying to spread butter on toast and the butter is too cold and hard. It's irritating and worth comment but it is not pushing Lister up against some shock of her own discontinuity.

So, there is a sense of mundanity to the task of having sex with Tib in Lister's writing *and* there is also a sense of *labour.* Lister puts in a lot of effort and time in the task to give Tib pleasure and also to give herself pleasure: to achieve the optimistic aim of sexual pleasure. This can be expressed directly, such as,

> *the alum made me dry last night and tib is always so but I had a tolerable kiss after some labour for it*[61]

and,

> *a pretty tolerable kiss last night but more trouble than it was worth tib is like a great unwieldy log a little degree of mucus ^after making water^ this morning when I got up perhaps occasioned by my labours last night*[62]

Again with the log insult but with an additional grumbling flourish of "*great unwieldy*", which, combined with this acknowledgement of "*labour*" tends to bring the description of

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[60] Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable,* p. 4

[61] Saturday 26th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0096

[62] Tuesday 5th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0107; also, for more log comments: '*feeling much inclined for a kiss went to tib just before getting and had as it were a bit of one but she is nearly like a great ^dry^ log of wood and this added to my not caring for her makes it impossible to have much pleasure with her --'* Friday 15th February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0103

sex into the associative space of a lumberman. Tib is cast as a particularly large and heavy log to manoeuvre in the lumber yard. Lister is the arduously productive lumberman. The other word that gets used within this realm of labour and work is "*trouble*". Here she complains that the sex was "*more trouble than it was worth*", again, associating sex with production value. The word "trouble" can mean, '[d]isturbance of mind or feelings; worry, vexation; affliction; grief; perplexity; distress', which would support Berlant and Edelman's slant of drama and discombobulation. However, considering the context of labour, time and effort in which Lister uses the word, it is much more likely that she intends the word to mean, and emphasise, the following: 'Pains or exertion, esp. in accomplishing or attempting something; care, toil, labour.'[63]

This pain or care in trying to achieve some form of sexual pleasure is frustrating for Lister, in so much as she is putting in the time and effort to achieve something and it is not answering and she doesn't think Tib is matching her amount of effort. It is unfair and it is testing Lister's patience, as we see in these two quotations:

> *Tib was in bed long before me but I roused her up by handling and whipping her in joke then tried for a kiss for a good while but at last gave up in despair she is good for nothing at it and not much in fact I am quite careless about her in these respects and shall not give myself much trouble*[64]

> *^a kiss last night I really did it from duty the pleasure was very little and the trouble great* -- ^[65]

There is hope and excitement shown in the first quotation, when Lister writes that she handled and whipped Tib "*in joke*" but it soon descends, after trying for a long time, in "*despair*". This despair is not about the unbearable experience of her subjective discontinuity that she's forced to confront in the intimate scene of sexual encounter, but

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[63] "trouble, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4137973457> [Accessed 12 April 2023]

[64] Saturday 2nd February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0098; another quotation that alludes to this physical aspect of AL's record of sex with Tib: '*pretty good kiss last night tib wanted one otherwise I did not I had her shift off she was rather less loggish than usual and rather more moist and we managed tolerably with less fatigue a little more pleasure to me* --' Wednesday 6th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0107

[65] Friday 1st March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0106

rather about the limits of her strength and endurance as a body actively struggling to make Tib orgasm. It is a physical and laborious despair, a despair in not being able to accomplish what she set out to physically accomplish. She is therefore fed up and expresses that she feels "*quite careless*" about sex with Tib and that she won't bother much in future.

The second quotation throws up again the facet of their relationship that revolves around a sense of obligation and duty. Lister is directly stating that she had sex with Tib "*from duty*". She does confess to some small pleasure but this is achieved through great trouble, implying that this was also not worth it. So, we return again to obligation and duty within their relationship. This narrative is rarely thrown up in representations of Lister as a sexual subject. The idea that she sometimes has sex with Tib out of duty rather than out of her own desire somewhat undermines the argument that she has such dominant sexual agency. The sexual encounters vary in the level of agency that Lister could be said to exhibit; there are times when she instigates it, as seen by her rousing Tib for sex, and there are times when she does it largely from a sense of duty.

Duty is significant between Lister and Tib. It is a concept only given sporadic attention in how Lister is perceived or represented in her sexual relationships. Indeed, a rake is hardly bound by duty; he is celebrated for his rebellious nature and breaking of social rules in order to gratify his sexual appetite. The successful lesbian version of Lister tends to display duty in so far as it is something Lister demands of others towards her, as well as representing more formal, heteronormative lines of obligation: she asks for Ann Walker's hand in marriage and Walker accepts this duty as Lister's wife. The duty between her and Tib is more nebulous and generalised and a little more difficult to pin down.

The duty that Lister shows towards Tib is one in which she feels obliged to keep Tib happy, a duty of care in many respects, though not without a sense of self-service. Ahmed speaks much of the way happiness and duty seem to interact, she writes:

Happiness is not just how subjects speak of their own desires but also what

> they want to give and receive from others. Happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration (I am happy for you, I want you to be happy, I am happy if you are happy) and also forms of coercion that are exercised and concealed by the very language of reciprocity, such that one person's happiness is made conditional not only on another person's happiness but on that person's willingness to be made happy by the same things. [...] [W]e can note the swiftness of conversion between desire and duty; the very desire for the happiness of others can be the point at which others are bound to be happy for us.[66]

The happiness that Tib feels in imagining a future with Lister is a happiness that, if we apply Ahmed's idea of reciprocity, obligates Lister into finding happiness in the same idea. Lister can only keep Tib happy by sharing in this project of happiness, by seeming to be made happy by the same idea. Lister's duty towards Tib is shown by her ways of trying to maintain the illusion that they do indeed share this aspiration. This means Lister feels the need to lie in order to keep Tib happy.

We get three distinctive entries during Tib's first visit in which Lister writes about the weight of this duty:

> I think IN much less tired than she has been before - She gets to bear walking better and better - *poor soul she little thinks how things are she feels secure I scarce can bear it I wish she knew all and all was settled* --[67]

> *I cannot bear Isabellas* [sic] *violence can neither respect nor at all admire such a temper and am more and more convinced it would never suit me to live with her it must not be at all events yet I cannot tell her so now*[68]

> *what ever π may do certainly Tib does not suit me tho I am obliged to say she does I wonder what will be the end of it I always wish I was settled in this*

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[66] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 91-2

[67] Monday 5th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0068

[68] Monday 16th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0081

matter and would gladly form some new and more propitious connection than any I have made yet -[69]

Lister's realisation that she cannot live with Tib because they do not suit each other is given in this relatively positive first visit of Tib to Shibden Hall. As I've explained above, Lister's mindset in entering this visit was with a hope to reconsider Tib as a possible life companion. She includes positive observations of Tib, such as the remark about Tib's energy and walking, in order to accrue evidence that Tib is in fact suitable. However, even within the same line, she cannot retain the shared project, the wish to be happy with Tib, and quite unexpectedly seems to confess, for the first time during this visit, that she is unable to really support this idea. Lister "*scarce can bear*" the burden of lying to Tib in order to upkeep Tib's sense of security and happiness. The fact she wishes to tell Tib, expressed twice, shows that Lister's happiness would be in Tib knowing that she is not made happy by the same thing and this being "*settled*". Yet, she feels she *cannot tell* Tib the truth, that she is *obliged* to say that Tib does suit her. Lister's desire to make a new connection is what would make her happy but this must remain hidden to keep Tib happy.

Lister's resolution to upkeep the illusion of shared happiness is greatly weakened once her and Mariana reconcile. There is a sense that now she has another more concrete plan for the future, another happiness project that she wants to invest in, the unhappiness that she will cause, for both Tib and herself, once she tells Tib they do not share in the same happiness project, will be more bearable and worth the temporary discomfort. Not only that, but she has the support of Mariana, who is very aware of the predicament that Lister has got herself into by continuing to go along with Tib's idea, for instance, Lister writes in March 1820 that "*π advised me last night to tell Tib every now and then she did not suit me and not to let her dwell so on the idea of our living together".*[70] Lister believes that the unhappiness that will be generated at her telling Tib the truth will be quite violent and could cause issues, which may also explain Mariana's quite gentle advice of just telling Tib "*every now and then*" rather than telling her outright that she doesn't want to live with her. Lister is quite scared of what Tib might be like when the truth is known, reporting a conversation with Miss Vallance in November 1820 in which she says, "*one might as well attempt to*

[69] Saturday 4th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0089

[70] Saturday 18th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0039

reason with the winds as with Tib" and that Lister "*let things take their course* [...] *for peace's sake".* She also gives the following advice to Miss Vallance who also has a sexual relationship with Tib,

> *she* [Miss Vallance] *made it appear that for the sake of appearances Tib must sleep with her in London and at Sittingbourne I agreed advised her to manage as well as she could but rather than come to a rumpus as Tib had no medium about her and no prudence and on this account was not safe to do the thing again (that is grubble Tib) and gradually cut the connection or get off it or marry or do as she could in future*[71]

So, there's a worry that Tib is uncontrollable, like the wind (quite a different image than the unwieldy log), and that her temper can cause "*a rumpus*". The concern though is not simply about having that temper directed at you, but about the fact Tib can't control this temper around others and is therefore, in this highly mannered and easily scandalised society, "*not safe".* So, the duty that Lister feels is not simply to keep Tib happy and avoid unhappiness but is also a concern about safety, or rather happiness in a wider social context: the appearance of happiness must be maintained so that those around Tib and Lister are also kept happy and not privy to unhappiness. It is also quite telling that Lister advises Miss Vallance to grubble Tib in order to keep the peace, a course of action that she also takes herself, as we've seen above, having sex with Tib "*from duty".*

When Tib visits Shibden the second time in January 1822, Lister is so secure in her connection and happiness with Mariana that she is much more ready to let the truth come out, as she implies in this entry:

> *Tib is affectionate seems happy here and is quieter than she used to be she appears to have no suspicion of my living and loving seriously any other than herself poor soul I know how she will take it when the truth comes out* --[72]

[71] Wednesday 22nd November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0103-4

[72] Monday 28th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0097

Rather than Lister wondering what will come of things, as she did back in 1819, she now *knows* how Tib will take it *when* she is told. There is much more certainty that her continued duty to upkeep Tib's happiness in this particular project will end. Lister notes that Tib is "*happy*" and connects this with her having "*no suspicion*" of Lister's real desire. There is care shown here and a feeling of pity, as she calls Tib "*poor soul*" again. Lister doesn't want to hurt Tib and cause her unhappiness. There is nothing calculating or conniving about her behaviour in this regard. There is certainly a level of self-service in keeping Tib happy, as she also gets to live in "peace" and continue to be liked, as well as the opportunity of sex when she does desire it (which is not very often during this visit). However, I would say that largely the lie is kept in order to avoid causing Tib unhappiness.

Right near the end of Tib's visit, they have a huge argument about Mariana and the truth finally comes out:

> [Tib] *could not bear to think she did not suit me loved me better than anything in the world it would be my fault if we did not live together I quietly told her we never should and persisit* [persisted] *that she did not suit and that it was best to be candid at once she cried a little and said she was very unhappy I bade her cheer up and said there was no reason why we should not always be very good friends she could not bear me to talk so however I gave her a kiss or two and we got the time over till near twelve*[73]

Tib gives Lister authority in determining their future and Lister takes this opportunity to finally "*quietly*" tell her the truth. Tib does not rage or cause a "*rumpus*" here, but she cries and tells Lister that she is "*very unhappy*". It is this unhappiness that Lister has been trying to avoid, even at the cost of her own happiness, as we've seen above when she wishes things were "*settled*" and her own happiness project recognised by Tib. But, as expected, she has caused unhappiness and must try her best to make Tib happy immediately, she does this by ordering Tib to "*cheer up*" and then by offering close friendship as an alternative. The duty, in this sense, still exists, though it shifts its direction. Lister shows by her demand for Tib's happiness that her happiness is reliant on Tib's, but now the happiness project is Lister's one of "*very good friends*" and it is Tib that must find happiness in this shared project. They are both still bound by a reciprocal dynamic of happiness.

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[73] Monday 18th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0110

Lister and Tib have sex and sometimes they do not. Lister wants sex with Tib and sometimes she does not. Lister enjoys the sexual encounters she shares with Tib and sometimes she does not. Lister has sex with Tib "*from duty*" and sometimes she does not. Lister wants Tib around and sometimes she does not. Lister does all she can to keep Tib happy until she does not. These are the simple inconsistencies and varieties that exist within this relationship that I feel trouble the representations of Lister as a rake and straight-forward successful lesbian. They point towards the times when Lister is not either of these things and they point towards her limited agency when it comes to relationships. There is just one last area that I want to sketch out in order to really flesh out this relationship: the ordinary.

Coming back around to the brief mention I threw towards Georges Perec and his notion of the endotic earlier when I was speaking of banal sex, I wish now to broaden the scope of this application. Georges Perec wrote a very short piece back in 1973 called 'Approaches to What?', in which he highlights how we think and question and focus our attention so acutely on 'the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary' and don't question 'what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual'.[74] Lister's journal provides a wonderful record of the ordinary, 'the background noise' that makes up a life, that happens, as it were, behind or near the woman writing, and this is also the case, in some small part, in the record of her relationships.

Kristeva writes in her book, *Tales of Love,* that

> Love is the time and space in which "I" assumes the right to be extraordinary. Sovereign yet not individual. Divisible, lost, annihilated; but also, and

[74] Georges Perec, 'Approaches to What?' [1973], *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* trans. By John Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), pp. 209-10

> through imaginary fusion with the loved one, equal to the infinite space of superhuman psychism. Paranoid? I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity.[75]

Though there are times when this sort of understanding of love or relationality may be appropriate or fitting, when it may be generative of useful information, here, I wish to use it as an example of how love can be theorised and written about, how the narratives we enjoy telling about love can be so grand and unattached to the reality of the everyday sedimentation of relationality, and how Lister's writing can give us an opportunity to speak of love differently, with a view to the ordinary.

Tib enters Lister's journal in many ways, not just when Lister logs their sexual contact, indeed, with Lister's decision to use symbols, not much description needs to be given about these particular events. The journals provide quite a full account of all the various ways in which Lister and Tib spend time together on a daily basis. To add to the effect of sedimentation, in all its appeal of gathering and texture, I'm going to present these 'various ways' as a list:

> **They talk a lot, nearly every entry includes the note that they "talked", sometimes including the content of those discussions:** "went up into the library with IN. and sat talking there till 12"[76] /and/ "Sat up talking about dispositions - firmness, sternness, etc."[77]

> **They travel from place to place together, and sometimes separately, and they visit people together: "**At $12\frac{25}{60}$ IN. set off on horseback behind William and I to walk by the side to call on Miss Hamer, at present and since last Sat. week, on a visit to Mrs Wilcock at Bull-close, now called Savile hill - She was not at home - left our card, and Isabel walked with me to the Saltmarshes' - Emma not at home - went to rest - the cloth laid - stayed 10 minutes - then went to Miss Kitson's, and thence to the library where IN. stayed a few minutes and then rode home"[78]

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[75] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* [1983], trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 5

[76] Saturday 26th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0065

[77] Saturday 17th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0070

[78] Tuesday 3rd August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0077

They go to church together or not: "All went to morning church - IN rode - Meant to have walked into church with her, but missed her in getting off horseback and had a fruitless and trying journey to N. gate and back"[79]

They read: "In the evening while Mrs V-, my aunt, father, and Marian played quadrille IN read Clarke's Scandinavia, and I from p. 91 to 109 Geograph. Introduction to vol. 1 Humboldt's Political Essay on new Spain"[80]

Lister logs when Tib has her period: "*Tib began this morning a day too soon"*[81]

Lister logs when Tib is affected by the rain: "IN set off to Halifax this morning between 1 and 2 - went to the library - [...] She did not get home till almost half past 4, and as it rained, got her pelisse a little wet"[82]

They write letters together, writing the ends or crossing each other's letters to family and mutual friends: "Isabel wrote to Miss Vallance (Sittingbourne Kent) - I filled the ends, and under the seal - Very small close writing - I.N. thought it so cold and formal she hastily said, if she had been Miss V- and I had written so to her, she should never answer it, nor ever write to me again - She says my style is spoilt –"[83]

Lister borrows Tib's clothing: "I drove all the way except over the bank, and a little bit or two afterwards where I was obliged to hold my hat on, tho' IN had lent me her beaver" … "Had a great deal to do this morning to get IN's hat to look decent after its soaking yesterday afternoon"[84]

Lister buys her first gig and let's Tib drive it: "*Tib drove from Halifax to Lightcliffe this morning I really think I am a good tho' not quite so stylish a driver as she she ran us*

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[79] Sunday 4th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0068

[80] Thursday 12th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0080

[81] Wednesday 28th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0075

[82] Saturday 16th February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0103

[83] Wednesday 21st July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0072

[84] Monday 2nd and Tuesday 3rd February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0099

^with the top^ against the woolsacks on a cart at the bottom of the Cunnery lane and if all the horses had not been steady it might have been awkward in spite of her not allowing herself to be ever frightened at anything she was ^rather^ nervous after it"[85]

Tib interrupts Lister: "Isabel talked to me till 12 - Afterwards came to pack her things for Leeds which interrupted me"[86] /and/ "IN. sat with me (sewing) till near 2 which rather interrupted me"[87]

Tib spends a lot of time asleep or on the bed: "IN. sat in my room mending her stockings most of the morning - *on the bed as usual asleep all the afternoon –"*[88] / and/ "In the course of the afternoon, while Isabel was asleep on the bed, wrote $2\frac{1}{2}$ pages to M-"[89] /and/ "IN lay in bed till a little after 12 - I sat by her finishing the obs. to accompany the plan"[90] /and/ "Did nothing before breakfast. Dawdling and sitting by IN's bedside to get her up – "[91]

A review of the everyday shared habits, the presence of Tib in Lister's space and consequently her journal writing, also highlight how different their relationship is during the second visit compared to the first. In the second visit, they are much less regularly together and Tib spends a lot of time going to the library newsroom on her own, for example, "From 2 to 4, between the gleams, IN walked to the library newsroom to read the papers as usual, and was sometime also at the library".[92] There is also less recorded talk between them and talks recorded between Lister and her aunt and uncle about Tib's growing drinking problem: "IN not down of more than an hour - *talking of her my uncle and aunt say she averages*

[85] Tuesday 22nd January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0096

[86] Saturday 10th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0069

[87] Tuesday 27th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0074

[88] Friday 23rd July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0072

[89] Thursday 29th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0075

[90] Sunday 27th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0097

[91] Sunday 10th February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0102

[92] Thursday 7th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0107

about a bottle of wine a day".[93] So we have more distance, quite physically, between them, and less communication during this second stay. However, the everyday piles up nonetheless and their relationship is mature and deep enough to allow for this change. Indeed, the ordinary is where most of their relationship takes place, it is the background, the scene, the space, without which they would be but shadows (as Lister might term it) – it gives them substance.

Arguably it is the shared ordinary that keeps them bound, more than sex, more than happiness, more than duty, more than an abstract concept of love or desire. It keeps them together when they are most at odds, as we see most clearly in this report after they've fought, the night before Lister makes Tib unhappy:

> At one *Isabel crossly called me to bed for I kept her awake and bade me fasten the window which made a great noise on account of the wind -- when I got into bed I said not a word nor did she I got as far from her as I could and went to sleep -*[94]

They have fallen out, they are physically apart, as Lister writes her journal at her desk while Tib lies in the bed behind, and yet Tib still calls Lister for the ordinary reason of being kept awake by her activity and then also asks of her the ordinary demand of shutting the window against the wind and then we have the ordinary account of having to share a bed whilst angry, the silence, the getting as far from her as she can, and the sleep. Sleeping in the same bed. The next day, Lister breaks the news of their unshared happiness project and changes the relationship, but, arguably, it is these small, ordinary acts that keep them bound together, as later that day, after Tib has visited her brother, Lister writes, "Came upstairs at 11 - helping IN to pack for near an hour".[95] The humdrum mundane shared activities continue, so even if Lister is happy when Tib finally leaves her in peace, writing,

> *Tib and I parted without any nervousness this morning she said she would come again next year I hope not I am much happier not to have her and am*

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[93] Sunday 17th February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0103

[94] Sunday 17th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0110

[95] Monday 18th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0110

> *glad enough that she is gone and that I have got my room comfortably to myself she does not suit me at all*[96]

it doesn't mean that she never sees her again – no – that November she goes to visit Tib at Langton, where they have "*better kiss last night than Tib has given me for long*" and where they share an ordinary day:

> at 2 1/2 off with IN to Malton in the gig — put into the post office my letter to my aunt (Shibden) — ordered a pair strong leather boots at Rutter's — got back at 3 3/4 — Did nothing in the evening — Very Fine day —[97]

[96] Tuesday 19th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0110

[97] Monday 25th November 1822, Calderdale Archive transcript, Volume 6.

Periods

> Was very warm yesterday and had a little nap - ditto today, and, latterly, quite in perspiration, tho', in spite of this, my knees still feel cold
>
> – Lister, Tuesday 21st August[1]

Lister's body comes into the text frequently and in various forms, reflective of the ways in which a body tends to infiltrate and suffuse a life, all human life being embodied in some shape or form, though writing can often elude this fact.

Most obviously, her body enters the text when it is misbehaving, or rather, not behaving as usual or as expected, such as the unexpected and peculiar case of her cold knees above, or when it is malfunctioning, usually in uncomfortable ways, such as when she is sick with bowel trouble, bad colds, or headaches: "Got up with symptoms of a sick headache which kept me from church".[2]

Less obviously, her body, and the bodies of others, enter the text in less direct or significant-seeming(-to-her) ways, such as when she is on the coach to Dover with her Aunt Anne and during a change of horses "stood on the step with my head in at the window talking to my aunt and Miss Curlewis",[3] or when she is waiting to be admitted to the Cabinet of Natural History in Paris and reports that it was "very hot from the crowd - nobody attempted to touch anything".[4]

The body enters, also, as you can see, when it is too hot, "Fine day - found it very hot sitting in my room writing all the day",[5] and when it is too cold, "It began to rain a little just as I came in - very violent hail-shower between 1 and 2 - very cold all the day - and no sun - I have felt quite starved and feel the chilblains in my toes".[6]

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[1] 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0055

[2] Sunday 18th June 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0064

[3] Wednesday 12th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0021

[4] Tuesday 18th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0027

[5] Monday 5th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0068

[6] Saturday 26th May 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0030

Also, there is the pervasive embodiment of her writing, the body that is marking the page and writing of its writing: "Came upstairs immediately - washed and made myself comfortable wrote the latter $\frac{1}{2}$ this journal of today".[7]

Then, there is the more obvious but less frequent occurrence of her body entering the text due to emotion, such as when she receives an "impertinent" letter and writes, "*I felt a chill agitation of vexation at the moment but talking about the letter to Marian put an end to the subject down stairs and I care not much about it now tho' my face is a little flushed and my head a little sanguine".*[8] The body tells the tale of her emotions, not only to the distant reader (us) but to herself.

There is *also* the ever-present and daily activity of her body walking, which she does pretty much every day, sometimes short walks, "then sauntered a little in the garden",[9] sometimes longer walks, "got there at $5\frac{40}{60}$ having walked from Haugh-shay in an hour and 12 minutes."[10]

Also, to counter the activity of this body in motion, there is the body when it is still, that is, when she is sleeping, or when she struggles to sleep: "Did not get to sleep last night till near 2 - disturbed with thought of one thing or other -"[11], and when she struggles not to, "I having foolishly dined with Mrs R- and Ellen, felt as usual the punishment of eating at this hour, and fell asleep during Mr Hudson's sermon from some text in the acts, and which, with his desperately slow preaching took him 27 minutes."[12]

And, also, following on from the previous quotation, there is the body and its consumption and digestion, usually for Lister her eating is only included in minimal detail, such as the bare report, "Dinner at 4".[13] However, when she eats out at an Inn, she tends to record what was purchased, "Ordered dinner (boiled haddock, veal cutlets, tarts, jelly, and preserved winesours ^and a pint of port wine^) at 8".[14] Aside from these rarer entries, her consumption largely enters the text when it causes her some discomfort, such as sickness, "Felt a sick head ^ache^ coming on (perhaps from eating a little at dinner and taking two

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[7] Wednesday 27th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0038

[8] Thursday 15th June 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0063

[9] Saturday 29th April 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0049

[10] Tuesday 27th April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0010

[11] Thursday 4th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0107

[12] Sunday 8th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0079

[13] Wednesday 23rd January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0096

[14] Saturday 2nd February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0099

very small oranges without sugar)",[15] or when she is controlling her diet because she has been ill, "A little minced beef for dinner at 6, the 1st time I have tasted meat since last Thurs week".[16]

There is also the ongoing chore of dealing with her hair: "Came upstairs at $10\frac{1}{2}$ - *dawdled in cutting curl papers and putting my hair in curl for this evening",*[17] and, "Came upstairs at $11\frac{1}{4}$ *quarter hour curling my hair gets so long and troublesome I must have it cut directly",*[18] as well as other forms of body maintenance, such as "*cut my toe nails and corns".*[19]

Then, of course, there is how the body is written into the text in relation to intimate encounters with others, from the overtly sexual, "sat by Miss V's bedside - *not much said by either of us but she let me press her breasts and kiss open mouthed put my tongue in indeed she put hers into my mouth",*[20] to the more symbolically intimate, "π [Mariana] *seems affectionate had hold of each others hand a great while after dinner a thing we never do here".*[21]

And *then, of-course-of-course*, there are the gendered aspects of her body, such as when she is talking to Miss Brown and reports: "*I said I was often mistaken my voice was so deep* [...] *I had given up singing my voice had been mistaken at a supper party (at Doctor Belcomes by Jack Raper) for a mans".*[22]

Lister's body appears in the text often and in diverse ways; it is overwhelmingly present. I begin with such a long and detailed list to purposefully submerge you in the mass of material there is on her body so that you can appreciate the strange reality that bodies, in spite of this presence, are so often left out of literary criticism and, most surprisingly, out of

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[15] Friday 12th May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0053

[16] Saturday 3rd June 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0059

[17] Tuesday 8th August 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0074

[18] Friday 8th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0032

[19] Monday 12th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0079

[20] Sunday 30th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0089

[21] Sunday 6th February 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0029

[22] Thursday 25th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0006

life writing criticism. In a recent collection of articles in *Life Writing,* Babs Boter et. al. write the following in their introduction:

> Diaries, of course, are about bodies. They are about daily activities such as writing (the diary!), eating, working, and sleeping. [...] Analogously to diary writing, life writing studies and diary scholarship have shown an uneven attention to corporeal issues. This cursory focus reflects the irregular attention the body has also received in more traditional academic disciplines such as history.[23]

I would like to clarify that it is only in the arts and humanities that there is a lack of this corporeal attention, in other disciplines, such as public health and the social sciences, bodies have gathered more specific attention. However, in the arts and specifically in literary studies, the empirical dimension of bodies can be overlooked in favour of more abstract, theoretical approaches to the body. . In other words, when bodies are discussed, it is largely in relation to other concepts such as sexuality and gender, which either reduce a body to a narrow scope of its functionality, or, as Katherine Canning puts it, 'allow[s the] 'body' to serve as a more fashionable surrogate for sexuality, reproduction, or gender without referring to anything specifically identifiable as body, bodily or embodied.'[24]

In this chapter, I wish to bring Lister's body into the foreground. As I have shown, Lister's body is ever-present in the text and to discuss all the ways her body appears would be too much material for the length of this chapter, so I have chosen to focus on one area: her menstruation. Originally in this chapter I wished to focus on building a case for an everyday sort of body, which I wished to call, in all its academic splendour, 'the quotidian body.' This sprung out of noticing how so many life writing narratives have focused on the body at its most fraught and extreme, such as Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980), Ruth Picardie's *Before I say goodbye* (1998) and Sinéad Gleeson's *Constellations* (2019). I wondered what could be discovered if I focused on the mundane or banal experiences of embodiment, such as Lister's management of cold feet and sore eyes:

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[23] Babs Boter, Ernestine Hoegen, Meritxell Simon-Martin & Leonieke Vermeer, ''Dear Diary, Dear Body': Reading Embodied and Narrated Selves,' *Life Writing*, 19.2 (2022), pp. 159-167, p. 159

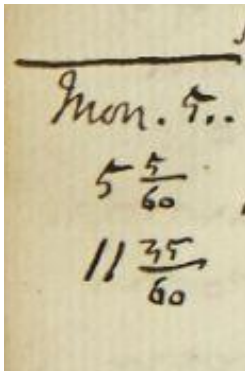
[24] Kathleen Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History,' *Gender & history*, 11.3 (1999), pp. 499-513, p. 499

> I have lately sat in a morning with my feet on the hearth to keep them from being so deadly cold; but the fire and the light at that distance from the window do not suit my eyes, and I have ^made a change in the arrangement of my room and^ got the high frame belonging to my writing desk; shall raise my seat, and try what I can do with my feet a foot from the ground[25]

There is so much in Lister's journal that can gather around this concept of everyday embodiment. However, I soon came across the unsettling realisation that my general idea of 'the quotidian body' did not include a uterus, indeed, as you may have noticed (though, you probably didn't) I didn't even include her menstruation in the above extensive list of her body's appearances. It did not seem to constitute the ordinary to me; it seemed to be exempt from such a consideration. A form of embodiment somehow excessive of the ordinary. This was unsettling, especially because Lister diligently logged her menstruation, as well as providing some textual information about her periods and the periods of other women. This was not a silence that was necessarily in the journal then, but a silencing that I had enacted upon the text. Though, as you shall see, there is much more to this erasure than my own erroneous attention.

Lister uses the symbol of ". ." (two dots) logged next to the date of an entry to represent the first day of her period, for example, this entry for the 5th April 1819:

[25] Sunday 25th March 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0017



The symbol is discrete and easy to miss.[26] However, this small acknowledgement means that it is possible to log every single period, whether Lister writes about it or not. It is because of this discrete symbol that I know that Lister has 38 menses during my three-year sample and that her cycle spans between 23 days long and 51 days long (see Appendix C for my period table). The information about her menses is there to be gathered and analysed and yet Lister's menstruation has not yet been the focus of any critical essay or chapter. Indeed, it is barely mentioned, if touched on at all. Catherine Euler's thesis (1995), which goes into such detail and supplies such fantastic analysis of how gender affects Lister's agency and subjectivity, does not think that menstruation warrants much close attention or analysis. There is only one mention of menstruation in the body of her thesis, in her chapter 'Gender and the Production of Texts', in which she discusses how Lister uses her crypt hand:

> While the Roman alphabet text deals with external reality in an objective way, the code deals with almost any aspect of the body. Lister herself prioritizes the public and the objectively mental, while hiding the private body and its inner subjectivity. As frequently happens when women of a certain age live together for any length of time, Lister and Walker often menstruated on or about the same day. Anne Lister preferred it if her partner never found out when she had her "«cousin»" as she phrased it, as this might "womaniz[e her] too much." Every mention of menstruation is in code, as is every mention of bowel movements, and every mention of the

[26] I missed it the first few times and then fortunately, while checking my understanding of her sex symbol on the website Packed for Potential, they listed it as her symbol for her period: <https://www.packedwithpotential.org/projects/anne-lister-sex-guide#h.p_-lETWPYvHoZi> This correlates with the information given in the journal, see Appendix B for a table of her periods.

> two women's sexual life together. Anything to do with the body was given a more hidden, less public status.[27]

The most glaring sentence to me is how Euler introduces the topic of menstruation with an incorrect fact about periods. A long-held myth that wombs speak to each other through pheromones and sync up to bleed at the same time. This is purely anecdotal and not proven by science, indeed, a recent study found that not only is menstrual synchrony untrue but 'cycles are actually more likely to diverge (get out of sync) over time.'[28] It glares because it highlights the way in which menstruation is misunderstood and mythologised, even within an academic thesis. It is only in the past fifteen years that such misinformation is being counteracted by scientific studies and dissemination of information by the popular press. Euler then informs us that Lister preferred her partner not to find out when she menstruates. This is not untrue per se, but it is an active interpretation, and she conflates two very separate quotations in her interpretation of this information. The information about not wanting her partner to find out is inferred from this quotation: "*no kiss had slept in cousin linen with paper as usual and w^hite w^orsted stocking besides which kept all very comfortable* [Ann] *never found out that I had cousin*"[29] – note that she does not explicitly say that she *prefers* that Ann does not find out but is stating a fact which implies she may prefer this. Euler then explains this preference by using a quotation from ten years earlier, the more contextual version of which is:

> *she* [Mrs Barlow] *suddenly touching my queer I started back ah said she that is because you are a pucelle* [virgin] *I must undo that I can give you relief I must do to you as you do to me I liked not this and said she astonished me she asked if I was angry no merely astonished however I found I could not easily make her understand my feelings on the subject and I dropped the*

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[27] Catherine Euler, 'Moving Between Worlds: Gender, Class, Politics, Sexuality and Women's Networks in the Diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Yorkshire, 1830 - 1840', Thesis, University of York, 1999, White Rose portal, Web. 30/06/2023pp. 61-2

[28] A study done in 2017 by menstrual tracking app, Clue, and Dr. Alexandra Alvergne from the University of Oxford, studied 360 pairs over three cycles. <https://helloclue.com/articles/cycle-a-z/do-menstrual-cycles-sync-unlikely-finds-clue-data> [Accessed 30/05/2023]

[29] Friday 20th February 1835, SH:7/ML/E/17/0166

> *matter altogether π- [Mariana] would not make such a speech this is womanizing me too much*[30]

This sexual context is very different to the context of menstruation and Lister seems to be more affronted and "womanized" by the way Mrs Barlow speaks to her about her sexual preferences than anything else, though Mrs Barlow's attempt to touch Lister's "*queer*" is certainly included in this complaint. My concern is how Euler has so swiftly merged Lister's sexual practices with her menstruation and given no time to explore the different ways these two separate gendered experiences are written about by Lister. So far, there have been no explicit references found to support the idea that Lister viewed other women knowing she had her period "womanizing". We might infer this from the text and by merging such information about Lister's other gendered practices, but Lister has not (as far as we know) written this sort of information in relation to her period. This absence is interesting in itself.

Euler is correct in stating that every mention of Lister's menstruation is in her crypt hand, as well as every mention of sex. However, when it comes to bodily issues in general, such as sickness and headaches, Lister is much more erratic with her use of plain hand or crypt hand, for instance, she does write about her bowels in plain hand here: "Felt much better this evening than in the morning when I was sickish and afraid of my bowels - having had 3 motions from getting up to our first going out, and one when we came in again".[31] So the idea that her body is hidden in crypt hand is not entirely true, though it does further highlight how different she perceives her menstruation in comparison to her other bodily functions; it would seem that her period is more private and more hidden than her bowel movements can be, placing menstruation on a lower social strata than diarrhoea.

Euler also provides more information in a footnote to the paragraph above, writing:

> Menstruation was always referred to as her "cousin," as in "«so much cousin got up & came to my study & got worsted stocking prepared & put on.»" AL Journal 27 January 1835. Her regular monthly periods were always mentioned, and always mentioned in code. She always put on worsted stocking or linen (3 September 1835) or flannel and riband (4 April 1837) in

[30] Saturday 19th March 1825, Calderdale Archive Transcription project, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Volume 8

[31] Sunday 30th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0043

> private, partly so her partner would not "be reminded of her petticoats," as she phrased it.[32]

Strangely, Euler again uses a quotation from ten years earlier that is not directly related to Lister's menstruation to explain why Lister prefers to deal with the management of her period in private. The full quotation is as follows:

> *We had talked of the management my temper required π* [Mariana] *knew it well it had its peculiarities but she did not fear sure she could and would make me happy talked of the Blackstone Edge business and that at Scarborough and Miss Morrit and Goodrick and my sensitiveness on anything that reminded me of my petticoats π* [Mariana] *behaved very well and I was ssatisfied* [sic] *she will know and manage me better in future I do not cannot doubt her affection I think we shall get on well together in time to come we both of us better know ourselves and what we are about ~*[33]

This quotation is significant because it is repetitively quoted by Lister scholars, specifically the comment on petticoats, to support arguments about Lister's gender, usually either pointing out how she was not comfortable with her feminine body (the idea suggested by Jill Liddington in 1998[34]), or, the more contemporary interpretation, to suggest that she experienced forms of gender dysphoria and was possibly gender nonconforming.[35] Euler's decision to pull the "petticoats" quote from this excerpt in order to explain Lister's desire to maintain a level of privacy in menstrual management is not necessarily wrong, however, I do wish to highlight the contextual origin of these quotations and the lack of primary evidence about Lister's period that is provided.

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[32] Catherine Euler, 'Moving Between Worlds: Gender, Class, Politics, Sexuality and Women's Networks in the Diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Yorkshire, 1830 - 1840', Thesis, University of York, 1999, White Rose portal, Web. 30/06/2023, p. 61

[33] Thursday 25th May 1825, Calderdale transcription project, West Yorkshire Archive, Volume 9

[34] Jill Liddington, *Female Fortune: The Anne Lister Diaries 1833-36: Land, Gender, and Authority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

[35] Mette Hildeman Sjölin, 'Adapting the queer language of Anne Lister's diaries,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), p. 394; and, Charley Matthews, '"I feel the mind enlarging itself": Anne Lister's gendered reading practices,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), p. 371

Anira Rowanchild (1999) also only mentions Lister's period twice, once in reference to her use of her crypt hand and once to support a discussion on Lister's gender identity. Rowanchild's thesis is on 'literary self-construction' so it is more reasonable for her to have excluded menstruation from deep analysis. However, it is still interesting to look at the ways in which she's included the topic. In reference to the crypt hand, she makes the same claim as Euler that Lister uses her crypt hand for 'bowel movements, menstrual periods and orgasms.'[36] Lumping the same three bodily functions together again, an interesting threesome, especially, as I have now made clear, because bowel movements do not always feature in her crypt hand so to include them in this particular list reveals a touch of bias. The second mention Rowanchild makes is in relation to Lister's gender identity, writing:

> She appears to have been unhappy [...] with some aspects of her female physiognomy. She carefully disguised her menstruation, which she called her 'cousin', from her lovers, even from her eventual life-companion, Anne Walker: '*No kiss. Had slept in cousin-linen with paper as usual, & white worsted stockings besides, which kept all very comfortable; A- never found out that I had cousin*' (Liddington, 1998: 149). When she considered Mrs Barlow's suitability as a companion, she noted that 'she lets me see too much that she considers me too much as a woman. She talks to me about being unwell. I have aired napkins before her. She feels me, etc. All which I like not. Marianna never seems to know or notice these things.' (Whitbread, 1992: 88).[37]

Rowanchild uses the same reasoning as Euler and the same quotation about hiding her menstruation from Ann Walker. She also adds an additional quotation in relation to Mrs Barlow, which does add more support to the interpretation that Lister sees her period as something undesirably "womanizing". In my sample, Lister makes one mention of wishing to hide her napkins, but rather than from a lover, it is from her Aunt Anne, she writes: "Came upstairs at $11\frac{10}{60}$ *shocked to see all the napkins on the horse when my aunt went into the kitchen aired and brought them all away which* [took] *me almost half hour and kept me up*

[36] Anira Rowanchild, '"My mind on paper": Anne Lister and Literary Self-Construction in Early-Nineteenth-Century Halifax,' Thesis, The Open University, 2000, Open University portal, Web. 30/06/2023, p. 128

[37] ibid., p. 203

so late".[38] Lister is also dealing with an STI during this bleed so it is unclear whether she is shocked because she does not want her aunt to see her unusual discharge or whether she solely wants discretion around her period. She does not mention anything about her gender in this quotation, though within the context of the evidence above, especially her preference of Mariana not seeming to "know or notice" her period, it does seem pretty clear that gender is part of Lister's issue with her menstruation. I also think there is a case to support the idea of a more general stigma attached to menstruation, in which her aunt seeing her menstrual napkins may simply be a shameful and embarrassing situation with or without her gender malalignment.

Euler and Rowanchild are the only Lister scholars to discuss Lister's menstruation in this much detail, which isn't much. Indeed, other scholars tend to use the same quotation, especially the one relating to Ann Walker (which most of them derive from Jill Liddington's *Female Fortune*), as well as the almost infamous quotation about her "petticoats", which is not in direct relation to her menstruation, though it is not unreasonable to join the two quotations in interpretation. In the majority of articles on Lister, which tend to deal with her gender and sexuality, her menstruation is not mentioned at all.[39] All in all, Lister's menstruation is not thought worthy of close attention, even though her journals provide adequate material to analyse and even though most scholarly work on her revolves around her gender in some capacity.

Menstruation is heavily stigmatised, so the lack of critical attention on this topic does not surprise me, as Emma Barnett writes in her book, *Period*, 'Periods really do lay serious claim

[38] Wednesday 27th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0112

[39] No mentions include (but not limited to): Anna Clark (1996); Caroline L. Eisner (2001) - though she does discuss Lister's STI over two paragraphs, Lister's menstruation is not mentioned; Danielle Orr (2004); Stephen Colclough (2010); Chris Roulston (2013); Susan Valladares (2013); Caroline Baylis-Green (2015); Chris Roulston (2021); Stephen Turton (2022) - though he includes in his appendix from Lister's extract books, ""*Catamen[i]a the menses monthly courses or flowers*", he does not discuss this in his essay; Jessica Campbell (2022); Charles Upchurch (2022), Rebecca Hamilton (2022).

to the label 'final taboo'.'[40] It was only in 2019 that the Department for Education introduced the period product scheme into state schools and colleges in England, providing access to free period products, and it was only from September 2020 that teaching all people, with or without uteruses, about 'period and menstrual wellbeing' was made 'compulsory in all state-funded schools, primary and secondary, as part of health education.' The guidance published on their website has a section on 'How to reduce stigma', which they introduce with, 'The UK still experiences many challenges regarding stigma and taboo relating to periods, which works to create a sense of shame around what is a natural bodily process.'[41] This was three years ago so the outcome of this education and its efficacy on reducing menstrual stigma is yet to be seen in our population. For current adults, the stigma is very slowly being counteracted by such popular publications as Maisie Hill's *Period Power* (2019) and Emma Barnett's *Period* (2019), the former of which was certainly a book that many of my friends were lending and passing around during the Covid pandemic. There are more and more podcasts on the subject, including 'Period.' by Kate Clancy, 'The Period Party' by Nicole Jardim, and '28ish Days Later' by India Rakusen. Then there is the power of social media with people actively fighting against the stigma, such as on Twitter with such hashtags as, #Tweetyourperiod, #Periodsarenotaninsult, #Justatampon, #Freethetampon, #Ifmenhadperiods, #Happytobleed.[42] As Maisie Hill phrases it, 'the red tide is turning'.[43] However, it will be a slow and arduous process and we're certainly not there yet, which actually places us and Lister in a common cultural epoch: we share the same menstrual taboo.

Lister was certainly, as has been introduced above, quiet about her period. Of the 38 menses I have recorded, nine of these included no other information given that would suggest she is bleeding, only the two dots. The two dots are never recorded in the index, which would have given her an easy visual aid to help measure her cycles, however, she does appear to have a generally good understanding of when her periods should fall. Lister

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[40] Emma Barnett, *Period* (London: Harper Collins, 2019), p. 10

[41] 'Guidance: Period product scheme for schools and colleges in England', Updated 8th September 2022, Department for Education, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/period-products-in-schools-and-colleges/period-product-scheme-for-schools-and-colleges-in-england#overview> Accessed 1st June 2023.

[42] Kayla Davidge, 'Social Media's Important Role in Reducing Period Stigma', <https://yourperiodcalled.com/2021/04/28/how-social-media-reduces-period-stigma/> [Accessed 1st June 2023]

[43] Maisie Hill, *Period Power: Harness Your Hormones and Get Your Cycle Working For You* (London: Green Tree, 2019), p. 8

writes during her period in January 1821, "*B*[efore]*. B*[reakfast]*. siding my things from the wash a three we*[e]*ks concern",* which would suggest that she works with an approximately three week, or monthly, cycle template. In my excerpt, she has three entries where she comments on when she was expecting her period to begin:

> **Thursday 3rd June 1819:** "*what should have come on Sunday came very gently this morning while getting up".*[44] This is a 32 day cycle and she thinks she should have had a 26 day cycle.

> **Tuesday 14th March 1820:** "*and about nine ^something began^ pretty much tho' I did not ascertain it till we came upstairs after eleven -- should not have been till Thursday ^or friday^ nothing with me and obliged to contrive and do as I could –".*[45] This is a 23 day cycle and she thinks she should have had a 25 or 26 day cycle.

> **Monday 1st October 1821:** "*about eleven days out of date it came on very slightly".*[46] This is a 41 day cycle and she thinks she should have had a 30 day cycle.

The middle example is particularly good at giving us an indication as to how prepared Lister usually would have been in regards to having her menstrual napkins with her, even when visiting. Between 8th - 17th March 1820, she was staying at the Dalton's residence, the Croft, with Tib, so she must have been expecting to begin her period on leaving the Croft (which just about matches up with her predictions). It highlights the way periods can materialistically affect people's day to day lives and the anxiety caused when the materials to manage them are not available. Her entry for the next day shows us the impact on her mood that this inconvenient period has: "*slept with my drawers on last night and a pocket handkerchief and paper miserable of course very much both yesterday last night and this morning no kiss of course and a terribly long time in getting in to bed".*[47] We also see how

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[44] SH:7/ML/E/3/0050

[45] SH:7/ML/E/4/0038

[46] SH:7/ML/E/5/0068

[47] Thursday 16th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0038

she did "*contrive*", which was with a handkerchief and keeping her drawers on, the whole process taking a long time out of her night-time routine and causing her misery "*of course*". This entry stands out in her general record of her periods, as it is one of the most detailed and the most emotional. It is the only record I have of her period causing her any sort of emotional distress, such as misery.

Lister's average (mean) cycle length for the 38 menses is 28 days, which puts her very close to the "ideal" length that, as Sara Crangle points out in her interesting essay on Virginia Woolf's menstrual cycle, 'was propounded by the medical establishment and by progressive campaigners for women's health, among them, Marie Carmichael Stopes. While noting that variations can occur, Stopes nevertheless insists throughout her publications that a healthy woman should have a twenty-eight day cycle.'[48] However, though this seems to be an ideal that became popular in the late nineteenth century (and well into our own time), Lister does not seem to count the days of the cycle and instead holds onto the general length of a month. It is unlikely that she had access to information that provided the exact length of a menstrual cycle in days. She did have access, however, to Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum,* which, as Stephen Turton has pointed out, she used to create her own 'erotic glossary'.[49] One of the items on her list of words, from the sixth volume of her *Extracts from Books Read*, that Turton includes in his Appendix is: "*Catamen[i]a the menses monthly courses or flowers*".[50] Turton dates the writing of this list to be between '23 January and 9 June 1820', which places it into my three year sample, so we know that she would have read this information a year into my record of her menstruation.[51] The other entries in Bailey's *English Dictionary* that relate to menstruation include the following:

MENSES, [*i.e.* Months] Womens Monthly Courses, L.

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[48] Sara Crangle, 'Out of the archive: Woolfian domestic economies,' *Modernism/Modernity*, 23.1 (2016), pp. 141-176, p. 154

[49] Stephen Turton, 'The Lexicographical Lesbian: Remaking the Body in Anne Lister's Erotic Glossary,' *The Review of English Studies,* 73.310, (2022), pp. 537 - 551 – I'll gloss over the lack of eroticism in menstruation for Lister, as the physiology does relate to sex (male/female) and so I can see it's association in this list of terms.

[50] Ibid., p. 550

[51] Full quotation: 'There is no explicit indication of when the copying took place, but material on pages 25 and 28 of the extract book is dated 23 January and 9 June 1820 respectively, and the glossary was likely written up between those days.' ibid., p. 543

[...]

MENSTRUA, [*menstrues,* F.] the monthly Flowers of Women, L.

MENSTRUA ALBA, the White Flux, the same as *Fluor Albus.*

MENSTRUAL, Discharge. The same as *Menses.*

MENSTRUOUS, [*menstruus,* L.] belonging to Womens Monthly Courses.

MENSTRUOSITY, [*menstuositas,* L.] the monthly Flux of Women.[52]

TERMS [among *Physicians*] are Womens Monthly Courses.[53]

This dictionary repeats in nearly every mention that the cycle is 'monthly', which goes some way to explaining Lister's inexact measurement of her cycle. It also includes the interesting metaphoric label of 'flowers', which, except in her book of extracts, Lister does not use in her journal proper to describe menstruation once. The other word ‘terms’ is also never used by Lister, though, she may never have found it, considering it is a good two hundred pages further into the dictionary and would only be discoverable if she was searching for 'terms' or other words beginning with a 'te'. It is worth noting 'terms' is used 'among *Physicians'* and though she does consult doctors about Mariana's venereal infection, she does not record using the word in this context, so perhaps it is out of date or not colloquially used by York physicians. Some of the other definitions, such as 'the Fluor Albus' and 'menstrual discharge', will come up later in this chapter.

I wish to also point out that she never uses 'menstruous' to describe herself, or any other person. This particular affixation of 'menstrua', unlike the adjective form of 'menstrual', highlights some of the negative associations that menstruous people have garnered for thousands of years, a set of myths I wish to briefly include. The *OED* throws up a great example of prejudice as early as the ancient biblical text of 2 Esdras, which writes about the apocalypse and includes this line: 'There shall be a confusion also in many places, and the fire shall be oft sent out again, and the wild beasts shall change their places, and

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[52] Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London, 1724), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0114367044/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=b8487e7c&pg=552.> [Accessed 4 June 2023], p. 552

[53] ibid., p. 870

menstruous women shall bring forth monsters'.[54] Only the Common English Bible version of this line deletes the adjective of 'menstruous' but all other versions retain the word, so it would seem the condition of being on her menses is important for bearing monsters.[55] The semblance of the word 'menstruous' to 'monstrous' is certainly not irrelevant. Kate Clancy provides some incredible evidence of how insidious these myths can be, her most evocative example is the story of Dr Béla Schick and his experiments into what he, and others, started to call "menotoxin." Clancy writes:

> Over a series of short papers and correspondence in medical journals, Dr. Schick and others took up the cause of what they called the menotoxin. Some injected menstrual blood into rodents to see if they died, while others grew plants in venous blood from menstruating women to see if it killed them. As with the original experiment, the menotoxin was not confined to menstrual blood per se but rather secreted in sweat, blood, breast milk, and menstrual blood during the menstrual period. What's more, any menstruating person was now in danger of being pathologized due to menstrual toxicity. One case study reported that a mother gave her child asthma because she was menotoxic during pregnancy. All manner of female ailments—and even conditions experienced by those in proximity to menstruating women—could be explained by the menotoxin.[56]

These experiments were conducted and published from 1923 right through to as late as 1979, revealing that though such myths may seem unharmful and silly, they can and have been used in seemingly serious scientific knowledge making. Lister may not have used 'menstruous' but there is a strong case to be made that she is certainly aware of the negative associations of pollution and dirtiness connected with menstruation. Lister does make a comment about cleanliness that is weighted with moral condemnation when speaking about Tib's period:

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[54] '1535 *Bible (*Coverdale*)* 2 Esdras v. 8' in "menstruous, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/116521> [Accessed 4 June 2023] – Also, full line found here: <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/2-Esdras-5-8/> [Accessed 4/06/2023]

[55] <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/2%20Esdras%205%3A8> [Accessed 4/06/2023]

[56] Kate Clancy, *Period: The Real Story of Menstruation* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023), ebook, epub, Chapter 1: There is a reason for all of this, pp. 22 - 50

> *the little that has come from quere* [sic] *both this morning yesterday and monday has been brownish green with a strong disagreeable smell has this been caused by my bowel complaint for my water was thick and dark coloured and indicative of fever I could not do without washing three times a day Tib had this sort of smell about her last wed thurs and friday the three preceding days she had a strong smell of menstrual blood and was very much so doubtless the effect of wine she never washes during this time surely nothing can be more wholesome than cleanliness*.[57]

Lister has strange, "*disagreeable*" smelling vaginal discharge and in trying to assess her symptoms and their possible causes, she compares her symptoms to Tib's. This runs on to the observation about Tib's *"menstrual blood*", which is one of only nine uses of the word 'menstrual' in my three-year sample and the only use of the compound noun 'menstrual blood', as she usually opts for the more general or sanitised version: 'menstrual discharge'. There is the interesting detail that Lister thinks that the strong smell and/or the heaviness of Tib's period (e.g. "*was very much so*") are caused by Tib's heavy drinking of wine, showing an understanding that consumption can affect vaginal health. Lister writes that she "*could not do without washing three times a day*", whereas Tib "*never washes during this time*", comparing herself, even in her dark hour of disagreeable discharge, favourably against Tib and ending with her statement "*surely nothing can be more wholesome than cleanliness"*. It is the only occurrence of 'wholesome' in my sample, a word with both physical and moral meanings, which, after the *OED* lists a moral definition in the first sense and a physical definition in the second sense, lists this definition – a mingling of the two – in the third sense: '3. a. Esp. of a person: in good condition, free from disease, corruption, etc.; physically or morally healthy; virtuous.'[58] The word itself shows how morality has long been associated with, and applied to, physical health. If we consider that Tib never washes during her menses, but Lister does, we see that Lister's menstrual management is not an example of all women of her class during this time, but more an indication of her own personal approach and feelings towards menstruation. It would seem that she perceives menstrual discharge as unclean and that this is, perhaps, more an olfactory concern than a visible one.

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[57] Wednesday 29th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0098

[58] "wholesome, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/228734> [Accessed 4 June 2023]

The language, or lack thereof, that Lister uses in reference to her periods is one of the most insightful elements of her record. In sixteen of her entries, which makes up a majority, she writes suggestive lines, like the entries provided above (on page 138), in which her menstruation is referred to as "*what*", "*something*", and "*it"*, usually combined with "*began"* or "*came on*". Her refusal to name her period even within the confines of her crypt hand suggests the way that Lister felt towards her bleeding. There is a definite wish to confine them to an unsaid and unsayable quarantine. In four of the entries, she only writes either "*airing things*" or "*standing by the kitchen fire*",[59] both of which are only contextually understood to be related to her menstruation due to the other entries. It would seem that the kitchen fire is where she airs her menstrual napkins and that she tended to stay with them during this activity, indicated by her tendency to include the time it took to do the activity of airing things, such as "*airing things for a quarter hour*"[60] and "*airing things and did not hurry*".[61] This would explain the shock that she felt when she found that her napkins had been on the horse in the kitchen when her aunt had been in there, as it seems that she usually supervised them. It appears that Lister only aired (or dried) her napkins and that the maid must have washed them, as she only sided her *"things*" for the wash or got them "*ready for the wash"* but there is no record of her 'washing' them. This would explain how the error of her aunt seeing them on the horse may have occurred and account for Lister's shock.

The fact that Lister does not use a specific noun to name her own period is even more surprising when we know that she had the language to do so. There is one word that she does use for menstruation however, and that is the word "cousin", as evidenced earlier by Euler's footnote. Interestingly, she does not use this word in reference to her own menstruation until her period in July 1821, after she has contracted a possible venereal infection from Mariana. She does use "cousin" before this date in reference to other people's periods, as early as December 1817.[62] It is extremely difficult to know where the euphemism of "cousin" came from, but it seems to have been used by Lister and her

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[59] Sunday 2nd May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0012; Wednesday 7th June 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0061

[60] Saturday 9th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0081

[61] Wednesday 11th April 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0021

[62] "*A very good kiss last night tho πs [Mariana] cousin came last Sunday and was not quit well*" - Saturday 27th December 1817, Calderdale transcription project, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/E/1

network of friends. The one paper I can find on this subject is 'The Vernacular of Menstruation' by Natalie F. Joffe, written back in 1948, which primarily focuses on American slang. However, it does shed some light on the choice of word, Joffe writes: 'female anthropomorphisms, particularly when phrased as relatives coming to visit, are numerous: *Grandma is here, Grandma has left, thank God, little sister's here, Aunt Jane, my country cousin, I expect a visit from my Aunt Susie*, are some of the more typical phrases.'[63] Lister opts for "cousin" most frequently as her euphemism for menstruation, even when she had access to other more medical or classical jargon, such as 'menses' or 'menstrua'. This tells me one of two things: that in her circle of friends (and possibly her family) "cousin" was perhaps used with such regularity (possibly to the extent that we now use 'period') that she may not have been fully aware of the euphemistic quality of the term; or that, even with her interest in terminology and anatomy, she made a choice to use the vernacular in this instance, suggesting a belief that menstrual activity did not warrant close attention and did not belong in the realm of phallocentric knowledge making.[64] Or, best, perhaps to merge the two inferences and suggest that "cousin" was a word produced and used by people who bled as a preferred term, and though it has euphemistic qualities, it is at least a word that belongs to the people who have experienced menstruation, and not one thrust upon them by people who do not menstruate and that, perhaps, with this in mind, Lister also shared in communal ownership of this term "cousin". This would also align with Joffe's findings that 'country cousin' was mainly used by women speakers.[65]

You may have noticed by now my decision to opt for gender neutral terms as much as possible when discussing menstruation, largely opting for 'people'. This has been a

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[63] Natalie F. Joffe, 'The Vernacular of Menstruation', *WORD*, 4.3 (1948), pp. 181-186, <DOI: 10.1080/00437956.1948.11659341> [Accessed 30/06/2023] p. 183

[64] 'The historiography of dictionary-making has itself often been a phallological affair, in which works mainly written and edited by men have been presented as deriving from, competing with, and then succeeding each other in a series of Oedipal conflicts.' - Stephen Turton, 'The Lexicographical Lesbian: Remaking the Body in Anne Lister's Erotic Glossary,' *The Review of English Studies,* 73.310, (2022), pp. 537 - 551, p. 538

[65] Natalie F. Joffe, 'The Vernacular of Menstruation', p. 185

purposeful decision, as I am wary of how non-binary or trans people who menstruate can face even more stigma than cisgender women, both internally, as it is the most gendered and negatively charged bodily function so wreaks havoc with gender dysphoria, and also externally, when attempting to access health care in relation to their periods.[66] I have taken my lead from other writers on menstruation, such as Maisie Hill, who clarifies in her introduction that '[n]ot everyone who is a woman has a menstrual cycle or womb, and not everyone who has a menstrual cycle and a womb is a woman.'[67] As well as Kate Clancy, who writes in a similar vein,

> While I hope it is obvious that many people who are not women menstruate, and that many who are women do not, menstruation research often seems unaware of this fact. In addition to children who menstruate, and trans men and nonbinary people who menstruate, there are women and postmenopausal people who do not (and of course, plenty of people who occupy multiple of these categories at once, like my transmasculine teenager).[68]

Both of them include the point that cisgendered women do not necessarily menstruate, which I think is equally important to keep in mind, for as long as we so strongly associate 'womanhood' with possessing a womb and bleeding, we shame and exile women who do not have wombs and/or are unable to bleed. However, you may also have noticed, particularly in my brief literary review on how Lister's menstruation has been discussed, that when I focus closely upon Lister and her time period I will use 'women' more frequently. This is also a purposeful decision, as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries menstruation was deeply and fundamentally gendered, as seen above in Bailey's *English Dictionary,* Menses are '*Women's* monthly Courses', so the way that menstruation is discussed and

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[66] 'Scholarship on transgender health has long documented discriminatory health care practices (Seelman et al. 2017), unsatisfactory provider care (Heng et al. 2018) and failure to meet the unique medical care needs of transgender people (Houssayni and Nilsen 2018). Advancing this literature, this study documents how current health care provider practices may inadvertently invalidate the bodies and gender identities of trans and non-binary people who menstruate.' Benjamin Lane, Amaya Perez-Brumer, Richard Parker, Amelia Sprong & Marni Sommer, 'Improving menstrual equity in the USA: perspectives from trans and non-binary people assigned female at birth and health care providers,' *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 24.10 (2022), pp. 1408-1422, p. 1418

[67] Maisie Hill, *Period Power*, p. 3

[68] Kate Clancy, *Period: The Real Story of Menstruation* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023), From the Introduction, p. 1 - 21

understood by Lister and her friends works along gendered lines of sociality; that is, Lister reports knowledge and discussions with other women about periods, or cousins, but the only times she speaks with men are when she is seeking medical advice about hers and Mariana's venereal infection.[69]

Language aside, Lister's attitude to menstruation is not all silence, shadows and stigma. In November 1819, she is met by Miss Brown, her long-term local Halifax crush, while out walking and reports the following:

> Miss Brown met me unexpectedly - *I was glad to see her she said she was doing a mad thing just before she was sick and ill and hardly able to stir but she heard I had passed and was determined to come she was expecting her cousin said I a walk may do you good if you do not get cold and instead of pursuing our way to king cross we went to bull close lane and finding that cold walked up and down the lane above savile row I advised putting her feet in hot water then wrapping them in flannel getting in to a warm [b]ed and taking something hot* [...] *I wished I had her at Shibden and I would sit up with and nurse and divert her pain all night*[70]

She also indexes this entry with: "*ill with her cousin coming".*[71] The fact that Miss Brown thinks it is acceptable to tell Lister that she's been "*sick and ill and hardly able to stir"* because "*she was expecting her cousin*" suggests that amongst women, it was reasonably permissible to speak about periods. Though, it is also worth taking into account the intimacy of their relationship. Miss Brown and Lister have been engaging in intimate conversations on their moorland walks and Lister does not record conversations about menstruation with other Halifax friends such as Emma Saltmarshe or Ellen Empson. Lister may not have had sex

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[69] includes Mr Duffin and Steph, Mariana's brother.

[70] Tuesday 23rd November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0004

[71] SH:7/ML/E/4/0137

with Miss Brown, but she has kissed her on the lips three times before this conversation,[72] so their physical intimacy is relatively developed. Miss Brown also looks to Lister for life advice, leaning on her to discuss her engagement with Mr Kelly and showing her intimate items, such as a couple of letters from Mr Kelly, in order to get Lister's opinion.[73] The nature of this relationship, with Lister taking on an authoritative and paternal role, may also explain why Lister gives such detailed advice. First, we have her opinion that "*a walk may do you good if you do not get cold*", presenting a correlation with walking and improvement of health, which Lister does mirror elsewhere in her journal when reporting on her own bouts of illness, such as, "Think my walk did me good - feel better this evening".[74] The idea that walking is good for health seems to be a relatively active idea in the long eighteenth century, for instance, here is a quote from her idol, Edward Gibbon, taken from his *Miscellaneous Works,* which she read during April - May 1819: 'Instead of rolling in a coach, I walk the streets, wrapped up in a fur cloak; but this exercise is wholesome, and except an accidental fit of the gout of a few days, I never enjoyed better health.'[75] Note his use of 'wholesome' to describe walking, similar to Lister's use for cleanliness, it is again used here to moralise physical health or the body.

She then dispenses her main medical advice, writing: "*I advised putting her feet in hot water then wrapping them in flannel getting into a warm [b]ed and taking something hot"*. Heat seems to be the main part of this advice, which seems sensible considering it's November and on this day Lister records the temperature at 9pm as F. 30 (-1 Celsius). Though it is interesting that she advises to heat the feet and not the abdomen, which is now

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[72] "*just before we came in from the garden contrived to be a few minutes with only Tib and the former gave me a kiss and I made it an excuse to kiss on her lips a very little moistly she looked shame faced"* Thursday 26th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0086; "*I looked to see no one was near she untied her bonnet and I took one I would tie her bonnet again and first took an o[t]her kiss as a payment for tieing it"* Saturday 4th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0090; and, "*never mind said she and held out her face and let me take a salute*" Saturday 6th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0108

[73] "*said every thing to console and she gave me his two least letters to bring home with me"* Thursday 25th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0006

[74] Sunday 12th December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0013

[75] Edward Gibbon, *Miscellaneous works of Edward Gibbon, Esquire. With memoirs of his life and writings, composed by himself: illustrated from his letters, with occasional notes and narrative, by John Lord Sheffield. in Three Volumes. ...* Vol. 2, printed for P. Wogan, L. White, John Chambers, P. Byrne, John Millikin, James Moore, J. Rice, W. Jones, John Halpen, Peter Moore, H. Fitzpatrick, N. Kelly, and G. Folingsby, 1796. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*,< link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0125112167/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=e57cb7ec&pg=164> [Accessed 5 June 2023] P. 154

more common (and effective) advice. Drinking something hot (and alcoholic) seems to be quite a common form of home remedy or treatment that women take when experiencing pain or ill health due to menstruating. There are another two examples of this, once when she dispenses advice to Miss Vallance: "*made breakfast ^V's cousin came this morning^* [...] *V went early to bed and at my recommendation had plenty of cinnamon put into her glass of brandy and water".*[76] So this instance is brandy and water, and her advice is to add cinnamon, which does not come up again in my three year sample, so it is uncertain whether Lister uses cinnamon herself and whether the cinnamon is related directly to Miss Vallance's cousin or whether it is an addition meant to treat Miss V's other nervous symptoms (she suffers from spasms). The second example is simply a report of what Mariana does: "*[Mariana]'s cousin came this afternoon she had a little gin and water just after getting into bed".*[77] So Mariana's choice is gin, so it would appear that the choice of spirit is generally up to the individual and there's not a specific spirit that is linked with treating menstrual pain. The last comment that Lister makes about nursing and diverting Miss Brown's pain is intended romantically, as a sign of her regard for Miss Brown, though it also shows Lister's enjoyment of taking on the role of carer for her lovers and family members, as well as signalling a lack of shaming or taboo around menstruation. Furthermore, this comment also shows a shift in position from the paternal and medically astute role to the maternal and nursing role. It shows how Lister's way of relating to others is neither fully masculine nor fully feminine, arguably it is this fluidity of gender positioning that allows her to create such intimate bonds with women. She can offer useful medical tips to Miss Brown as well as a caring maternal body that will tend to her all night. Miss Brown does follow up the next time she sees Lister and Lister writes: "*her cousin came on Tuesday evening she followed my directions implicitly and they answered exceedingly well".*[78] There is a small hint of pride in Lister's decision to write up such a good review of her advice.

Another instance of Lister exhibiting behaviour that is not in keeping with shame or silencing practices is given when she has a bloody incident with Miss Vallance. This is during her stay at Langton Hall, near the end of the visit, when Lister and Miss V have engaged in

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[76] Wednesday 1st November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0096

[77] Wednesday 2nd January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0091

[78] Thursday 25th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0006

quite a few sexual encounters and developed an intimate relationship, already having discussed the notion of whether they could live together in the future.[79] Lister writes:

> *then went to V* [Miss Vallance] *took her on my knee held her with my right arm and grubbled with the second finger of the left I kept it nearly still and she gave the action so that I am sure she felt enough we were a gooddissh while at it and had only just done when Char came in and observed V had had dirtied her petticoat oh said I unconsciously I suppose she has splashed it in walking luckily I had my pelisse on and went into my own room directly and to my surprise found my finger quite bloody and my things stained thro' to my skin on the left thigh - took them of*[f] *and put them in water till all came out and was therefore a full hour in dressing for dinner - did not mention this when I saw her again but she said she could hardly bear me it made her ill and certainly she looked wretchedly all dinner time and all the evening - came up with her afterwards and it came out that she thought me wrong in supposing it menstrual that she had been affected in this way every time I had so touched tho' never before so bad as now*[80]

There is no definitive meaning to Lister's use of 'grubble' though the general consensus among Lister scholars is that it means to use her fingers on other women's genitals, either directly or through clothing.[81] In this case, it seems that she was directly on the skin and the reference to finishing when she writes, "*had only just done*", suggests she brought Miss V to orgasm. Lister's lack of disgust or shock, or other such more negatively associated emotional reactions, to the discovery that she is covered in blood is telling of her neutral attitude to such things. She writes that it was lucky she was wearing her black pelisse so that Char did not notice the blood on her but this is because it would have indicated a sexual connection, especially as Char is aware of Lister's relationship with Tib, and not, in this instance, because the menstrual blood would have been shameful in itself. Then Lister is only surprised, a word

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[79] "*I had asked to visit her if she remained unmarried tho' she would not come to me I had before also hinted at her displacing tib this she could not make up her mind to do she could be thus forced to cut with the N's she could not either come to me ^entirely^ while her father or mother lived – I said I had proposed everything I could think of to her none would answer and I must try to get the better of my folly"* Thursday 30th November 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0106

[80] Thursday 21st December 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0113; also, included in her index as: "---- *all bloody."* – SH:7/ML/E/4/0128

[81] See Packed for Potential's sex guide: <https://www.packedwithpotential.org/projects/anne-lister-sex-guide#h.p_KvwMOf3-19pe> [Accessed 05/06/2023]

with much less intensity or negative associations than "shocked", (such as she uses when her aunt discovers her napkins) to discover her finger is bloody and her things stained right through to the skin. She has to wash these immediately to get the stain out and so spends a full hour to get ready for dinner, a matter which she does not add any report of annoyance or irritation to, but simply states rather matter-of-factly. She also chooses not to disclose her own bloodiness to Miss V, which suggests discretion, though they still discuss the incident.

We find out that Lister supposed the blood was "*menstrual*" and I believe this is why she does not find the incident particularly shocking. There is evidence of Lister engaging in sexual activities during her cousin, as well as other women's, mainly Mariana's, such as, "*in spite of my cousins appearance last night just at bed time we* [...] *had two good kisses both together that is without having separated*"[82] and, "*good kiss last night* [Mariana]*'s cousin always small at first".*[83] Though, the latter quotation also suggests that it is the heaviness of the bleeding that is taken into account, most likely due to pragmatic reasons of not wanting to get too much blood on the bedding. There are a series of entries in relation to Tib's cousin that show how periods are perceived in relation to sexual management, or at least, in relation to Tib in particular, who, as we already know is not clean enough for Lister during her menstruation:

> **Saturday 14th October 1820:** *talked a good deal to Tib after getting into bed said I had had a great mind to stay with Miss V and would go tomorrow night as Tib's cousin came this afternoon Tib took it very well*

> **Sunday 15th October:** *Tib's cousin came yesterday so no kiss [...] shewed she loved me and in spite of her cousin we had a good kiss*[84]

> **Monday 16th October:** *no kiss of Tib one account of her cousin*[85]

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[82] Friday 27th July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0046; also, see her visit in Manchester, when she begins her cousin just before going to meet Mariana, but it is never mentioned even though they have sex, Thursday 18th and Friday 19th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0113-4

[83] Thursday 3rd January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0091

[84] SH:7/ML/E/4/0090 - both Saturday and Sunday

[85] SH:7/ML/E/4/0091

Tuesday 17th October: *I not in a humour for more kissing and glad of Tib's cousin for an excuse*

Wednesday 18th October: *she wanted a kiss and said she was well of her cousin however grubbling seemed to satisfy her*[86]

This is during Lister's visit at Langton when she is engaging in secret sexual activity with Miss Vallance and will encounter her bloody finger later in November. In the first entry, Tib's menstruation is understood as cause enough to stay overnight in Miss V's room. In the second entry, it is used as the reason that they had no sex, though later that day, they have good sex "*in spite of her cousin*". In the third entry, it is given again as cause not to have sex. The fourth entry indicates that the etiquette of not having sex during a woman's period is not always a hard rule but something that can also be used as "*an excuse*" for Lister, supported by the fact that they did have good sex two days earlier whilst Tib was on her period and also by the evidence given above of her having sex with Mariana during their cousins. Then, the final entry shows Tib's understanding of the situation, that if she tells Lister her period is over, then that means they can now resume having sex. We see the power of this social etiquette, as once Tib has discarded the "*excuse*", Lister feels that no other reason will suffice to decline sex with Tib, and therefore, begrudgingly grubbles her. The series of these quotations show more clearly how the etiquette around menstruation and sex is certainly present but not a concrete rule for either Lister or her sexual partners. Instead, it functions more as a general rule that can be broken and is not always used purely out of an aversion to having sex with a menstruating woman but sometimes simply as *"an excuse*" to get out of what Lister perceives as her obligation to have sex.

So, back to Lister and Miss Vallance. Miss V tells Lister that she is mistaken about her bleeding being caused by menstruation and the conversation that ensues the next day provides information on attitudes towards vaginal health more generally, moving away from menstruation into other forms of discharge, as well as giving an insight into Lister's knowledge of female anatomy. Lister reports the following:

[86] SH:7/ML/E/4/0092 - both Tuesday and Wednesday

> *turned to the subject of yesterday she said it was not menstrual and had then gone off she was afraid she could not bear much and could never make anyone happy Doctor Bolton had told her something came too low down and blocked up the passage before ^it^ should do so that she had had whites very bad for which the Doctor had made her use a uterine syringe with lineseed tea and also lime water with an infusion in it of oak bark but he told her she was not to marry without first particularly speaking to him I told her it was the clytoris had slipped down too low from illness anxiety etc. and gave great hope of all being better and she being stronger by and by but this was the cause of the bleeding*[87] – indexed as, "*V's obstruction"*[88]

The "*whites*" she speaks of are the 'Fluor albus', which is included in Bailey's dictionary above, as 'MENSTRUA ALBA, the White Flux, the same as *Fluor Albus.*'[89] This was the term used for any unusual vaginal discharge. This is the first time that "*whites*" are named in Lister's journals, however she does seem to understand what Miss V means by the word, indicated by her decision to write the condition in its most vernacular form without any definition. The "*whites*" become particularly important to Lister the following year when Mariana and herself contract a venereal disease. However, the condition of whites is perceived as more innocent and understood as separate from a venereal disease by Lister, evidenced here when she writes, "*my letter for π* [Mariana] *appears to convince or at least strongly persuade myself that the t*[h]*ing is venereal however I have wavered about it this last day or two surely it never can be a case of simple whites how is it that I have been so infected".*[90] She seems to know quite a lot about them, including what they are supposed to smell like, e.g. "*the matter the syringe brings from me every now and then is plastic and will pull out into a longish thread has not a bad odour but smells like ^the fluor of^ whites"*.[91] It is difficult to know whether her knowledge about whites comes only from books, or whether it

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[87] Friday 22nd December 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0113

[88] SH:7/ML/E/4/0128

[89] Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London, 1724), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0114367044/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=b8487e7c&pg=552> [Accessed 4 June 2023] p. 552

[90] Monday 17th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0063. This belief may have come from a medical dictionary of some kind, as in Hooper's *Medical Dictionary,* which she read in August 1821, it says: 'LEUCORRHOEA. *Fluor albus.* The whites. An increased secretion of white mucus from the vagina of women, arising from debility, and not from the venereal virus; from *λευκός,* white, and, *ῥοία,* to flow.' -

[91] Monday 10th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0061

is something she has been taught aurally or information she has acquired through experience.

We know that she had a copy of *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (1698), a sex manual and midwifery book that was anonymously written and popularly read from the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. She first mentions her ownership of this book in November 1819 when she is "*injudiciously*" showing Mrs Belcombe her books at Shibden and reports telling Mrs Belcombe the following, "*tho I had no taste for these things now I had given myself the trouble to learn a little of everything said a lady gave me Aristotle it is by right my Aunt Listers and she took it from one of her servants*".[92] So, we can infer that she may have read and taken "*the trouble to learn*" from it. This book has a list of chapters about the organs of generation, a few sex tips (such as not to sneeze after copulation so you don't expel the seed), menstruation, and many chapters about the womb, which include,

> '*Of the Genitals of Women, External and Internal, to the Vessels of the Womb.'*
>
> *'A Description of the Womb's Fabrick, the preparing Vessels, and Testicles in Women, as also of the different and Ejaculatory Vessels.'*
>
> *'A Discourse of the Use and Action of the Several Parts in Women, appropriated to Generation Etc.'*
>
> *'Of the Organs of Generation in Man.'*
>
> '*Of the Retention of the Menses.*'
>
> '*Of the overflowing of the Courses.'*
>
> '*Of the Weeping of the Womb.'*
>
> '*Of the False Courses, or Whites.*'[93]

The most compelling evidence that Lister read *Aristotle's Masterpiece* before this conversation with Miss V is her spelling of "*clytoris*" with a 'y', as this book is one of the only ones I can find in her possession that had this spelling, for instance: 'The *Clytoris* is a

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[92] Saturday 20th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0115

[93] Aristotle, pseud. *Aristotle's Masterpiece Compleated in Two Parts* .. , London, 1698. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/books/aristotles-masterpiece-compleated-two-parts/docview/2240893188/se-2> [Accessed 4/06/2023]

substance in the upper part of Division, where the two wings concur, and is the Seat of Venereal Pleasure, being like a Yard in Situation, Substance, Composition and Erection'.[94] This spelling is not used in Bailey's *Dictionary,* where the entry is: 'CLITORIS, a Part lying within the Skin in the *Pudendum Muliebre,* about the bigness of the *Uvula.'*[95] Either way, she knows of the whites, but she is still confused, even with the description in *Aristotle* and Bailey's *Dictionary* about what exactly constitutes the clitoris.

Lister's diagnosis of Miss V's symptoms, believing that her "*clytoris had slipped down too low from illness anxiety etc.*" and her conviction that "*this was the cause of the bleeding"* are in keeping with the language used to describe the female anatomy when it is malfunctioning during the long eighteenth century. It tends to be 'falling' or generally moving about into areas it is not supposed to be during this time, as we see in *Aristotle,* in the chapter '*Of the Descending or Falling of the Mother'* in which it discusses '[t]he falling down of the womb', and again in the chapter, '*Of the Suffocation of the Mother',* where it speaks of 'a retraction of the Womb towards the *Midriff* and Stomach'.[96] However, there is no mention of either of these conditions being caused by emotions, though in the chapter on whites, emotions are included in a list of causes: 'The external cause may be moistness of the Air, eating of corrupt Meats, Anger, Grief, Slothfulness, immoderate Sleeping, Costiveness of Body.'[97] *Aristotle* does give the general idea of 'distemper' as a cause for many disorders, which may be the reason Lister has led with Miss V's illness as the first cause, followed shortly by her own addition that Miss V's anxiety is also the cause, which is not a huge leap as her illness is thought to be one of the nerves.[98] Lister's belief that it is the clitoris that has "*slipped down too low*" seems to be entirely her own construction, as I can only find information on the womb moving about and no mentions of the clitoris doing so. It does tell of a particular gap in Lister's knowledge of the clitoris, that she would think that it being low would cause an "*obstruction*" and so much bleeding. Anna Clark, in her upcoming chapter, 'Anne Lister's Search for the Anatomy of Sex', provides evidence for Lister only discovering the clitoris in February 1831, ten years after my sample, so this explains Lister's

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[94] ibid., p. 77

[95] Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, p. 182

[96] Aristotle, pseud. *Aristotle's Masterpiece,,* p. 131

[97] ibid., p. 118, and p. 123

[98] e.g. "*burnet says her complaint is quite on her nerves*" - Wednesday 11th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0089

confusion.[99] Clark also believes that Lister was confused between the clitoris and the cervix, which would also explain her understanding that it could be the clitoris that has "*blocked up the passage".*

The confusion is not difficult to understand when you consider the types of diagrams and pictures that Lister would have had access to, for instance, the year after this conversation with Miss Vallance, she records reading from Cheselden's *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* writing, "*was above an hour reading about the genital parts of men and women* – For above an hour reading Cheseldon's Anatomy".[100] This publication has diagrams in it and it is safe to presume with Lister's thirst for knowledge that she certainly would have poured over them. The diagrams below are from the 1730 edition, we have no way of knowing which edition she had in her possession, but the diagram remains almost the same in both the 1712 edition and the 1750 edition, though in the latter there is actually less detail, both in the diagram and in the labelling. The confusion over what the clitoris is, however, is evident in both versions of the diagram.

[99] The chapter has been sent to me kindly by Anna Clark before it's publication: 'Finally, on 17 February 1831, she wrote that she fell asleep reading Cloquet, and then incurred a cross, noting, 'it was from studying the female [parts of] generation and finding out distinctly for the first time in my life the clitoris.' Clark's reference: 17 February 1831, SH:7/ML/E/12/0169

[100] Sunday 19th August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0055

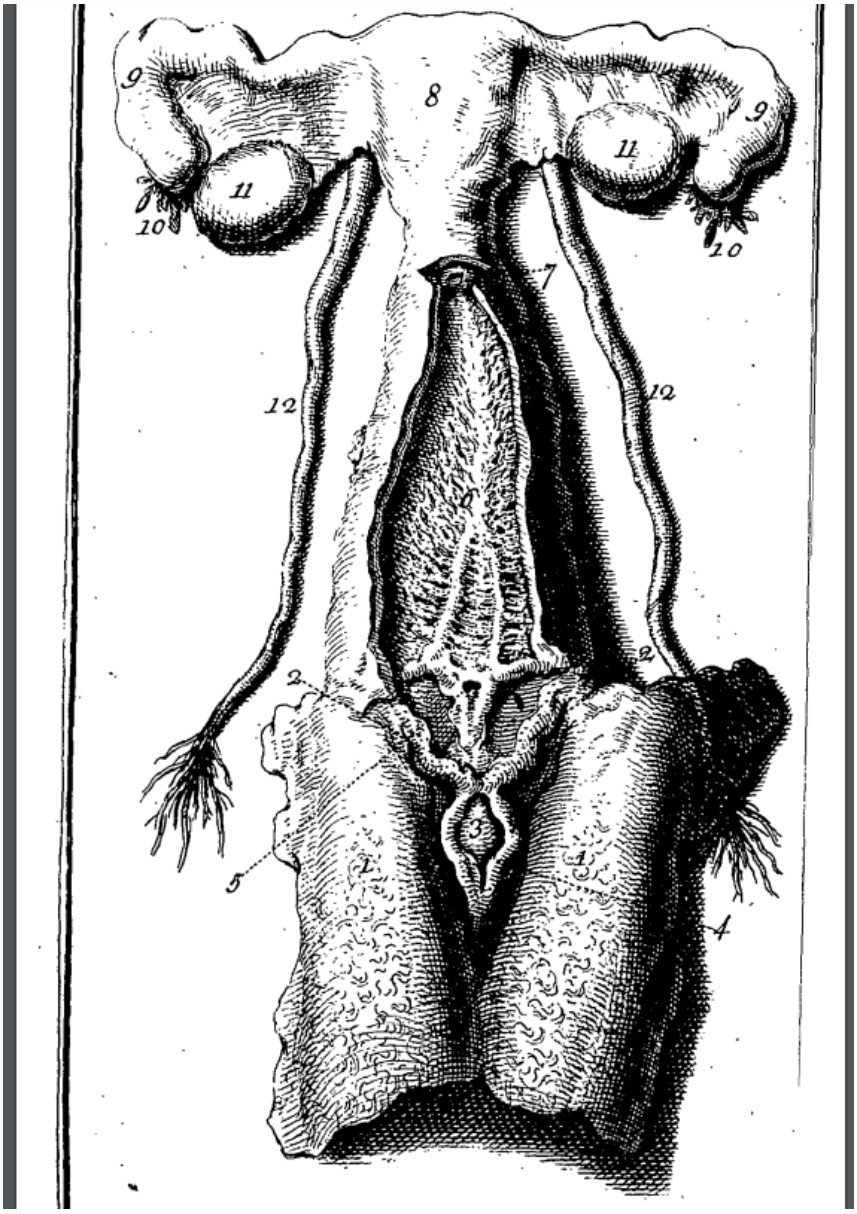

Figure 1: TABLE XXIX[101]

101 William Cheselden, *The anatomy of the human body. By William Cheselden, Surgeon to Her Majesty, F. R. S. And Surgeon to St. Thomas's-Hospital*. 4th ed., printed by W. Bowyer: and sold by J. and J. Knapton, A. Bettesworth, J. Osborn and Tho. Longman, J. Noon, and J. Clark, at the Royal-Exchange, MDCCXXX. [1730]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0107587690/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=e7f06c13&pg=310> [Accessed 1 June 2023] p. 300

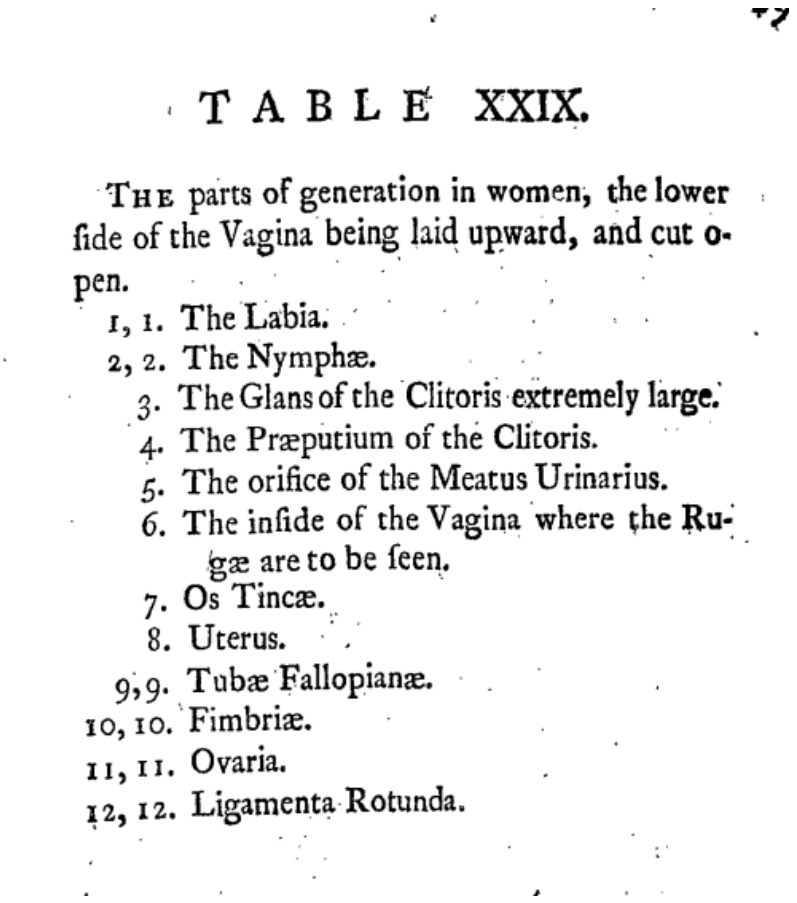

TABLE XXIX.

THE parts of generation in women, the lower ſide of the Vagina being laid upward, and cut open.

1, 1. The Labia.
2, 2. The Nymphæ.
3. The Glans of the Clitoris extremely large.
4. The Præputium of the Clitoris.
5. The orifice of the Meatus Urinarius.
6. The inſide of the Vagina where the Rugæ are to be ſeen.
7. Os Tincæ.
8. Uterus.
9, 9. Tubæ Fallopianæ.
10, 10. Fimbriæ.
11, 11. Ovaria.
12, 12. Ligamenta Rotunda.

Figure 2: TABLE XXIX labels[102]

As you can see, the perspective of the drawing makes it appear that the clitoris is the entrance into the vagina and this diagram does not show or label another way into the vagina. The description he gives in the body of the text, also does not make it any clearer:

> CLITORIS, is a small spongy body bearing some analogy to the Penis in men, but has no Urethra. It begins with two Crura from the Offa Ischia, which uniting under the Offa Pubis, it proceeds to the upper part of the Nymphae, where it ends under a small doubling of skin, called Preputium; and the end which is thus covered is called Glans. This is said to be the chief seat of pleasure in coition in women, as the Glans is in men.[103]

102 ibid., p. 301

103 ibid., p. 264

This description, coupled with the particular perspective of the diagram, makes it appear that the clitoris is the soft tissue encountered just inside the entrance to the vagina (i.e. vaginal introitus). It is reasonable to presume that though Lister only records reading this publication in August 1821 that she may have read or looked over this volume prior to this date, as it appears to be in her, or her uncle's, private library (rather than at the local Halifax Library). It would explain much of her confusion in diagnosing Miss Vallance the year before.

So, Lister knew of the whites and her version of the clitoris in 1820. Her reaction to Miss Vallance's confession of this "*obstruction*" is reasonably unphased. She does not shame Miss Vallance, but rather tries to gently reassure her. There is an element of Lister trying to align herself with the male physician, Doctor Bolton, by choosing to provide her unasked for medical opinion, but her intimate position near Miss V in the household, with so many moments afforded alone in Miss V's room and their consequent sexual relationship, place Lister somewhere more uncertain, a grey area between man and woman, similar to how she was placed when dispensing advice to Miss Brown. Lister's behaviour towards Miss V does change around this time, though it is more in reaction to the arrival of Mrs Milne and Anne Belcombe at Langton, than an effect of Miss V's confession. Indeed, the next day, Lister writes, "*an hour with V alone when she was in bed handled and rubbed her so as to make her feel but did not put my finger up",*[104] which would suggest that her sexual behaviour towards Miss V has not been hugely affected, except that she is more careful in not penetrating Miss V now she knows of her condition. There is a level of acceptance in Lister's absorption of this information.

As I have noted earlier, Lister does not use a noun for her menstruation until she contracts what she believes to be a venereal disease in July 1821 and begins to use the word "cousin". This is also the beginning of a very different record of her menstruation and vaginal functions in general. Before her August 1821 period, she does not give any information about the heaviness of her menstrual bleeding or about the consistency of her discharge, or

[104] Saturday 23rd December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0114

how long her period may last for, instead, we only have her simple and suggestive entries, such as, "*airing began after breakfast*" on Thursday 28th June 1821.[105] Then, three months later for her October period we get lots of detail regarding the heaviness of her flow:

> **Monday:** "*about eleven days out of date it came on very slightly indeed a mere nothing just after breakfast [...] – the menstrual discharge exceedingly little*"

> **Tuesday:** "A sick headache came on soon after breakfast. [...] *not sick to action this morning the discharge greater than yesterday but still only small considering its being the second day when it is usually the most copious*"

> **Wednesday:** "*good deal of the menstrual last night and tolerable today which I trust will do me good*"[106]

So, for the first time we have a record of how light or heavy her period is, it begins as "*a mere nothing*", though it is still unclear whether this is due to her abnormal period: eleven days late and during a venereal infection. However, the comment on the second day clarifies her usual pattern of bleeding, as she writes that the "*second day* [...] *it is usually the most copious"*. Then, we know that she bled a lot on the second night and during the third day, which she qualifies with the statement, "*which I trust will do me good".* So, it would seem that, even with her sense of shame around her period being noticed by others, Lister has certainly absorbed the information that it is healthy for her to bleed and she does not depict any wish for her menstruation to stop, instead we get the contrary. The idea that during her venereal infection, she believes that a "*tolerable*" heavy bleed will potentially help, suggests that she thinks that the blood is either a good substance with healthy benefits or a sign of good health in general. This is in keeping with the sorts of literature she has read, such as *Aristotle,* as any irregularity of menses, whether bleeding too frequently or too little, are considered in need of treatment as it includes in its chapter '*On the Retention of the Menses*', 'may I conclude with *Hippocrates,* If the Months be supprest, many dangerous

[105] SH:7/ML/E/5/0038

[106] Monday 1st, Tuesday 2nd, Wednesday 3rd October 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0068

Diseases will follow.'[107] It would seem that Lister has logically inferred from this sentiment that if the Months *do* flow they will cure any dangerous Diseases, almost as if the flood of menstrual discharge will wash away the infection. Elsewhere, Lister has exhibited a general, quite stoic, acceptance of her period, such as when she is about to meet Mariana briefly in Manchester and starts her period the day before, writing, "*Began as soon as I got home this afternoon how unlucky to be at this time but what is is best.*"[108] So, Lister shows a level of positivity and acceptance about her period and its regularity. This attitude may not expand to include others noticing her period but when it comes to her private relationship with her body and its health and functions, she does not demonise or wish menstruation away, instead she regards it with a more nuanced, often neutral, regard, as she perceives it as signifying her good health. This nuance needs to be considered when scholars analyse Lister's journals for signs of gender dysphoria, as it adds significant information that may help enrich this discussion. I would argue that Lister's unease in her female body is largely social and not strictly private or internal, as in, she does not like what her bleeding represents socially to others, in that it signifies that she is a woman and a woman in the social sense must be passive, under-educated and generally constrained; however, her experience of periods is not strongly gendered or unwanted but simply accepted as a necessary and healthy bodily function.

Once Lister starts to include more information, we also get indications of the other effects that her period can have upon her body. She writes about her headache above, on the second day of menses, and then later during her December period we have a report of "*uneasiness*" in her bowels.[109] So we know that she can have bowel trouble and headaches during her period, though this is the first time that those conditions are recorded in correlation to her period, which might suggest that before contracting her venereal infection she did not see the point in recording such symptoms, or that these symptoms were not occurring. She also never records having any spirits and water before bed, or of wrapping her feet in a flannel, the treatments she has suggested to others or recorded of others doing to treat their menstrual pain or discomfort. It is possible to interpret this lack of record two

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[107] Aristotle, pseud. *Aristotle's Masterpiece,*p. 103

[108] Wednesday 17th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0112

[109] "*hardly any cousin today but a little uneasiness and complaint in my bowels*" - Sunday 23rd December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0089

ways, either as another sign of her refusal to shine too much attention upon her own menstrual activity, or as an indication that she does not usually have painful or bothersome periods that would require such treatment – though the amount of information that she does record about her general health suggests to me that it is most likely the latter.

The information that she gives us about her menstruation suggests that she generally had regular periods, with a heavier second day, that could last for up to six or seven days[110]; that these periods were not particularly painful for Lister, though they may sometimes have caused headaches or uneasy bowels; that she would estimate her period to come monthly and plan accordingly; that she aired her own menstrual napkins and would wear her drawers in bed and a handkerchief if caught out whilst visiting (or generally "*contrive and do as* [she] *could"*); that sex during her cousin, or her partner's cousin, was generally to be avoided, though exceptions to this rule could be made; that menstrual blood was not considered dirty or disgusting by Lister, unless it was particularly pungent and a sign of uncleanliness or lack of washing; and that she believed menstruation was healthy and if periods ceased bad health could ensue. She also had a reasonable understanding of female anatomy and other vaginal discharge, such as the whites, which she had learned from books such as *Aristotle's Masterpiece,* Cheselden's *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* and Robert Hooper's *Medical Dictionary.* As I have touched upon at the end of this section, her menstrual record became richer and more detailed once she began to have trouble with her "*venereal taint*". Furthermore, the website 'Packed for Potential' has begun a shared project to gather data on Lister's period, which so far has many entries for the 1830s and these show Lister continuing to use "cousin" to refer to her own period and also tend to include more detail in general, compared to her record prior to July 1821.[111] There is no shortage of information and my hope is that, as the stigma surrounding periods begins to finally wane and we come to view them as an ordinary bodily function, we will see many more studies on Lister's menstruation.

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[110] E.g., she notes during her November period, "*my cousin quite gone today*" seven days after her first day, Tuesday 27th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0082

[111] <https://www.packedwithpotential.org/projects/anne-listers-cousins> [Accessed 09/06/2023]

Boredom

Sally Wainwright introduces Lister in Anne Choma's biography as an 'extraordinary woman' and though this may be true in the sense that Lister is at times 'out of order', with eccentric qualities that stood out amongst her contemporaries, she is not always contrary to the regular or in possession of excessive talents or abilities.[1] No — for a large portion of her journalized life Lister is ordinary. She has issues with lying in too late, not doing enough of her studies, falling asleep at church, and she is privy to frequent "dawdling". She must wash her menstruation napkins, sew her drawers, go to the toilet, wash herself, eat, walk about, and talk to people she doesn't much like. Her journals offer an indulgent example of this sort of ordinariness in everyday life, a compendium of ordinary textual artefacts. The way that others have approached this feast of dullity has generally been to either place it carefully to one side and largely focus on where she is active and interested – or let's face it, largely when she is having sex – or they have regarded it with a sort of reproach, such as Steidele who writes, 'her notes are of questionable value, as far as the information in them is concerned, and far from entertaining.'[2] It is this 'questionable value' that I suppose I disagree with; it was precisely these details in her journals that created a depth and texture for me that other textual representations of life tend to leave out. As Robert Fothergill puts it, 'it is precisely the coral-like aggregations of minimal deposits that become addictive.'[3]

During lockdown, Zadie Smith published a collection of essays, titled *Intimations* (2020), and within this collection there is the profoundly banal essay 'Something to Do,' in which she explains her motivation to write as '*it's something to do'*.[4] The essay explores the strange predicament of Lockdown during which so many people were making copious amounts of banana bread and the realisation that 'there really *is* only time, and there will

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[1] Sally Wainwright, Foreward, *Gentleman Jack: The Real Anne Lister* (London: BBC Books, 2019), p. vii; And*, "Extraordinary, **A.** adj. **1. a.** Out of the usual or regular course or order" OED Online.* Oxford University Press, June 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1119340869>[Accessed 5 September 2021]

[2] Angela Steidele, translated by Katy Derbyshire, *Gentleman Jack, A biography of Anne Lister: Regency Landowner, Seducer and Secret Diarist* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2018), Epilogue: Reading Anne Lister's Writing

[3] Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 8

[4] Zadie Smith, *Intimations: Six Essays* (London: Penguin books, 2020), p. 19

always be too much of it.'[5] There is a portion of the essay that struck me, largely due to its emotional kick, but also for its resonance with my project here, which goes:

> In the absence of these fixed elements, I'd make up hard things to do, or things to abstain from. Artificial limits and so on. Running is what I know. Writing is what I know. Conceiving self-implemented schedules: teaching day, reading day, writing day, repeat. What a dry, sad, small idea of a life. And how exposed it looks, now that the people I love are in the same room to witness the way I do time.[6]

Lister and Smith 'do time' in a very similar way: they both have relatively solitary daily lives and must make up their own schedules, including 'hard things to do' and 'things to abstain from' and 'artificial limits'. The reason I feel this chapter is important is precisely because of Smith's emotional judgement that when her life is witnessed it appears to her as 'a dry, sad, small idea of a life'. I believe this assessment is symptomatic of how so many people view their day-to-day lives, a fear of the ordinary, of boredom and of loneliness. Lister is not always interesting or interested but rather she must cope with the unending march of time and, as such, her journal is full of moments of emptiness, of gaps and of looseness and lack. In this chapter, I will be exploring the ways in which she spent time when she was not doing anything in particular, when she was "dawdling"; as well as negotiating the modern conceptions of boredom and loneliness as they relate, or do not relate, with her experiences of all that could be "dull" in life.

😐

Virginia Woolf speaks of 'non-being' in her 'Sketch of the Past', which to Woolf is when a 'great part of every day is not lived consciously';[7] those moments in life that lack a certain

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[5] ibid., p. 24

[6] Ibid., p. 23

[7] Virginia Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' *Moments of Being: Autobiographical writings*, edited by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Vintage Digital, 2017), pp. 64 – 159, p. 79

form of interest, or a certain form of illumination. Woolf's sentiments do not easily apply to Lister's journal writing, as Lister's project of journal writing attempts to keep these everyday activities solidly within the conscious realm where they can be logged and accounted for. However, even within Lister's construction and maintenance of conscious living, she cannot account specifically for all time, and she arguably expresses a form of 'non-being' when she writes of "dawdling".

To dawdle was a term that became common after 1775, meaning: 'To idle, waste time; to be sluggish or lazy; to loiter, linger, dally'.[8] Though the relation between idling and dawdling is perhaps overly emphasised by its placement in the *OED* definition here. Idling is too close to doing nothing, whereas dawdling suggests some form of activity, as a wry article explains in *The Irish Monthly*:

> It has been said already that the dawdler is not necessarily an idler. Only a very brainless ninny can set himself out for doing nothing; but very many who imagine themselves to be very busy would, if they were as clear-sighted as Seneca, confess with him that they had spent most of their time *operosè nihil agendo*, "doing nothing very laboriously."[9]

This article goes on to offer advice and morally berate the loss of time imbued in dawdling, ending their article with the command: 'Let us work in earnest; let us dawdle no longer.'[10] This view of dawdling seems to be awfully apt to describe Lister's view of productivity and use of time, as I have mentioned in my introduction, she writes as epigraphs in two of her journals, Gibbon's quotation: '"I propose from this day to keep an exact journal of my actions and studies, both to assist my memory and to accustom me to set a due value on my time."'[11] The value placed on this time, however, is difficult to upkeep every single day through all those hours. This is nowhere more evident than in how many times Lister diligently records herself "dawdling", she uses the word 110 times over the three-year period. She sometimes uses it to suggest time wasted and she sometimes uses it when she

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[8] "dawdle, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/47505> [Accessed 13 June 2023]

[9] Anonymous or The Present Writer, 'On Dawdling,' *The Irish Monthly*, 15.165 (1887), pp. 138-143, p. 139

[10] ibid., p. 143

[11] SH:7/ML/E/1/0002

wishes to log an activity, such as a conversation, but without wanting to give details or perhaps when she can't remember the details. There is something about the presence of this "dawdling" that balances out the purposeful image of Lister that has been presented in the recent drama, *Gentleman Jack,* when Wainwright focuses on Lister's entry into coal mining and we see her striding about with great intention.[12] When we take some time to view her moments of "dawdling", we get to see her in her times of looseness, when she does not have shrewd criticisms to make, when she does not have an agenda to pursue, but is doing something with neither great attention nor energy.

Woolf explains her idea of non-being as a form of forgetfulness, which is wrapped up in conversation, saying, 'I have already forgotten what Leonard and I talked about at lunch; and at tea; although it was a good day the goodness was embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool.'[13] Lister also regularly uses dawdling in conjunction with conversation. For instance, over the course of Isabella Norcliffe's stay at Shibden in the summer of 1819, Lister writes:

> Dawdled away the evening in conversation[14]
>
> Dawdled away the evening talking to IN.[15]
>
> Came upstairs at 11 dawdled talking to IN. ¾ hour She sat in my room till near 2[16]
>
> Came upstairs at 10 ½ dawdling and talking to IN. till 11 ¼ [17]

These instances of "dawdling" are never accompanied with any detail of what was included in the conversation, suggesting that the content of the conversation was either uninteresting

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[12] Wainwright, S. (2019). *Gentleman Jack*: Episodes 1–8 (shooting script). Lookout Point Limited. Retrieved 13/06/2023, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scripts/tv-drama/gentleman-jack>

[13] Virginia Woolf, 'Sketches of the Past,' p. 79

[14] Monday 28th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0066

[15] Wednesday 7th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0068

[16] Friday 10th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0092

[17] Wednesday 15th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0094

and/or forgotten. This is further proven by the continued entry on Wednesday 7th July, when Lister goes on to say,

> Dawdled away the evening talking to IN. - My aunt and the rest gone out walking - Very fine day - very hot walking - though as I went the sun was not much out, and there was a little air - B. $2\frac{1}{2}$ deg. above changeable F. $62\frac{1}{2}$ at $9\frac{1}{2}$ p.m. - Came upstairs a few minutes after 11 - Sat up talking to IN. - *about Miss Browne Miss Caroline Greenwood jealous of her Mrs Milne liked Charlottes* [sic] *presents and the rank in life and fortune of Mr Norcliffe did not think much of her heart* [18]

The crypt hand goes on for some time with much detail of what was said by both of them, largely gossip about the Milnes. As you can see, earlier that evening when she is dawdling in conversation, there is no report of what was said. However, when she is simply "talking" with Tib later in the night and no dawdling is mentioned, there is much detail provided. So, when "dawdling" is used we have a need to allocate an activity to time spent, but a forgetfulness of what that activity entailed, a period of non-being, or 'nondescript cotton wool'.

There is forgetfulness in the term and there is also time, the idea that too much time has been spent over an activity or before settling down to an activity. For instance, writing a letter or packing,

> After a good deal of dawdling had just written nearly 1 ½ pages to Anne B.[19]

> Spent the rest of the morning in dawdling and siding my things after Bettey's cleaning[20]

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[18] SH:7/ML/E/3/0068

[19] Monday 6th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0091

[20] Thursday 28th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0105

B. B. dawdling and writing out the names of some books I should like to purchase[21]*

My aunt and I read the morning and afternoon service *dawdled all the day looking at my things and making little preparations for packing trying things on Mrs Waterhouses five handkerchiefs* etc. etc.[22]

B. B. and afterwards all the morning from coming upstairs […] at $11\frac{20}{60}$ to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ *dawdling over my accounts and one thing or other*[23]

Dawdled away the time watching the weather. Showery this morning and rained almost all last night -–

dawdling with things at the kitchen fire[24]

My favourite is when she dawdles away "the time watching the weather", the most static form of dawdling she does. It's interesting to see how dawdling can lie somewhere between wasting time and doing something with it, doing away with time, moving through it, or doing something with time but slowly or insignificantly. The dawdling can be akin to wondering but with more emphasis on time, such as when she writes of "dawdling and writing out the names of some books", such thinking is *too* slowly done. Or it can be akin to wandering, that sort of aimless motion, such as when she is dawdling about looking at her things, packing and trying things on. There is a directionality to her dawdling, she is moving towards or away from a task, or simply in the interval between two tasks, but the destination, the task completed, is arrived at too slowly or not at all.

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[21] *Before Breakfast, Monday 3rd January 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0019

[22] Sunday 24th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0085

[23] Saturday 27th January 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0122

[24] Friday 29th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0039

As you can see, when dawdling is used in activities that are considered embarrassing, such as arranging her undergarments to dry next to the kitchen fire, she writes it in her crypt hand. This is also true of when she uses it in conjunction with other activities that she wishes to keep hidden from wandering eyes. The most profuse use of the term in crypt hand is when she stays with the Norcliffe's (at Tib's) in the autumn of 1820. It appears in crypt hand ten times during this stay, largely in combination with her spending inappropriate time with either Miss Vallance, Anne Belcombe, or Tib:

> *should or rather might have sent my letter today but dawdled with the girls Miss V in particular*[25]

> *went to V - after slight opposition got into bed with my stockings and dressing gown on quarter hour dawdling and entreating she could not hold out any longer and let me have* [squiggle mark with line through] *a good kiss*[26]

> *I had just got into her and had her to me about a second or two when she heard a door shut started away and sent me off in the midst of our just beginning* [in margin: *half one* vid.] *kiss perhaps it was well we had dawdled too long but Tib did not come till I had been in my room five minutes then*[27]

The idea of dawdling in this context still has a sense of things taking longer than they should, but the action of dawdling seems to carry slightly more weight, as if it is a kind of shared dawdling, or a pointed dawdling, the type of dawdling that carries a communication, a sexual dawdling. Especially when it is used in the second quotation, when she spends a "*quarter of an hour dawdling and entreating*", in this sense it reads rather like an invitation, a space of time that is kept in waiting, expectantly, to be filled with a sexual activity. Perhaps in this particular sense, it is more weighted towards the notion of "lingering", with the sensual connotations that term produces, of feeling reluctant to leave a place, or a person.

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[25] Thursday 12th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0089

[26] Tuesday 24th October 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0094

[27] Monday 4th December 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0108

Dawdling is sometimes used with activities, as seen above, but much of the time it is used on it's own, as a gap of time, with nothing noted about what was done in that time, it was simply "dawdled away". The variations on this dawdling are:

Dawdling about for an hour before breakfast and afterwards[28]

somehow, or other, we contrived to dawdle away here 2 hours and 12 minutes; as we arrived at 12, and it was 2 $\frac{12}{60}$ when we set off again[29]

Dawdled away the evening[30]

Dawdled upstairs till after 5[31]

Came upstairs at 10$\frac{3}{4}$ - Dawdled about 1 thing or other till 12 -[32]

Came upstairs at 10 ¾ - *dawdled about half hour*[33]

Dawdled away the evening in fact, not feeling well enough to do anything[34]

[28] Saturday 8th May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0014

[29] Wednesday 2nd June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0047

[30] Tuesday 15th June 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0063

[31] Friday 23rd June 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0065

[32] Saturday 27th February 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0009

[33] Saturday 28th April 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0024

[34] Monday 21st May 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0029

Came upstairs at $10\frac{40}{60}$ - Dawdling till $11\frac{1}{2}$ -[35]

Dawdled over 1 thing or other till $11\frac{3}{4}$[36]

Dawdling about in my own room till 6[37]

Dawdling away all the morning till very near 2[38]

The word does not necessarily mean that absolutely nothing was done, though perhaps it does when she's too ill "to do anything". Instead, there's a suggestion that things have been done, but nothing of consequence, nothing productive in her eyes worth recording in the diary. Nothing interesting has occurred. She has perhaps been moving her things about, or looking out of the window, or daydreaming, or trying to make a decision about whether to walk out, but we'll never know, we only know that her time was spent "dawdling".

In Lister's journal, there are rare occasions when the dawdling is involuntary and unwanted, such as when she stays at the Dalton's in November 1821:

> *otherwise dawdled and trifled all the day I can do no other on account of the girls who in fact teaze me particularly Isabella who hangs about me and gives wettish kisses and looks pensive I like Marianne far the best*[39]

Lister's pairing of "*dawdled*" with "*trifled*" expresses a level of disdain in this entry and we get a real sense that this form of dawdling is time wasting at its most negative, an ugly and undesirable form of time wasting. However, in general, "dawdling" is largely a neutral term

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[35] Saturday 18th August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0054

[36] Tuesday 11th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0061

[37] Wednesday 9th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0093

[38] Monday 4th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0107

[39] Thursday 15th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0079

for Lister, written without comment as the unavoidable in-between segments of time that don't get attributed to some form of recognisable, or easily narrated, activity. Robyn Warhol writes of 'the unnarratable' in the Victorian novel and includes a section on 'the (unutterably) dull', in which she writes about 'that which is supposed to be too dull or too obvious to warrant saying.'[40] Warhol's point within this section is that what counts as unnarratable is subjective and a matter of taste. She then goes on to show how female writers, such as Charlotte Brontë and Louisa May Alcott, would narrate about activities such as sewing or cooking in ways that were largely not narrated by their male contemporaries, such as Charles Dickens. I would say in relation to Lister's use of "dawdling" that it can indeed show where she attributes value and where she does not, though, unlike novelists, her selection of what counts as narratable is made (mostly) daily and therefore relative to that day's events, so each selection is made in a new context and is dependent on many factors, such as her mood when she comes to write and what has occurred within the confines of that single day, or series of days. In a journal, the unnarratable is flexible.

😐

So dawdling is used when Lister is spending a long time over something, or as a catch-all word for activities that are unworthy of a full written description. Dawdling is perhaps Lister's expression of 'non-being'. Experiencing a lack of interest is not always neutral, however, and there are times when this lack is more negatively felt. We might call this form of suffering 'boredom', but this word was not in existence in 1819 - 1822, though they did have 'bore' or 'bored'.[41] These terms were in growing usage during this period and one cultural example that helps to explain Lister's knowledge of the terms is Lord Byron's poem *Don Juan.* During my three-year sample, Lister reads the first five cantos of *Don Juan* (i.e. the ones that were written) and is a fan, writing in response to poor criticism of it: "that such

[40] Robyn R. Warhol, 'Narrating the Unnarratable: Gender and Metonymy in the Victorian Novel,' *Style*, 28.1 (1994), pp. 74-94, p. 81

[41] The *OED* dates one of the earliest uses as 1853, "boredom, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/21650. Accessed 13 June 2023; and, it dates "bore" as specifically a French malady of ennui as early as 1766, though it's more general usage as 1778, "bore, n.2." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/21637> [Accessed 13 June 2023]

power should be so abused!"[42] He uses 'bore' within this poem, mainly in the sense of to carry or forbear, but also as an insult, e.g. 'You're a bore,/ A charlatan, a coxcomb', and as the version that most closely relates to our version of boredom, when he compares himself to his 'epic brethren': 'They so embellish, that 'tis quite a bore/ Their labyrinth of fables to thread through'.[43] But Lister only uses 'bore' in its noun form once in my three year sample, so we can assume that at least in her social circle, the word was not yet popular. She uses 'bore' against Isabella Dalton whilst staying at the Croft — as you can see above, she's not a fan of Bell and it doesn't feel too surprising that out of all the characters in her journals, this teenage girl gets the insult — "*Isabella sat with me in my room most of the time reading aloud Italian and being in fact a bore to me*", and she notes this occasion as simply "*Bell a bore"* in her index.[44] For Lister, the term is used as a derogatory way to describe a person who is annoying her or being a nuisance. She goes on to say that she did not let on that she found "*Bell a bore*" and that "*this would not do for long".* This experience is situational, and Lister knows that the feeling is caused by something external that she has to grin and bear. It is a social dilemma and confined to temporal limits.

Boredom is often conflated with 'ennui', for instance, the *OED* uses it as a way to define boredom, defining it as the 'state of being bored; tedium, ennui'. However, both Patricia Meyer Spacks and Peter Toohey in their respective books on boredom have distinguished between boredom and ennui. Spacks writes,

> Boredom was not (*is* not) the same as ennui, more closely related to acedia. Ennui implies a judgement of the universe; boredom, a response to the immediate. Ennui belongs to those with a sense of sublime potential, those who feel themselves superior to their environment.[45]

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[42] Wednesday 13th September 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0082

[43] Lord Byron, *Don Juan,* Canto the First, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/21700/21700-h/21700-h.htm> [Accessed 14/06/2023]

[44] Thursday 8th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0078 - and in the index, 'bell a bore' SH:7/ML/E/5/0133

[45] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 12

She also adds that '[b]oredom presents itself as a trivial emotion that can trivialise the world.'[46] Toohey separates ennui into what he names 'existential boredom' and differentiates it from what he names 'simple boredom'. He writes, 'to my mind, existential boredom is a hotchpotch of a category, and one whose basis is more intellectual than experiential - it is a condition which seems to me to be more read about and discussed than actually experienced.'[47] I wish to focus on trivial or simple boredom, the one that does not reach sublime heights but instead is trapped tediously in the world of eternal church sermons.

Spacks and Toohey also share the opinion that boredom is not inevitable or natural. Spacks writes that boredom 'does not necessarily inhere in being human'[48] and Toohey writes that '[b]oredom isn't necessarily and at all times part of human life. Humans always have had the capacity for this emotion, I believe, but not all societies enable or require humans to experience boredom.'[49] Bearing this in mind, I could argue that Lister does not experience 'boredom' in the same way that we do, or that it did not exist as an experience. This is partly true, as it is difficult to prove one way or the other, and Lister rarely describes experiences in ways that would suggest boredom as we would understand it. In contemporary times, the term has grown into its own kingdom, as an all-pervasive noun that yawns wider than any given situation, a place we can stumble into and get stuck in, a no-man's-land lurking beyond the interesting. This form of boredom is not expressed in Lister's journals. It is hard to believe, however, that someone could live without feeling bored, and here I would like to second Wendell O'Brien's simple formulation:

> Boredom is:
> (1) a mental state of
> (2) weariness,
> (3) restlessness, and
> (4) lack of interest in something to which one is subjected,

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[46] ibid., p. 13

[47] Peter Toohey, *boredom: a lively history* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 6

[48] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom*, p.14

[49] Peter Toohey, *boredom: a lively history,* p. 156

(5) which is unpleasant or undesirable,

(6) in which the weariness and restlessness are causally related to the lack of interest.[50]

O'Brien does not include time in his definition, though he does include 'weariness', a concept that draws on the passing of time, the *OED* defining 'weary, adj' as 'discontented at the continuance or continued recurrence of something'.[51] Roland Barthes also emphasises the time that inheres in weariness, writing, '*Fatigo*: to wear out [...] Cf. the older Gide: I am a tire that flattens. In the very image, an idea of duration: what doesn't stop leaning, emptying itself. It's the paradoxical infinity of weariness: the endless process of ending.'[52] This sounds rather awful, though Spacks seems to hold a lighter view of weariness, writing that '[b]oredom, unlike weariness, carries intimations of despair.'[53] I partially disagree, I think there *can* be despair in weariness, though I understand that in general the term can be used across a broader spectrum of intensity, which sometimes does not reach the heights of despair but falls somewhere in the vicinity of the doldrums. In Lister's various expressions of boredom-like, or boredom-adjacent, language, there is typically a reference to undergoing time, lack of interest, and feelings that touch upon the 'unpleasant and undesirable'.

The first three terms I wish to dawdle through are "tedious", "dreary", and "tiresome". These words are most evocative of this sense of weariness that tugs at the tails of boredom. Interestingly, she uses these words very infrequently. Tiresome seems to come closest to our understanding of 'boring', for example:

Mr West, of Southram chapel, preached 36 minutes from Malachi. c. 4. v. 2. "But unto you that fear my name; shall the sun of righteousness arise with

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[50] Wendell O'Brien, 'Boredom,' *Analysis,* 74, 2 (April, 2014), pp. 236 - 244, p. 237

[51] "weary, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/226628> [Accessed 13 June 2023]

[52] Roland Barthes, *The Neutral,* trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 16

[53] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom,* p. 11

> healing in his wings." A tiresome sermon, good neither in language nor delivery[54]

However, then it is used slightly differently here:

> the quack Dr Healey of Manchester, had got so bad a cold that his defense was read by the ^leading^ council for the defendants, and a curious, tiresome, performance it was[55]

Here, if we swapped out "tiresome" for 'boring' the meaning would shift and wouldn't fit the idea of the defense being "curious". "Tiresome" is doing work here that 'boring' cannot do, it is suggesting a snobbish evaluation of the speech made by the leading council and by combining the words "curious", "tiresome", and "performance" she is ridiculing the man. If she had chosen to call the leading council a "bore", she would have expressed something else entirely, a condemnation that the man held no interest for her, instead, he has piqued her curiosity, but he has done so in a tiresome way. The meaning suggested is of a stupid, silly, or ridiculous spectacle that goes on for too long and eventually leads to Lister's disdain.

"Dreary" is only used twice in my three year sample, and both times they are when Lister is contemplating a life alone.

> *often as I have thought I should not be sorry when Tib went I felt a sinking at my heart this afternoon as I thought how soon she would be gone and I left all alone none to love to turn to or to speak to all will be dreary and forlorn oh that I had a fit companion to dote on to beguile the tedious hours but I must study and never think of love and all the sweet endearments of life*[56]

and,

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[54] Saturday 25th December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0016

[55] Monday 20th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0039 (the Hunt trial)

[56] Sunday 26th September 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0097

> *oh how my heart longs after a companion and how I often wish for an establishment of my own but I may then be too old to attach any one and my life shall have passed in that dreary solitude I so ill endure*[57]

In the first quotation, Tib has been staying with Lister at Shibden for three months, and Lister is surprised at her own sadness at Tib's imminent departure. In the second quotation, Lister has just had a conversation with her aunt about inviting Miss Brown around for dinner, and her aunt has shared that her uncle wouldn't approve, so Lister has decided she must put off pursuing Miss Brown until she has more independence. In these examples, "*dreary*" is very much associated with loneliness, with a form of boredom caused by the lack of stimulation from somebody (and quite specific somebodies), rather than from something. It is also a future state in both cases, which is interesting, as Lister is lonely (in her formulation of the word, without a companion) for a good thirteen months of the three year timespan I have studied, but in those thirteen months, she doesn't regularly complain of this form of dreariness, indeed, for most of the time her endeavour to "*study and never think of love*" works. The displacement of this dreariness into a future that never arrives seems to be an indication of Lister's general ability to offset her negative feelings into some abstract future. A way to deny and dismiss any yearning and retain her sense of stoicism. More on this loneliness later.

The "*tedious hours*" are what Lister most fears, yet she only uses "tedious" five times in three years, and most of them are related to her writing up of her journey to France with her aunt in May 1819 (she uses the word 5 times, 4 in the six month period after her France trip). After this visit, she has to write out the proper copy of her journal from her pencil journals, write out her finance accounts, and she also decides to write a booklet for her friends the Duffins, which takes her six months to complete. All of this catching up of work is a painstaking process, not helped by Tib's visit of three months ('IN. sat with me (sewing) till near 2 which rather interrupted me'[58]). She uses "tedious" twice about her French accounts:

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[57] Saturday 30th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0106

[58] Tuesday 27th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0074

> All the morning, till 3, over this summary of French accounts - My particularity makes the thing so tedious - I am not satisfied unless it is right to a fraction
>
> Then, in her index, 'French accounts Why so tedious (151.)[59]

So we have her "particularity" leading the accounts to be "tedious" and they are so "tedious" that it is also noted in her index, so a description she stands by later. The fact that this tedium is self-inflicted by her own "particularity" seems to add some more substance to the idea that without "*a companion*" she will have to endure "*tedious hours*", as she will be condemned to endure her own company with all its tedious particularity. Then, she writes of her relief at finally finishing the booklet that she wrote out for the Duffins, all 96 pages of the glorious material (which I must say, sounds as tedious to read as it was to write, with all its many dry details, such as measurements of monuments and bridges…):

> turning again to Tillement's Emperor's vol. 9 about Julian looking over the last 30 pages of the letter to Mr and Mrs D-, and wrote a note to Mr D- giving the dimensions of the Louvre gallery, account of the Diana etc. vid. my own copy of the letter p. 72 - so that, after all, this letter of 96 pages was to have been sent off at 1, but I was hurried and did not get it despatched till $\frac{1}{2}$ past - I am heartily glad it is finished and gone - it has been a sad tedious concern but I hope I have learnt something during the time spent in writing it - at least I have gained a valuable turn towards a habit of patient reference and correction which, should I ever publish, may be of use to me[60]

This self-inflicted tedium continues to plague Lister. Though, in this account we get a reason, or at least a compensation, for undergoing such "patient reference and correction": she may be able to use it to help her write something worth publishing. Her French accounts are also of use: she needs to know how much money she spent and how much money she has. In this way, it would seem that for Lister, her moments of tedium are produced by arduous productivity – those tasks that require more effort and time than she was planning to

[59] Thursday 12th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0080 and SH:7/ML/E/3/0120

[60] Wednesday 22nd December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0015

expend. So, sometimes she is "doing nothing very laboriously"[61] in her dawdling, or she is, on the other hand, "doing something very laboriously". She is experiencing a 'lack of interest in something to which one is subjected'.[62] In this case, it is something that she has subjected herself to. Lister's hope for "*a fit companion*", in this regard, can be seen as an opportunity to escape from the gruelling chore of being forever productive, whilst that very productivity is also viewed as a way to distract from the "*dreary solitude*".

So, "tiresome", "dreary" and "tedious" are all adjectives that gesture towards a condition of boredom, but Lister has a favourite word that I think is even more interesting to inspect: "dull". She uses this word much more frequently than all the words above put together (36 times in total, compared to 11). "Dull" overlaps with the definition of boredom, as it is used to describe something or someone as lacking interest in the same way that we might use 'bored' or 'boring'. However, the great thing about the word is that it has a much richer and broader list of meanings, most likely accounted for by its older status. "Dull" has been around since the fourteenth century, which made it in 1819 over four hundred years older than 'bore'. Here is my précis of the *OED*'s list of definitions:

Dull, adj. can mean:

a stupid person,

a feeling of insensibility in the bodily senses,

an indistinct pain,

a sluggish movement,

stagnant trade,

a person who suffers from listlessness or is evaluated by others to not be cheerful,

something or someone that causes ennui,

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[61] Anonymous or The Present Writer, 'On Dawdling,' *The Irish Monthly*, 15.165 (1887), pp. 138-143, p. 139

[62] Wendell O'Brien, 'Boredom,' *Analysis,* 74, 2 (April, 2014), pp. 236 – 244, p. 237

a blunt object,

a colourless object or one lacking brightness or clarity,

and last, but certainly not least, gloomy or overcast weather.[63]

This assortment of definitions contrasts quite strongly with the definition found in Bailey's *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary,* the copy that Lister had in her possession, in which it simply writes, 'stupid, heavy, sluggish.'[64] When I searched for the word "dull" throughout this dictionary, it tends to crop up most frequently alongside insults, such as 'blockhead' or 'sot,' suggesting a similar sort of disdain, an annoyance at being subject to the 'unpleasant and undesirable,' that the words 'bore' and 'boring' also imply. There is also the link to dawdling, 'to be sluggish or lazy', the implication that to be dull is one form of dawdling, though, as I will show, a more cumbersome and heavy word for Lister, used with less neutrality.

Before we come around to the instances when Lister uses the word in ways that most closely resemble 'boring', I want to look at the other ways she uses this word. I want to do this for two reasons: a) because a word always carries the allusions and connotations of its other meanings even if they're not the meanings directly called into action by the given context - and with "dull" in particular there is a crossover of meanings; and b) because the purpose of this section is to look at where interest is lacking, and though we may understand this now as 'boring', it can also mean other things, or other ways of being or seeing the world.

Considering "dull" has such a strong association with various symptoms of illness, as seen above, and Lister does speak of illness with some detail, she only uses "dull" three times to describe her bodily complaints:

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[63] "dull, adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2021. Web. 6 September 2021.

[64] Nathan Bailey, *An universal etymological English dictionary,* 2nd edn., (London, 1724), 1724. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0114367044/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=b8487e7c&pg=291> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

Too heavy and languid to think of a kiss last night and got up this morning rather dullish Got up with a little head-ache, and feel of languor, lowness, and wish for taciturnity -[65]

- was interrupted from $12\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ by Mrs William Rawson and Miss Threlkeld's calling and staying $\frac{1}{2}$ hour, and by my staying downstairs $\frac{1}{2}$ hour longer - All this unsettled me, and, besides, feeling very heavy and dull, dozed from 3 to 4 - It will be Sat. before I shall be able to finish Herodot.[66]

Came upstairs at 11, and sat an hour with Mrs Milne in her room - *being sleepy and dullish downstairs*[67]

The first quotation most precisely fits the context of illness, especially as Lister wrote in the entry preceding this one, 'Felt heavy and unwell during the evening'[68], and then she explains that she is suffering from 'a little head-ache'. This, combined with her feeling of 'languor', means that her use of "dullish" covers three of the definitions given above, as it includes a feeling of insensibility in the bodily senses, an indistinct pain, a sluggish movement. In this case, the use of the suffix '-ish' reflects the scale of dullness, as she only has a *little* head-ache. The coupling of "dull" and "heavy" occurs again in the second quotation, recalling the 'sluggish' body again, but also making me think of 'a blunt object', as though her body has become a huge, grey paperweight. This time, we get not just "dull" in its pure form but the addition of the adverb "very". This kind of dull is more intensely experienced than the other two kinds. The third quotation brings "sleepy" into the mix, so that we get again this idea of insensibility. "Dull", "or "dullish", in these instances works to describe that strange fog that blankets the mind when feeling tired and unwell, and again, in this, we can see how gloomy weather can be seen as a metaphor for the sensation.

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[65] Monday 9th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0079

[66] Thursday 13th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0061

[67] Sunday 9th December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0085

[68] Sunday 8th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0079

Which brings us around to one of Lister's most popular uses of "dull": describing the weather. She uses it nine times in this context, and there is something about the collation of the weather reports into a list that sounds like a poem, so here they are:

> Dull, darkish, lowering day, but fair[69]

> Fine day, tho' not much sun, and rather thick and dullish in the morning[70]

> Dullish morning rain in the afternoon and evening[71]

> Very fine, soft day - tho' rather dampish and dullish before breakfast highish wind towards night.[72]

> Fine day, tho' windy and looking dull and wildish when I set off to Halifax - finer afterwards and the wind lower[73]

> Fine day - tho' dullish and dampish till about 11 a.m. ^gentle^ rain came on about 8 in the evening and a good deal of rain fell during last night[74]

> Dull morning rainy afternoon some heavy showers - fair in the evening but thickish and likely for rain tomorrow.[75]

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[69] Tuesday 4th July 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0067

[70] Thursday 13th July 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0069

[71] Wednesday 26th July 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0071

[72] Wednesday 31st January 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0123

[73] Saturday 3rd February 1821, SH:7/ML/E/4/0124

[74] Tuesday 24th April 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0024

[75] Monday 13th August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0053

> Did nothing in the evening - Dullish sort of day, but fair - A few drops of ^damp and^ small rain between 9 and 10[76]

> Dullish day - a drop or 2 of small rain as I set off to Halifax and afterwards but the wind rose, and kept it off - wind high towards night with a little rain[77]

Again, we get a scale of "dullish" to "dull", indeed, the majority of her adjectives to describe the weather have a tendency to be given the suffix "-ish", including "darkish", "dampish", "highish", "wildish", and "thickish". I think this use of language reflects the transitory and ever-changing nature of the weather. Lister finds it difficult to be quite so specific all the time. It contrasts with her barometer and thermostat readings that she records every night, for example, for the last quotation given above, she also records in that entry: "B. $1\frac{1}{2}$ deg above rain. F. 47 at 11 p.m."[78] The air pressure and temperature may be factors of her environment that she can specify, but when it comes to describing the experience of living within that environment, she must dull her specificity.

We get a real sense of what is included in Lister's understanding of the term "dull/ dullish" in these weather reports; or rather, we see what company "dull" keeps. They emphasise how deeply certain physical qualities are associated with the word. She uses "thick/thickish" repeatedly in collaboration with "dull", which acts to compliment the version of "dull" that describes something as 'opaque' or 'muffled'. Combined with the pairing of it with "heavy" when concerned with illness, "dull" appears to represent a feeling that is very physically overbearing. When it is "dull" it can be dark or there can be little sun, though strangely for Lister it is never 'grey' (and Lister never uses 'grey' to describe the weather, which I find very puzzling, as it's one of my favourites); indeed, in some ways, "dull" stands in for grey in its reference to some form of indistinct colour. And, for Lister, "dull" tends to be used as a prelude to rain or as a suggestion of rain to come, hence "dullish sort of day, *but* fair", or "dull morning rainy afternoon"; or, it can be used with "small rain", or when it is "dampish". The threat of rain in particular is what can lead Lister to fall back on

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[76] Wednesday 15th August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0053

[77] Thursday 21st March 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0111

[78] ibid.

tedious tasks, as she doesn't like to go out when it's wet, for example, she writes in the warmer month of May: "So likely for rain in the afternoon that I did not go out - turned out fair then but a wet evening - therefore wrote out the Table of contents of my letter to Mr D- and continued the Literary Index to this vol of my journal from p. 38 to p. 102."[79] So the threat of rain is both active in turning Lister towards these tedious tasks and also forms their backdrop. Perhaps it is unfair, therefore, to say such tasks are entirely self-inflicted. The dull weather can sometimes orient Lister towards tedium.

So, "dull" has a very bodily presence, compared to 'boring'. 'Boredom,' as O'Brien explains, 'is partly an affective state, a feeling. It is not a mere bodily feeling in the way that, say, toothache and nausea, are. If there is any particular distinctive raw feel to it at all (I do not think there is), it is certainly not located in any part of the body you can put your finger on.'[80] This suggests that 'boredom' is only indistinctly a bodily feeling and falls somewhere between a feeling and a cognitive state. Whereas, we see how "dull" keeps company with a heavy and languid body and with a thickish, darkish, dampish world. It is related to what happens in the world and is used to describe our presence in our bodies and in the world; it is a word of sensation.

Bearing this distinction in mind, we turn towards the instances in which Lister uses "dull" in a way that more closely resembles our usage of 'boring'. The simplest examples of this are when she describes church sermons:

> Mr James Knight preached 34 minutes, very dully, from Hebrews ch. 4. v. 1[81]

Here, though she uses the adverb form of "dull" to describe how the sermon was delivered, the meaning appears similar to the definition of 'bore, v.: To weary by tedious conversation or simply by the failure to be interesting.' There is nothing more said, the word "dully" is sufficient to communicate the effect of the experience, it is a suffering of the mind, a lack of interest undergone for 34 minutes. There is no need for other descriptors, such as about the feel of the atmosphere or the sound of his voice, "dully" is enough. This form of descriptive

[79] Thursday 18th May 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0055

[80] Wendell O'Brien, 'Boredom,' p. 238

[81] Sunday 1st August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0076

weight, a sort of dismissal (lacking explanation), is also persistent in how we use 'boring'; we do not need to say why when this word is applied, it says everything and nothing.

Other than the odd, badly delivered sermon, Lister can find certain social situations dull. The first example of these is when she goes to visit the Saltmarshes in Halifax, a family that she is friendly with, though occasionally bad-mouths in the privacy of her journal; they are the best Halifax can offer her for friends around her own age. She is particularly friends with Emma Saltmarshe, but on this occasion, they are joined by Emma's husband:

> *Mr S sat with us all the time after tea… I know not how it is I thought Emma a little under restraint on this subject before her husband and that he might be a little so before his wife I have often thought married people the best company when separated I never knew a woman so pleasant when her husband was by I came away feeling unsatisfied tho they were both very civil and friendly I had rather sit an hour with Emma and not stay tea the evening is dullish*[82]

This time we have the adage that the evening left her "*feeling unsatisfied*", which befits the lack of interest provided by Emma, an interest that she usually expects to be fulfilled and that was blocked by her husband's presence. The strange use of present tense, "*the evening* is *dullish*", shows how the lack of satisfaction has followed her home. Her use of present tense could mean that she has shifted topic and is now describing the weather, however, I would add that her decision to write this phrase in crypt hand points towards an assessment of the social evening, as (to my knowledge) she always writes about the weather in plain hand. In this way, the suffix '-ish' is perhaps more an indication of her sulky mood – that she finds even her sense of dullity unsatisfactory – than a suggestion that this dull was only somewhat present.

She also complains of dullness while staying at the Daltons, the family that she also complained of "dawdling" too much with and the family with the infamous Bell ("a bore"). There are five different instances when the term is employed while staying with them. Firstly, we have a clue as to their perspective of Lister's life at Shibden. Mrs Dalton questions whether Lister will marry, and Lister says she will have a companion, but not Tib as she has

[82] Friday 30th March 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0018

her sister Charlotte to take care of, and then Lister makes this general statement about all the Daltons collectively:

> *they have asked innumerable questions about my uncle and Shibden and joked much and pitied me for living such a dull life*[83]

Here the idea of a "*dull life*" is very much in reference to Lister's assumed loneliness; it is a social diagnosis. The "*dull life*" is their reaction to knowing she only has her elderly aunt and stubborn uncle for company and has no suitable acquaintances in town to keep her pleasantly occupied. The Daltons perceive this life as dull, or rather, as boring. Where is the interest? Where the intrigue? They do not fully conceive the extent of, and the interest generated by, Lister's studying, as they are a family who lack eccentricity in this regard, the girls, Marianne and Isabella, paint or play the piano and read awful books:

> In the evening they read aloud about 30pp. more of Lady Morgan's Italy, a stupid, dull, flippant florid concern[84]

This is the second usage of "dull"; here it is alongside "stupid", so it accentuates just how stupid this book is and adds the additional associations of heavy and sluggish, and the addition of "florid" may point towards the feeling of weariness when something goes on for too long, when it is too excessive it tires and causes a sapping away of interest. For Lister, this book lacks interest and more than that, it offends, as she does not give just any book such a long stretch of adjectives to condemn it. This book has really pissed her off. We get a sense that the excessive "dawdling" experienced at the Daltons is boring Lister to an inch of her life, which seems particularly ironic when we know that they pity her for what they believe to be a dull existence.

The third instance is given when Lister is taken to a ball by the Daltons. The ball sounds rather a flaccid affair:

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[83] Wednesday 7th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0078

[84] Tuesday 6th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0077

> *Mrs D said she would introduce me to Mrs Tower if I liked but was evidently well pleased at my saying no which seeing all this induced me to do Mrs D never offered to introduce me to anyone else I spoke ^once^ to Mr Tweedy and a little now and then to Mr Hartley and here ended my acquaintaneship* [sic] *with all the party assembled Mrs D seemed to feel herself a person of no importance Marianne actually appeared of much more I was amused with staring about but otherwise the ball could not have been more dull to me*[85]

It does not seem surprising in this circumstance that Lister was bored. She sits alone with no one to speak to, not even the people she came with, watching people have (one hopes) a good time. She tries to give herself the consolation that she was "*amused with staring about*", but this seems to be an act of resistance against admitting to being bored at an event that is supposed to engage and entertain; an attempt to look on the sunny side.

The last two instances are given in the same entry about the two girls, Marianne and Isabella. They have Mr Norcliffe, Tib's brother, come to stay briefly, and he only really gets on with Lister. Here we have Lister coming around to the company of the girls and then defending them against Norcliffe:

> *a rather less dull day than yesterday the girls are beginning to be rather less stupid I told Norcliffe they were shy he thinks they have no manner nothing like the Sleningford girls how said I can it be expected remember how little they have seen only a few Richmond balls a winter or two in York would do them good but they are too shy to relish the thought of it ...*

She believes their inability to create interest in company is caused by their lack of social experiences, they have not been out in York yet, have not been tutored in the art of conversation (we presume). Though the girls are becoming more entertaining for Lister, and she has only just defended them, the entry ends with her own scathing report of how Marianne is so trite:

> Sat in Mar's room till near one - *she joking about complaining of being cold in bed and about having Norcliffe which sort of jokes are always dullish to me*

[85] Thursday 15th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0080

but she is no great shakes of a companion at all times childish and seemingly passionless[86]

Here it is the graceless joking about Norcliffe that peeves her and leads her to complain of the girl's immaturity and lack of passion. The latter accusation seems rather uncalled for but does suggest what may have interested Lister more: perhaps if Marianne had shown a romantic passion for Norcliffe, rather than making a bawdy joke about him, Lister would have been all ears.

Considering Lister only stayed with the Daltons for less than a month, the amount of "dawdling" and the quantity of "dullish" experiences is inconsistently high. It is telling of where interest is lacking for Lister, or rather, where these lacks are most agonising for her to experience. At the Daltons she gets to write her journal and write letters, but otherwise, there is nothing else to entertain her. She cannot study, she cannot go out on walks alone (which means, she cannot go out on long walks), she cannot visit friends when she wants to, she does not go to church every Sunday, and she has no love-object, no one to "*beguile the tedious hours*". On top of that, she must bear the company of two young girls whose tempers do not suit her, and who tend to get on her nerves.[87] There is a sense of entrapment at the Daltons; Lister is restrained in many ways and though she makes the most of it and tolerates the visit as best she can, it is very much representative of Wendell's suggestion that boredom is a 'lack of interest in something to which one is subjected, (5) which is unpleasant or undesirable'.[88]

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So, we've seen Lister dawdle about, feel sluggish, complain of darkish weather, and get bored by church sermons, bad company, and trite jokes, and we've had a brief glimpse of

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[86] Tuesday 20th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0081

[87] '*said I to myself how tired should I be to live here these girls are very fond of me but their tempers would bother me desperately*' Sunday 9th November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0078

[88] Wendell O'Brien, 'Boredom,' p. 238

how she envisions her loneliness as "*dreary solitude*". It is this latter perspective of boredom, or a dull life, that I would like to finish on. I do not want to mislead: Lister's use of "dull" to refer to a lonely or desolate state are not particularly frequent, but this does not discount them: they do exist, and they do inhabit the darker side of what it is to be without interest.

Loneliness has often been associated with boredom, as Toohey writes, '[i]t's very easy to confuse boredom with loneliness. Both involve a lack of external stimuli: in the case of loneliness what's lacking is the company of people or of a specific person.'[89] There is lack of interest at the heart of both conditions and both conditions cause suffering. Loneliness, like boredom, only came into existence as we understand it today in the nineteenth century, as Fay Bound Alberti explains in her book *A Biography of Loneliness,*

> [t]he meanings of loneliness [...] changed. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, loneliness did not have the ideological and psychological weight that it does today. Loneliness meant simply 'oneliness', which was less a psychological or emotional experience than a physical one. Deriving from the term 'lonely', oneliness meant simply the condition of being alone.[90]

So, just as boredom slowly collected an internal set of attributes that, though related to the external world, became more and more the responsibility and experience of the individual, loneliness also grew larger than its original external definitions. I do not find the correlation coincidental, but rather a strong indication that the two states have an overlap and are, or have been, brought on by the same societal shifts and changes. Though Toohey tries to simplify loneliness by suggesting that it is caused by lack of external stimuli, more recent studies have found that it is much more of an internal issue, as John T. Cacioppo and Stephanie Cacioppo write in the *Lancet*,

> Loneliness has been associated with objective social isolation, depression, introversion, or poor social skills. However, studies have shown these characterisations are incorrect, and that loneliness is a unique condition in

[89] Peter Toohey, *boredom: a lively history,* p. 102

[90] Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 18

> which an individual perceives himself or herself to be socially isolated even when among other people.[91]

How loneliness is defined is an ongoing and contested area, especially within social sciences, however, the two definitions I prefer are Rook's (quoted by Lars Andersson, quoted by Alberti):

> an enduring condition of emotional distress that arises when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood, or rejected by others and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activities, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy.[92]

And Olivia Laing's less scientific formulation 'that loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability, for one reason or another, to find as much intimacy as is desired.'[93] It is easy to see how boredom may interact with loneliness, how the lack of interest in a person or from a person of interest is included in the 'emotion cluster'[94] that is perceived as loneliness; how interest is so indelibly wrapped up with the meaning we derive from intimacy. This is integral to how Lister perceives her own loneliness, that it is the product of a certain lack of interest and want of intimacy.

Lister is a romantic, to Miss Vallance in 1820 she "*explained the enthusiasm and romance of my natural disposition"*[95] and she reports writing a letter to Mariana in February 1821, saying the following:

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[91] John T. Cacioppo and Stephanie Cacioppo, 'The Growing Problem of Loneliness,' *Lancet,* (Feb, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30142-9> [Accessed 14/06/2023], p. 426

[92] Lars Andersson, 'Loneliness research and interventions: A review of the literature', *Ageing & Mental Health*, 2 (1998), pp. 264–74, p. 265.

[93] Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2016), pp. 3 - 4

[94] 'I describe loneliness as an emotion 'cluster', a blend of different emotions that might range from anger, resentment, and sorrow to jealousy, shame, and self-pity.' Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness*, p. 6

[95] Friday 27th December 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0113

> *the following in crypt I know not what to make of myself but that I am at heart romantic as ever and that be it hid and smothered as it may I still feel all the fervour of impassioned tenderness and still adore as fondly and as faithfully as ever - you cannot divine what I sometimes endure and fate forbid you should yet I am patient Mary you love me and I am happy*[96]

She clarifies that she wrote this section in her crypt hand to Mariana, which does suggest that the inclusion of "*romantic*" and her description of this state, "*the fervour of impassioned tenderness*", are not appropriate for Mariana's husband, Charles, to read. Lister could not throw such writing *"on ^the excess of mere^ friendship".*[97] So by romance, or being a romantic, Lister certainly seems to be implying a form of romantic love that we understand today. She does not mean the Romantic that wanders upon the crests of mountains and dabbles in the sublime, though her version of romance is certainly informed by this genre, as she writes in reaction to Mariana's more "*worldly*" form of love, "*give me a little romance it is the greatest purifier of our affections and often an excellent guard against libertinism".*[98] So romantic love for Lister is a balancing act between erotic and impassioned urges and pure and faithful behaviour. Romance stands against libertinism for Lister, and she believes in it so strongly that she identifies with it; it forms part of her "*natural disposition*" and she is "*at heart romantic*". Lister must "*endure*" this lack of a romantic partner and it is her great interest in romance that leads her to complain of loneliness, a condition that for Lister arises when faced with this particular lack of interest. As Alberti writes, '[t]he language and history of the romantic ideal are important [...], for an inability to find 'the one' can generate loneliness through a sense of lack'.[99]

My first example shows how Lister uses interest, and its lack, to manage her desire. She does not express loneliness here, though it does provide some context to how she might construct loneliness, or what loneliness might mean to her. Once Lister has decided that Miss Brown is not someone she should pursue, due to the fact Miss Brown is engaged to be married, she starts to convince herself that she is not interested in her anyway:

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[96] Friday 16th February 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0006

[97] Monday 25th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0037

[98] Thursday 18th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0113

[99] Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness*, p. 12

> From Whitley's along the Southgate, by Black wall and Royston road - in passing west-field, Miss Brown met me - prevented going to the library - her father and mother not yet returned - *common place conversation nothing very interesting indeed I thought her looking less well less pleasing than usual and felt her company dullish I do not feel the same interest in her I did before I knew she was positively engaged she is out of my reach knowing this makes all the difference in the world and her leaving Halifax will give me no sort of uneasiness I begin to think her dullish shall not perhaps be sorry to get rid of her*
>
> — and in index: Walked with Miss B- *think her dullish and fancy I shall not be sorry to get rid of her.*[100]

Lister uses her appreciation of her own interest as a method to protect herself in this case. She knows she has no choice in the matter either way: Miss Brown is to be married and there is nothing she can do about it, and furthermore, her class status would have prevented their close companionship regardless of any marriage proposal. So, Lister adapts to Miss Brown's newly perceived inaccessibility by purposefully regarding the woman as "*dullish*" and with "*nothing very interesting*" to say. Now that Miss Brown is "dullish", repeated twice in the entry and repeated again in her index, Lister "*shall not be sorry to get rid of her*". In this example, the direction of interest is towards a love-object, and we see how Lister can turn it away from that love-object when she feels threatened. In this formulation, to be "dullish" is to be without love-interest.

We see how this particular response is rather forced when two months later, she is still pursuing Miss Brown and declares that she is actually the only girl in the town who does interest her:

> *I like the girl she amuses many an idle thought and want someone to interest me she is the only one the town or neighbourhood affords that can do this at all*[101]

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[100] Thursday 12th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0080 and SH:7/ML/E/3/0120

[101] Saturday 30th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0106

We see how the existence of a love-object for Lister provides entertainment, fills in the blank spaces of her days, her "*idle*" thoughts. The dark side of this reliance on a love-object to provide interest and entertainment is that the notion of relinquishing the love-object means giving into a lack of interest, as we see when she tries again the next day to pull herself away from thoughts of Miss Brown:

> *I must not dream of anything like love or think but to improve and how to spend my time most pleasantly in study no gentle voice to cheer me no kind no fond congeniality to charm one listless hour tis dull tis life unblessing and unblest but still it must be so my heart must bear it and submit - oh never hart longed more for the waterbrooks than I for some amiable girl to love and by whom be loved --*[102]

The "*tis dull*" statement comes across like an exclamation here, implanted as it is after the list of all that she cannot have, the "*listless hour[s]*" that she will have to live without a love-object to alleviate even just "*one*" of them is too much, it is dull! There is also something about the way she shifts between "*no kind*" to "*no fond*" that reads rather like she is drafting out a poem. Then the line "*tis life unblessing and unblest*" possibly pushes towards a psalm – as a translation of Psalm 37 that was anthologised a lot in the 1820s-30s begins: 'With mines of wealth are sinners poor/ Unblessing and unbless'd.'[103] As we have seen earlier with her "*dreary solitude*", the only escape from this lack of interest is to direct interest into "*study*" and into her own improvement, though, as we also know, this can be tedious. She can think about her own improvement because it is within her power to pursue without restraint, whereas "*love*" is as far-off and as out of reach as God; as she suggests with her reference to psalm 42 – 'As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul for Thee, O God' – implying that she longs for "*an amiable girl*" more than a person longs for their God when they are downcast.[104] The level of distress expressed over a life without a love-object is high in this excerpt and it is significant that such a terrible thought is expressed with the word "dull". The beauty of her journal in this moment is that it allows her to creatively express her

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[102] Sunday 31st October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0106

[103] H. Auber, *The spirit of the Psalms, or, A compressed version of select portions of the Psalms* (London: For T. Cadell, Strand; C. & J. Rivington, Waterloo Place, and St. Paul's Church Yard, 1829), p. 38

[104] <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+42&version=KJ21> [Accessed 14/06/2023]

emotional distress at her imagined future of solitude and, in doing so, offers her an opportunity to create interest and entertainment for herself.

We see that Lister is conscious of her literary leaning within this entry when she goes on to write, after she has written a wiggly dash and turned the page:

> (5$\frac{3}{4}$ p.m.) *it has just struck me that I will some time write some verse on a life unblessing and unblest my aunt says I should do better to live alone than either she or my uncle I have more resources true but my heart could ill endure that solitude that shut it out from love that dearest soother of our troubles here*[105]

So here we have two interesting factors. Firstly, we have her sudden idea to spend her listless hours writing a verse on the topic, a way to counteract the burden of this lonely boredom. Spacks discusses the relation between writing and boredom most specifically in her work, beginning her introduction with a contemplation on the relationship between the writer and reader in their shared management of boredom:

> The need to refute boredom's deadening power impels the writer's productivity and the reader's engagement. In the best of all possible arrangements, an author's energy and a reader's reciprocate, establishing a "dialectics of desire" (Barthes 4). [...] The mutual dependence of writer and reader declares their human likeness in shared defiance of psychic entropy.[106]

We can see this at work in Lister's mind, a woman dedicated to turning her mind to productive habits of interest, ways of improvement, and away from deadening and wasteful boredom. She is not one to wallow often or for long, less than a few minutes in this case, as she only departed from talking to her aunt Anne at 5.10pm to write her journal: it would seem that in the very process of writing this complaint in her journal, it has occurred to her that she could turn this reflection into verse and make something of it (the notation of the

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[105] Sunday 31st October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0107

[106] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom*, p. 1-2

time this thought "*struck*" her is endearing, a suggestion that she believes this idea is such a revelation of genius that it requires recording exactly). Second, we are given her particular definition of "*solitude*". This word predates the concept of loneliness by at least two hundred years when it comes to frequent usage in Britain. Usually it simply means to be alone, without the applied emotional strife, but here we see Lister adapt the term to mean something more akin to loneliness as we might understand it. She has already used the word "*alone*" in its pragmatic sense and agreed with her aunt that she does indeed have the "*resources"* to cope with living without the help of others. So, here she is specific: it is "*<u>that</u> solitude"* that comes from not having a person to love, which she cannot endure.

Lister continues to associate a love-object as necessary to eliminate boredom from her life later in 1821 and 1822 when Miss Brown has been abandoned to her marriage to Mr Kelly, and she is again considering Mariana as her primary love-object. The significance of the quote below is that it is written in June 1821, after five months at home in Shibden without a long-term visitor. She has just bumped into Miss Walker on a walk:

> *after parting I could not help smiling to myself and saying the flirting with this girl has done me good it is heavy work to live without women's society and I would far rather while away an hour with this girl who has nothing in the world to boast but good humour than not flirt at all if I had π I should be very different she has my heart and I should want no more than her - but now I am solitary and dull*[107]

Here, Lister alleviates her boredom with some "*flirting*" and excuses her decision to do this by explaining that if Mariana were with her, she wouldn't need to because she wouldn't be "*solitary and dull*". The lack of "*women's society*" is "*heavy work*", again we get allusions to weight and presence when "dull" is used, as well as labour. The choice of "*good humour*" to describe Miss Walker, as well as the choice of "*flirting*" to express what she was doing (to compare, she never "flirts" with Miss Brown), adds to the idea that the antithesis of "dull" is a sort of lightness.[108]

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[107] Tuesday 12th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0033

[108] "flirt, v." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4614862032> [accessed1 October 2021] '**5.** *intransitive*. To move with a jerk or spring; to spring, dart. Of a winged creature: To take short quick flights.'

Lister's quest for a love-object is to sustain a certain kind of interest in her life, an interest of "*charm*". It is one thing to be interested in study, to want to know the lengths of all the bridges in London, and another to be amused by the company of a loved one. There is a lack of weight to the latter form of interest and, most significantly, it is an interest that creates excitement and joy. And when this joy has been and then gone, as happens when Mariana comes to stay for a couple of weeks at Shibden, we see how "dull" can come to mean all that is missing, all that is heavy, and all that is lacking joy:

> *π and I had parted tolerably but the sight of my room was melancholy I sighed and said to myself she is gone and it is as tho' she had never been I was getting very low and therefore sat down to write out my journal and wrote form last Sunday to last Friday - then used the alum got ready and came down at half past four then obliged to idle away my time talking to my aunt and doing nothing how dull without my π my wife and all I love'* … and later same entry: *'felt very low and dull oh that π and I were together - had a fire at night contrary to my usual custom it cheered the room a little but everything looked and I felt desolate -*[109]

"Dull" is written amidst the emotions of "*melancholy*", "*very low*" and "*desolate*", all packed into a single entry. The image of her walking into her now empty room and sighing is so mundane and so sad; it is not the moment of goodbye, where she expected to feel strongly, but the sight of her new everyday that causes pain. The use of "dull" in this entry, first to describe the situation of her having to while away the time talking to her aunt and then to describe her feelings, gives the word an excessive, overwhelming presence: it is both outside Lister and inside Lister; it is ever present. She then falls back on the ordinary, small pleasure of lighting a fire in her room in an attempt to cheer herself up, but the attempt does not work. Instead, she continues to be overwhelmed by an external, "*everything looked*", and internal, "*I felt*", weight of desolation. This excerpt does well to show the range of dull's application, it spans the trivial to the significant, as does Lister, as she sits by the fire gazing upon her empty room.

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[109] Monday 7th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0092

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Lister is not always interested in everything. She "dawdles", and lives, at times, a dull existence. She is very good at creating interest for herself, but this interest, of study and writing, can also be a source of tedium. Though Lister's interests traverse many subjects, such as anatomy and philology, history and travel, there are times when Lister is not doing anything of interest worth reporting. She lives like any other person, through periods, long and short, of great dullness. This "dawdling" can sometimes be pleasant and, at others, when it is less of a choice, it can be irritable and frustrating to live through. Her conception of what it means to be dull is complex, wrapped up in a myriad of meanings: a heavy, demanding, bodily weight that can range from a level of nuisance to great, wallowing despair.

Or it can simply be used as a fantastic insult:

> *had I possessed money how differently might I have been situated now what endless sorrowings and empty longins* [sic] *had been spared and π had never given her hand without her heart to the rude and loveless grass of stupid self sufficient dullness --*[110]

[110] Friday 18th May 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0028

Conclusion

> My memory is there, which conveys something of the past into the present. My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing—rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow. – Henri Bergson[1]

It is a Saturday afternoon, a week before Christmas, in the year 2023. In two days, I will submit my corrections and clear out my desk: take down the pictures on my wall, return my books to the library, and take my sweetheart plant home. I will be finished. This morning, on arriving at the office, I stood in front of the bathroom mirror and was struck, as we sometimes can be, by the developing lines and indentations on my face. I find it fascinating: the physical evidence of my duration. Who knew one could form a vertical crease under one's left eye just by habitually sleeping in the same position? Bergson speaks of the ongoing accumulation of duration as we pass through time, and I have always loved his metaphor of 'a snowball on the snow'. Memory can often feel like a hushed and muffled snowy landscape with brief moments of biting clarity. I can remember with great clarity, for instance, the September morning when I walked into my old job and decided to try again for Ph.D. funding. That was over five years ago. There is so much that I do not remember with clarity, however, so much that crunches into itself, difficult to isolate and articulate, but nonetheless existent and influential.

I submitted this thesis – but not this conclusion – over five months ago. My viva examination was three months ago. I reread my thesis this week and was humbly impressed by some of the ideas that it puts forth. I began with a nod to failure, but I wish to end with an appreciation of my small successes.

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[1] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1907), trans. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover Publications, inc., 1998), p. 2

Successes: (i) methodology

I described my methodology in the introduction as sedimentary attunement through transcription. The idea that as I endured the transcription process, inhabiting Lister's subjective position, I grew attuned to her in a way that reading alone might not have allowed. I had plodded through the text at a similar pace to the writing subject, trapped in the same 'continuous present', and acutely aware of the intricacy and details that went into her daily living.[2] My affective tie to Lister combined with the experiential knowledge of her written record in all its messy detail gave me a strong feeling of ethical responsibility. I wanted to ensure that my representation of her was attentive to the incongruence and nuance that was evident in the text. I felt that a 'rhetoric of defamiliarisation' tended to push my interpretations into bold claims and my critique suffered a flattening out into trite logic that did not serve the representation of an archival subject.[3] So I offered up the idea of a rhetoric of vulnerability, hoping to affirm the lack of neutrality and the persuasive nature of my prose, while also permitting a greater level of uncertainty. One device of this rhetoric of vulnerability was an inclusion of autobiographical moments (like the one above) in the thesis, so that the reader was aware of my presence and positionality. I believe this acknowledgement invites discussion and an appreciation that what I write in these pages is not indisputable and incontrovertible truth, but my interpretation of a text. This prose is as fallible as I am. I invite your curiosity. Another device of my rhetoric was to include subjective moments of doubt or affective responses. I was transparent about what I was unsure of, where confusion lay, and when I was upset or disliked an idea put forth by a critic. I found this granted me greater flexibility when approaching certain critical works that had both good and bad (in my opinion) arguments. It allowed nuance into my reasoning. This methodology is perhaps my greatest success within this thesis. I feel it has allowed me to be extremely attentive to Lister and her record, so that I feel confident that I have presented a

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[2] A nod towards Margo Culley's formulation of a certain tense in diary writing, quoted and used in Anna Jackson's *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915 - 1962,* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 19

[3] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 7

version of her that is as close to the text as I could get it.

Successes: (ii) accumulative interpretation

In my first chapter, I discussed the ongoing trepidation of applying the term "lesbian" to a figure from the past. I highlighted Terry Castle's metaphor of "the apparitional lesbian" and applied it more broadly to the word in general, arguing that "lesbian" can be both compromised and potent within criticism.[4] The ghosting effect of this term means that it is repetitively chosen for use, but insistently questioned. There is no sure footing. I noticed moments of mild desperation in the critics who chose to use it, such as Euler's footnote: 'I must be able to use an intelligible symbol, or word, for my work in this dissertation.'[5] I briefly discussed the over-reliance on historical evidence and the consequent historical view that women had no sexuality until sexologists in the late nineteenth-century came along and endowed it upon them. The idea that women needed to be taught about their sexual arousal to know it existed, let alone to know how to act upon it. This idea was wonderfully undermined by the evidence in Lister's journal, not least by the number of women engaging in sexual play outside marriage, but also by her own admission to using the screen of "*mere friendship*" to hide these sexual relationships.[6]

My main success within this chapter, aside from quite clearly sketching out this doubt-strewn critical terrain, was the way I negotiated the more recent Lister scholarship. The work of Jessica Campbell and Charley Matthews was invaluable in this regard. I found their decisions to write into their work lines of invitation and inclusivity were highly effective in affirming their own interpretative positions without damaging the interpretations of

[4] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 2 - 3

[5] Catherine Euler, 'Moving Between Worlds: Gender, Class, Politics, Sexuality and Women's Networks in the Diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Yorkshire, 1830 - 1840', Thesis, University of York, 1999, White Rose portal, Web. 30/06/2023, p. 38 footnotes

[6] Monday 25th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0037

others. In particular, Charley Matthews' inclusion of Liz Stanley's work gave me the metaphor of a kaleidoscopic view of biography: the idea that interpretations change depending on positionality and duration, and that rather than throwing out these different configurations, we can allow them to gather and accumulate.[7] This process allows for different interpretations to exist alongside each other without rejection or refutation. It is this idea of accumulative interpretation that gave me the space to interpret Lister as a lesbian, whilst also acknowledging the other interpretations that critics have propounded.

It is interesting to note at this stage of the project my insistent attraction to metaphors of accumulation or gathering: the images of sedimentation, of the kaleidoscope, of 'a snowball on the snow.'

Successes: (iii) sexual banality

In the second chapter, I looked at the representations of Lister as a rake, or seducer, and as a model of a "successful lesbian". I voiced my concern that these representations were cementing into two-dimensional versions of Lister that overemphasised her agency in her romantic and sexual relationships. The version of Lister that I got to know through my process of transcribing had limited agency within her relationships with other women and, as such, was often filled with doubts, confusion, and inconsistencies. I argued that though she may have sometimes acted in libertine ways, her ability to maintain such a role was frequently challenged, both by her own desire for a long-term partnership and the behaviour and actions of her sexual partners. I chose Lister's relationship with Isabella Norcliffe, or Tib, as an example of a sexual relationship that did not easily conform to any single representation of Lister.

Tib and Lister allowed me the conceptual space to explore how sex is conceived within theory (and, by society "at large"). Taking Leo Bersani's lead, I wrenched apart the

[7] Liz Stanley, 'Biography as microscope or kaleidoscope? The case of 'power' in Hannah Cullwick's relationship with Arthur Munby', *Women's Studies International Forum*, (1987), 10(1), pp. 19–31

anticipation, or desire, for sex from the sex act itself; and, by doing so, it was possible to see how, in Lister's record, her anticipation of sexual pleasure had become mixed up with the sex act itself. Lister's use of symbols for sex and good sex adhered to the story that sex was pleasurable. Whereas her short expressions of complaint or dissatisfaction delivered a story of sex as underwhelming and disappointing. Instead of arguing that one version of the story cancelled out or negated the other, I used Maggie Nelson's comment that 'sex varies in its meaning and importance to people, with that importance fluctuating over the course of a life', and Gayle Rubin's 'concept of benign sexual variation', to suggest that there was benign variance in Lister's feelings about sex with Tib through time.[8] Understanding Lister's sexual activity through a lens of benign variation prevents an essentialising impulse.

The idea of benignity prompted my next step, which was a consideration of theory's tendency to dramatize sex. The dialogue between Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant that I presented exhibits an unwillingness to relinquish this idea of sex as a dramatic scene of subjective rupture and excess. I found it difficult to apply 'the shock of discontinuity' and other dramatic interpretations to the reading of Lister's sexual account.[9] Instead, I suggested that a consideration of sexual banality could be more fruitful when discussing how sex functions in forming and reforming relationality. Within this scene of sexual banality, I analysed the way labour and duty figure in Lister's expressions of sex with Tib. The sex was physical labour, not psychological splintering. The motivation was largely duty, not pleasure. Sara Ahmed's idea of happiness as obligation, as a reciprocal dynamic between two people to maintain a shared 'happiness project', was useful in understanding Lister's expression of duty in her relationship with Tib; as well as pointing towards the (political) dangers of representing Lister as a 'happy queer'.[10]

These ideas of benign variation, sexual banality, and a duty of care accumulated into my last consideration, which was to shift my analysis away from Lister's sexual encounters with Tib and towards their daily and mundane shared activities, such as letter writing and church-going. I argued that it was the everyday sedimentation of relationality that kept Lister

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[8] Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021), p. 76; and, Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,' *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 137 - 181, p. 154

[9] Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable,* (London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 4

[10] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 105

and Tib together as friends and lovers and provided the substance to their relationship. My success within this chapter was to gently nudge the discussions about Lister and sex, or Lister and romantic relationships, into a different arena, away from essentialising impulses or dramatic conclusions, and towards more benign, banal, and ordinary interpretations.

Successes: (iv) destigmatising menstruation

In the third chapter, though I began with the wish to theoretically construct a concept of the 'quotidian body', I soon relinquished that to pragmatically present my findings on Lister's record of her menstruation. The stigma, or cultural taboo, of menstruation was evident in the lack of critical engagement with this facet of Lister's record. It struck me as particularly worrisome that so many works on Lister consider her gender, yet somehow do not think her menstruation is relevant. This chapter was purposefully less theoretical and more empirically focused. I wanted to present as much information as I had on Lister's period, and more expansively, on her knowledge of female anatomy. Within this information, there was evidence of Lister's general acceptance of her monthly flow, as well as her opinion that a regular period was a sign of good health. She sometimes offers up language of discomfort when describing her menstruation – "*miserable of course*"[11] – sometimes exhibits a level of stoicism about it – "*what is is best*"[12] – but largely makes no qualifying comment. I differentiated the external from the internal, agreeing with other scholars that Lister found it socially difficult to be seen as a body that menstruated, but that she exhibited a general internal acceptance.

My hope is that this flood of information on Lister's menstruation will add to the growing scholarship on periods, such as the Menstruation Research Network, and will gradually rewrite history so that uterus shedding becomes more visible, and consequently,

[11] Thursday 16th March 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0038

[12] Wednesday 17th November 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0112

less stigmatised. Menstruation is an ordinary part of many people's lives, but consistent shaming and stigma make it appear less ordinary. My decision to include it in a project that seeks to view Lister as ordinary is strategic. I view this chapter as a small but significant step on the road to destigmatising menstruation.

Successes: (v) feast of dullity

Boredom, or lack of interest, seemed tantamount to me on my quest to represent Lister as an ordinary lesbian. She was always depicted in criticism and media as an exciting and busy character. Someone who was always interested and interesting. It was not that these representations of Lister were incorrect, she was certainly a very active and curious individual, but that they screened out the moments in her record when she "[d]awdled away the time watching the weather"[13] or when she was "*sleepy and dullish*".[14] I felt I could add a little shadow to an otherwise two-dimensional wonder-woman by attending to these moments in the text.

I discussed her use of "dawdling", a verb that she used to account for the time she spent doing things slowly or inefficiently or without great consciousness. I posited that this verb was used to fill in for, as Robyn Warhol puts it, 'the unnarratable' parts of Lister's daily life.[15] "Dawdling" seemed to cover the grey area between interest and its lack, it sat between excitement and boredom, that middle-ground we so seldom notice, especially within the narratives we spin about our lives, or the lives of others. I turned, then, to boredom and highlighted the intriguing knowledge that such a concept did not exist in Lister's lifetime. This led me to explore Lister's use of "dull", a much older and more generous word than 'bore' or 'bored'. It could be used to describe the weather or how she

[13] Tuesday 15th May 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0028

[14] Sunday 9th December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0085

[15] Robyn R. Warhol, 'Narrating the Unnarratable: Gender and Metonymy in the Victorian Novel,' *Style*, 28.1 (1994), pp. 74-94, p. 81

felt when she was ill, as well as the uncomfortable experience that we today call boredom.

The story of Lister's boredom inevitably led to exploring how loneliness figured in the text. It was a close partner to boredom for Lister, as she identified so strongly with being a romantic. For Lister, a companion was viewed as a way to relieve the dull weight of her own tedious nature. My focus upon the parts of her report when she is yearning for a companion, or has recently parted from one, and the sadness and desperation that was often involved in these written expressions, worked to balance out the representations of her as a rake or "successful lesbian". This chapter successfully presented a more ordinary Lister. It presented a version of her that could "dawdle", suffer through tedium, or feel lonely in her desolate room.

The Ordinary

> More even than novels, diaries can provide reassurance about the contours of shared humanity. Nor does such reassurance depend only on revelations of a hidden, dark, unsocial or even antisocial life. Quite opposed kinds of revelation can validate other aspects of the reader's experience. To uncover the relentless triviality of a writer's everyday life may confirm the value of a reader's mundane daily career. A diary can reveal the importance of commentary unspoken. It can uncover unexpected ways of achieving personal dignity. It can redefine authenticity.
>
> – Patricia Spacks, *Privacy* (2003)[16]

> But whatever I am, or have since become, I know now that slipperiness isn't all of it. I know now that a

[16] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 168-9

> studied evasiveness has its own limitations, its own ways of inhibiting certain forms of happiness and pleasure. The pleasure of abiding. The pleasure of insistence, of persistence. The pleasure of obligation, the pleasure of dependency. The pleasures of ordinary devotion. The pleasure of recognizing that one may have to undergo the same realizations, write the same notes in the margin, return to the same themes in one's work, relearn the same emotional truths, write the same book over and over again— not because one is stupid or obstinate or incapable of change, but because such revisitations constitute a life.
>
> – Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (2016)[17]

I hope I have managed, in some small way, to trace 'the relentless triviality' of Lister's life of 'ordinary devotion.' I also hope my exploration of what constitutes the ordinary has unsettled the term somewhat. The very attempt to hoist the ordinary onto the stage of analysis has perhaps already granted it a level of attention that renders it less ordinary. Though, perhaps it is not simply attention that renders something ordinary but rather that the ordinary is not so ordinary after all; that it insistently withdraws as we reach out to grasp it. Stanley Cavell (1986) spoke of 'the uncanniness of the ordinary' and 'the sense of the human as inherently strange, say unstable, its quotidian as forever fantastic.'[18] It is this paradox that I hope to have highlighted in focusing on some of Lister's more ordinary concerns: her insistent and persistent desire for women; her intricate and mundane connection with Tib; the regular shedding of her endometrial layer; and her daily dawdling and persistent indolence.[19] These aspects of her life are both ordinary and worthy of our attention. They are both ordinary and interesting - indeed, the (supposedly everyday) construction of these two terms as antithetical strikes me as a tool for prejudice, for singling

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[17] Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (London: Melville House UK, 2016), p. 90

[18] Stanley Cavell, 'The Uncanniness of the Ordinary,' *The Tanner Lectures of Human Values,* Delivered at Stanford University, April 3rd and 8th 1986, https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/c/cavell88.pdf Accessed 30/06/2023 p. 85

[19] "alas! I might say with Gibbon (vid. his journal 16 august 1762 p. 67/726 vol. 2 miscellaneous works) "while every one looks on me as a prodigy of application, I know myself how strange a propensity I have to indolence"" - Monday 12th April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0004

out, for celebration–sure–but also, for ridicule, for segregation, and for hierarchy. The challenge I have made to Lister's various representations has generally been a project of recuperating her banality from 'the *Gentleman Jack* phenomena'[20] that (if inadvertently) veers dangerously into idolatry. I want my version of Anne Lister to validate what Spacks terms 'a reader's mundane daily career'.

I do wish to highlight the danger of the ground I tread when I slip into writing of *the* ordinary, as if there is a universality to it that applies to all. It is true that I share Spacks' optimism that there exists some zone 'of shared humanity', but I am wary of how I seek to construct that zone. For instance, it is pertinent to point out that, though Lister does many ordinary things, such as eating and sleeping, she does *not* cook or wash her bedding, tasks that, though it pains me, are ordinary for me and many, many others. The ordinary for Lister in this sense is maintained by the many ordinary tasks of others. Yet, Lister's record of her servants' labour to maintain her version of ordinary life is relatively scant. George, her footman, is included in her journal with some regularity, as he accompanies her on so many errands, especially the task of selling her father's estate and her purchase of a gig and horse in late 1821.[21] Their daily lives converge more frequently. However, Betty, her housemaid, is mentioned with much less frequency. Betty lights her fires, cleans her room, answers the door, sews some of her clothes, and aids her when she's sick.[22] She most likely does many more things, of which we have no record. Most starkly for me, though, is the cook. Lister doesn't seem to ever name her cook; Lister has breakfast, dinner, tea, and sometimes supper, most days, and yet there are only three mentions of her cook in my three year sample and she is simply 'the cook', such as, "the cook made the dye for carriage leathers according to M-'s receipt".[23] It is noteworthy as well that when the cook is mentioned within

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[20] Jennifer Reed & Ella Ben Hagai, '*Gentleman Jack* and the (re)discovery of Anne Lister,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 26.4 (2022), pp. 303 - 308, p. 306

[21] For instance, Wednesday 19th December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0087

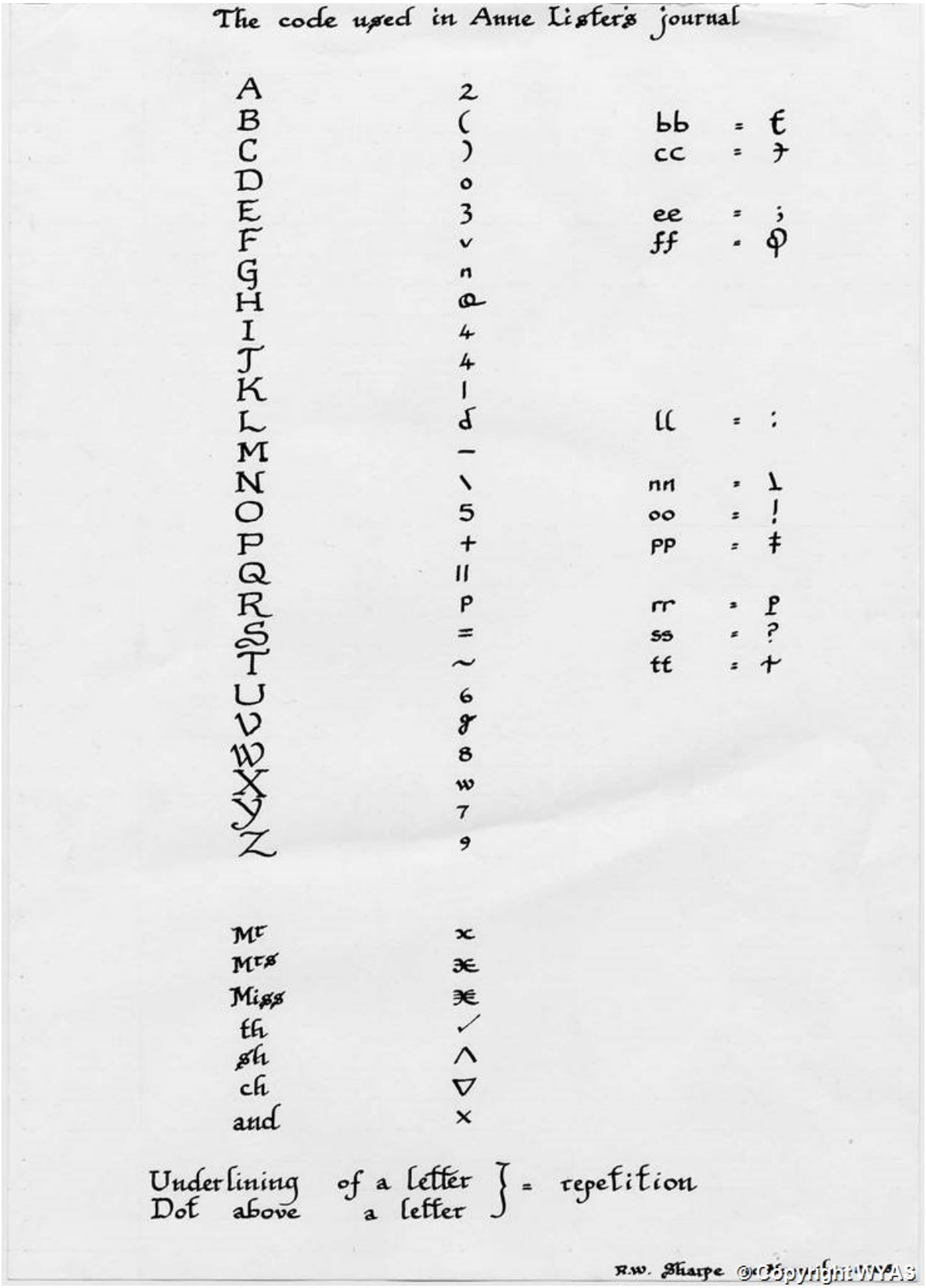
[22] "Betty is cleaning my room today which sent me into the kitchen-chamber and hindered me a little" - Wednesday 27th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0105; "*betty lighted my fire at six"* - Monday 27th December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0016; "*during this time a young man betty said who called himself Gledhill wanted to speak to me I desired her to ask where he came from and what he wanted and heard no more of him"* - Saturday 19th August 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0076; "*Miss Kitson had not done ^altered^ my lustre spencer right all the afternoon undoing and planning it and telling betty how to sew it"* - Saturday 14th July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0043; "*felt a little griping before getting up and rang for betty at eight to be ready to go down stairs into the court"* - Sunday 9th September 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0060

[23] Friday 1st February 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0098

my sample, it is because she is doing something out of the ordinary: she is not cooking but making dye or posting letters.[24] As I posited at the beginning of my thesis, ordinary is a shifting terrain. It is a concept heavily reliant on the social: on what others are doing or not doing. In this sense, the version of ordinary that I lean into within this thesis has been an ordinary that Lister and I share. We both consistently desire women. We both have had tolerable sex and shared the mundane alongside a loved one. We both bleed every month. And we both can dawdle, sink into dull doldrums and feel lonely. I have gravitated to the areas of our 'shared humanity.' My hope is that this project will inspire others to focus on ordinary aspects of Lister's life, or biography more broadly. I believe my methodology can enable others to navigate the complex terrain of working with a manuscript diary and an archival subject, as well as providing the tools to better attend to all that is mundane and messy in life.

[24] "Sent my letter to M- (Lawton) by the cook" - Thursday 22nd April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0009

Appendix A – The key to her crypt hand



Appendix B – Example of double page and my relevant transcription, SH:7/ML/E/5/0031

[58]

Thurs. 31

9

$11\frac{40}{60}$

My uncle does not seem quite so well this morning of his cough and difficulty of breathing -

Mr Sunderland called to see him - Stayed down stairs till $11\frac{1}{2}$ - Wrote 3 pp. and an end to M- *which t*

ook me from twelve and a quarter to the same after three -- In the afternoon from $4\frac{3}{4}$ to $6\frac{20}{60}$, walked

to Smithhouse-bar - from Lightcliffe returned by Bramley-lane, thro' Hipperholm, by Hardcastle's

cottages along the fields to common wood, down Stony lane, and thence by the high road home - In the evening read partly ^aloud^

p. 84 to 97 vol. 3 Retrospective Rev. article 6. Life of Sethos - Fine day - but no sun ^rather windy^ and cold.

B. $2\frac{1}{2}$ deg above changeable. F. 49 at 9 p.m. - My uncle breathes very hardly tonight -

Came upstairs at $10\frac{3}{4}$ -

June Fri. 1

$8\frac{55}{60}$

12

during breakfast Letter from Mrs Henry Priestley Haugh-end - *kind and wishes to meet me soon -*

another of those black guard letters this morning but did not even see it and betty gave it the

post man to take back again -- Came upstairs at 11 - wrote the last end, and crossed the 3 pp. and 1 end

of my letter to M- (Lawton) and sent it down stairs ^before one o'clock^ to go to the post - *no crypt but a line under*

the seal to tell her to do as she liked about sending me the twenty pounds in the parcel containing

a veil she has worked for my aunt which I wish her to send my letter very affectionate but

might be read by anyone without much harm -- copied ^in an hour and five minutes^ the letter I wrote to V on wednesday

From a little after 2 to $3\frac{40}{60}$ reading Collin's pastorals and odes and Dr Langhornes obs. in my little

pocket edition of Collins - In the afternoon from $4\frac{1}{4}$ to 5 sauntered with my aunt along the new road and went over

the house at Pump - then left her and walked to Crownest to call on Miss Ann Walker on her

return from London and on Mrs Edwards, of Pyenest, who went there on Wednesday with her little boy Thomas for change

of air for him in consequence of his illness (palpitation at the heart) left by the measles - Mrs W-

and her oldest daughter at Manchester. Stayed tea ^took a couple of cups of coffee^ and sat above an hour - Miss A- W- walked back

with me along the fields as far as Lidget and with her Mr Edward Priestley who met us by the way -

I wished him at jerusalem think the girl likes me she is good humoured and I have some

thought of flirting a little with her -- Returned by Lower brea and got home at $7\frac{1}{2}$ - Had dinner and

enjoyed it more than usual - Mr Taylor, of Sunderland, the setter up of steam kitchens and curer

of smoking chimnies has been at Crownest these last 6 weeks for the latter purpose - Drank

tea with them and seems to have lived at their table all the while. An insufferably impertinent fellow

who ought to have been put in the kitchen - Fine day - B. $1\frac{3}{4}$ deg above. F. $52\frac{1}{2}$ at 9 p.m.

Came upstairs at $10\frac{3}{4}$ - My uncle has seemed a little better today - *airing things downstairs* --

Sat. 2

$7\frac{1}{2}$

$12\frac{5}{60}$

B. B. till $9\frac{1}{4}$ and afterwards from $11\frac{40}{60}$ to $12\frac{20}{60}$, settling my accounts for the last 4 months. Stayed down stairs till

$11\frac{1}{2}$ and read ^a good deal of^ the last page of the last London paper to my uncle who seems not quite so well this morning as yesterday

much fatigued with the exertion of getting up, and his breathing difficult. *he does not seem in good heart about*

himself and perhaps thinks about making a will -- From $12\frac{1}{2}$ to 3, read from ch. 79 to 88 Thalia

[59]

Herodot. and afterwards from p. 96 to 107 vol. 2 Beloe's translation - In the afternoon at $4\frac{20}{60}$ down

the n. b. to Whitley's - Stayed there some time skimming over Fred. Accum's Culinary chemistry, 1 vol.

small 8 vo. A philosophical sort of cookery-book ^worth buying^ and just published by Ackerman price 9/6

Sat 40 mins with Mrs Catherine Rawson - just called at Mr Sunderland's surgery to desire him to come

to see my uncle who has appeared not better since morning - Sat $\frac{1}{4}$ hour with my aunt L- and got home at

$6\frac{20}{60}$ - Fine day - B. $1\frac{3}{4}$ deg above changeable. F. 58 at $9\frac{1}{2}$ p.m. - In the evening read from p. 97

to 127 vol. 3 Retrospect. Rev. Mr Sunderland came just as it struck 9 and stayed near $\frac{1}{2}$ hour - Came upstairs at $11\frac{5}{60}$

[written in left hand margin of entry:] Gave up having tea in the evening and had a more

regular dinner ar 6. -- this is the first time

I have gone without tea.

Sun. 3

8

$12\frac{1}{4}$

My aunt stayed at home with my uncle. I went to the old church. Mr K- preached 25 mins from 1 Epistle Peter

c. 3 part of v. 15 "sanctify the lord in their heart," the 3rd, and I suppose, last discussion, on the subject which he began with

the corresponding text from Isaiah on Sun. 13 May vid. p. 51. - Called at Northgate and stayed about 10 mins

Sauntered along the new road in returning and got home at $1\frac{20}{60}$ - wrote out from 22 Feb to 22 March of the Index

to this volume - *trying on the new coarse bombasin gown Mrs Milner made for me last winter and what*

sort of handkerchiefs would suit me best all which took me an hour - Went down stairs at $4\frac{1}{4}$ - My aunt and I

read the afternoon prayers - Mr Wiglesworth came a little after 5, and drank tea with us, and stayed till near 8 - Afterwards

read aloud sermon 20th and last, bishop Sandford - Fine day - tho' not much sun and a cool air, yet felt

warm with walking home this morning - B. $\frac{1}{4}$ deg below changable. F. 59 at 9 p.m. - Came upstairs at $10\frac{55}{60}$

My uncle much the same today as yesterday -

Mon. 4

$8\frac{50}{60}$

$11\frac{1}{2}$

Came upstairs at $11\frac{5}{60}$ - From $11\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 read from ch. 88 Thalia, Herodot. and afterwards from 107 to

$119\frac{1}{2}$ vol. 2 Beloe's translation having made some obs. and several extracts from Beloe's notes - In the afternoon

sauntered about the new road with my aunt for a few minutes then from $5\frac{10}{60}$ to $5\frac{50}{60}$ walked ^to and from^ Hipperholm lane ends -

In the evening out about $1\frac{1}{4}$ hour from $7\frac{40}{60}$ - up the fields to the top of the hill, thence along Long lane, round by Southowram

bank-top and Beacon hill into old Wakefield road again took a turn along the whole length of it, and returned by Bairstow

and cunnery lane - then down the fields to the brook - Fine day tho' a shower or 2 early in the afternoon and

few drops just before tea and while I was out - B. $1\frac{1}{2}$ deg below changeable. F. 55 at 9 p.m. The 1st thing

this morning Mr Wiglesworth sent us 2 copper plate books of specimens of different sorts of writing Law-

hands, etc. which he promised to lend us yesterday - My uncle certainly rather better today - Came upstairs at $11\frac{35}{60}$

[written in left hand margin of entry:] Mr Sunderland called this morning and

Mr Hudson of Hipperholm in the afternoon

to inquire after my uncle and also on business.

Tues. 5

$8\frac{55}{60}$

12

Came upstairs at 11. Made an extract in vol. D. from Beloe - From $11\frac{1}{2}$ to 3, read only from ch. 100 to 108 Thalia Herodot. and

afterwards from p. $119\frac{1}{2}$ to $128\frac{1}{2}$ vol. 2 Beloe's translation - Making notes and obs. which prevented my reading more making an

extract (in vol. C) and reading over 1 thing or other from 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ - *got ready to go out but rain prevented* -

Went into the drawing room and from $4\frac{3}{4}$ to 6 copying (from one of the books Mr W- sent yesterday) what is called the court alphabet

in which most old papers seem to be written. In the evening from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to $8\frac{3}{4}$ sauntering with my aunt along the new road, about Pump over

the house, and thence round by Lower brea home - began to rain a little before we got in and immediately afterwards some very heavy rain with a

little distant thunder, very thick and dark all the afternoon and a slight shower or 2, and the threatening clouds kept me in the house -

B. $1\frac{1}{2}$ deg below changeable. F. 55 at $9\frac{1}{2}$ p.m. - Came upstairs at $10\frac{35}{60}$ - Mr Sunderland called this evening while we were out - My uncle

seems progressively getting better -

[left hand margin:] for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour before getting into bed

reading Sat. lib. 1 and ode 1,

and 2, lib. 1 Hor.

Appendix C – Period table (see over page)

No.	Date of 1st day	Two dots?	Length of cycl	Any relevant quotes (on 1st day)	Relevant quotes and notes before or after that date
1	Monday 5th April 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0120	Yes.	27	n/a	"(Had a fix this morning as I got up so soon.)" - not sure if this is related or not
2	Sunday 2nd May 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0018	Yes.	32	*sat up airing things*	
3	Thursday 3rd June 1819 - SH:7/ML/E/3/0050	Yes.	30	*what should have come on Sunday came very gently this morning while getting up*	
4	Saturday 3rd July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0067	Yes.	27	n/a	*No kiss last night on account of* - Sunday 4th July - NB. this could be in relation either her period or
5	Friday 30th July 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0076	Yes.	27	n/a	
6	Thursday 26th August 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0086	Yes.	28	*Began as soon as I got up*	
7	Thursday 23rd September 1819, SH:7/	Yes.	27	n/a	
8	Wednesday 20th October 1819, SH:7/ML/E/3/0104	Yes.	28	n/a	My head hot and heavy this morning, and altogether feels as if it was a little swollen -[...] my head rather better this evening - Had Crossley this morning and cutting my hair
9	Wednesday 17th November 1819, SH:7/	Yes.	25	*Began as soon as I got home this afternoon how unlucky to be at this time but what is is best.* (before she goes to Manchester to see Mariana)	
10	Sunday 12th December 1819, SH:7/ML/E/4/0013	Yes.	36	n/a	
11	Monday 17th January 1820, SH:7/ML/E/4/0024	Yes.	33	n/a	
12	Saturday 19th February 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	23	*began just after breakfast*	

13	Tuesday 14th March 1820 - SH:7/ML/E/4/0038	Yes.	36	*and about nine ^something began^ pretty much tho' I did not ascertain it till we came upstairs after eleven -- should not have been till Thursday ^or friday^ nothing with me and obliged to contrive and do as I could –*	*slept with my drawers on last night and a pocket handkerchief and paper miserable of course very much both yesterday last night and this*
14	Wednesday 19th April 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	26	n/a	
15	Monday 15th May 1820 - SH:7/ML/E/	Yes.	23	*began just before I went this morning ^stood^ airing at the kitchen fire*	
16	Wednesday 7th June 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	30	Came upstairs at 11 *standing by the kitchen fire near half an hour -*	
17	Friday 7th July 1820, SH:7/ML/E/	Yes.	33	n/a	
18	Wednesday 9th August 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	31	*the two dots incurred immediately after breakfast*	
19	Saturday 9th September 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	27	Came upstairs at 11 - *airing things for a quarter hour --*	*airing things for quarter hour -* Sunday 10th
20	Friday 6th October 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	30	*just before getting up began*	
21	Sunday 5th November 1820, SH:7/ ML/E/4/0097	Yes.	28	*began a quantity of treacle with hasty pudding at dinner yesterday gave me a little pain in my stomach and I went to my uncle twice* [...] Felt a bad cold come on	
22	Sunday 3rd December 1820, SH:7/	Yes.	25	*began before church time that is between twelve and one -*	
23	Thursday 28th December	Yes.	25	*began this morning just as I got out of bed*	
24	Monday 22nd January	Yes.	25	*^came on just before getting up^*	*B. B. siding my things from the wash a three weks concern -*
25	Friday 16th February 1821, SH:7/	Yes.	24	n/a	
26	Monday 12th March 1821, SH:7/ML/E/	Yes.	30	*began just as I was getting into bed -- began sitting in my ^black cloth^ waistcoat this morning*	
27	Wednesday 11th April 1821, SH:7/	Yes.	26	*airing things and did not hurry --*	*Came upstairs at 105060 quarter hour airing things* - Friday

28	Monday 7th May 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0026	Yes.	25	*airing things for -- began in the afternoon --*	
29	Friday 1st June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0031	Yes.	27	*during breakfast* [...] *airing things downstairs --*	
30	Thursday 28th June 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0038	Yes.	28	*airing began after breakfast*	
31	Thursday 26th July 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0046	Yes.	26	n/a	*in spite of my cousins appearance last night just at bed time we both being excited as we sat talking at my dressing table undressed and got into bed before my hair was curled and had two good kisses both together that is without having separated had a quarter hours nap I then left in bed and*
32	Tuesday 21st August 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0055	Yes.	41	*three times before the cold water without pain just before breakfast at the necessary found that my cousin was come an appearance of slimy mucous along with it indeed the discharge was rather greater both yesterday and saturday than it had been for two or three*	
33	Monday 1st October 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0068	Yes.	51	*about eleven days out of date it came on very slightly indeed a mere nothing just after breakfast [...] - the menstrual discharge exceedingly little*	A sick headache came on soon after breakfast. [...] *not sick to action this morning the discharge greater than yesterday but still only small considering its being the second day when it is usually the most copious* – Tuesday 2nd October 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0068
34	Wednesday 21st November 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0081	Yes.	30	*^no cousin since the first october^ [...] then aired things and wrote this of today tolerably pleasant evening not quite so heavy as the two last* -[...] *- have not used the lotion today on account of my cousin*	*my cousin quite gone today and I have had not the least ^other^ discharge indeed not any since this day week* – Tuesday 27th
35	Friday 21st December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0088	Yes.	29	n/a	*no kiss last night I was sleepy and tired and lay apart [...] a good deal of cousin yesterday but less today* –" Saturday 22nd December 1821, SH:7/ML/E/5/0089, "*hardly any cousin today but a*

36	Saturday 19th January 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0095	Yes.	32	*only once today because my cousin came at four this afternoon airing things by the kitchen fire for twenty minutes before getting into bed*	It's on the following Monday 21st that she says that thing about not affecting any warmth towards Tib - could be also to do
37	Wednesday 20th February 1822, SH:7/	Yes.	27	*my cousin came just before I got up this morning*	
38	Tuesday 19th March 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0110	No.	27	*only once for my cousin came before breakfast* [...] *cutting curl papers aring things and doing my toe nails --*	Came upstairs at 11 10/60 *shocked to see all the napkins on the horse when my aunt went into the kitchen aired and brought them all away which me almost half hour and kept me up so*
	Monday 15th April 1822, SH:7/ML/E/5/0118	Yes.	26	*my cousin came on just after I got home this evening* [...] *I used the alum lotion both morning and afternoon that it does keep back the arrival of my friend — Came upstairs at 10 25/60 — downstairs*	
	Saturday 11th May 1822, SH:7/ML/E/6/0004	Yes.		*Mm [My] cousin came just before breakfast [...] Airing things by the kitchen fire above twenty minutes —*	

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