Sexuality in Translation: Anne Lister and the Ancients

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Anne Lister, the now-famous early nineteenth-century Yorkshire diarist who candidly recorded her romantic relationships and affairs with women over the course of three decades, has become a touchstone for queer and lesbian history. In terms of both scholarly and popular culture, Lister's diary has been read as a unique document that has not only disproved what Terry Castle has called the "no-lesbians-before-1900" theory but also revealed the autonomy and agency of women with regard to questions of sexuality and desire.[1] While Lister has been on the scholarly radar since 1988, thanks to Helena Whitbread's publication of the first diary extracts, *I Know My Own Heart*, the past decade has seen a flurry of mainstream interest in Lister that includes a 2010 BBC docudrama, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister*, with its accompanying documentary, *The Real Anne Lister*, and Sally Wainwright's BBC-HBO series, *Gentleman Jack* (2019), based on Lister's courtship of and union to Ann Walker. Two biographies have been published in recent years: Anne Choma's accompaniment to Wainwright's series, *Gentleman Jack: The Real Anne Lister* (2019), and Angela Steidele's biography, *Gentleman Jack: A Biography of Anne Lister*, translated from the German in 2018.[2] In 2017 a historical plaque was affixed to the Holy Trinity Church in York, where Lister and Walker shared a sacrament to celebrate their union, and the Lister diaries have been added to the UNESCO "Memory of the World" register. After 150 years of being

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

[2] Anne Lister, *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791–1840*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago Press, 1988); *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister*, BBC drama (2010); *The Real Anne Lister*, BBC documentary (2010); *Gentleman Jack*, BBC-HBO miniseries (2018); Anne Choma, *Gentleman Jack: The Real Anne Lister* (London: Penguin, 2019); Angela Steidele, *Gentleman Jack: A Biography of Anne Lister*, trans. Katy Derbyshire (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019).

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repeatedly returned to the proverbial closet, the "secret" diaries of Miss Anne Lister have now become very public indeed.[3]

The Lister diaries defy historical expectations on so many levels that—in much the same way Lister seduced her female lovers—it is difficult for scholars not to be captivated by their content. For compelling reasons, the scholarly literature has tended to focus on Lister's self-sufficiency, independence, and ability to construct a coherent, intelligible, and unified sense of self at a time when nonnormative sexualities and gender presentations existed largely beyond the social imaginary. However, there is also a risk in seeing Lister as a figure who defied her historical moment rather than being defined by it. With the diaries' groundbreaking status as a record of early lesbian sexuality, it is important to remember the degree to which Lister continued to reflect and embody the values of her social and economic class, particularly in terms of her unswerving Tory politics.

The Lister diaries therefore pose key questions about how we might approach, construct, and categorize sexuality and gender through a critical historical lens. In light of this, I propose to revisit Lister's reading practices—specifically her engagement with the classics of ancient Greece and Rome—in order to chart how, on the one hand, this engagement immersed her in the intellectual norms of the Regency period and how, on the other, it challenged who had access to those norms. In other words, Lister was claiming a form of knowledge normally reserved for elite masculinity. As scholars such as Anna Clark and Anira Rowanchild have noted, Lister created her unique sense of self through her varied reading practices, making use of the material available to her to construct and fashion an intelligible sexual and intellectual style. Yet alongside this strategic and productive self-invention, the diaries reveal moments of doubt, melancholia, loss, and failure, modes of affect that play just as critical a role in forming and shaping Lister's complex and inconsistent sexual subjectivity. By mapping Lister's dialectical engagement with her own culture's norms through her reading practices, we can begin to develop a broader canvas for understanding the gains and losses involved in Lister's nonconforming sexual and gender identity construction in the early nineteenth century.

In recent scholarship, the Lister diaries have borne a certain burden of representation for queer and LGBTQ+ history; they continue to be read in terms of what Laura Doan describes as a "genealogical project" that is still beholden to an identity politics framework.[4] Because of the diaries' explicit sexual content, this is perhaps inevitable, yet the diaries also open up a space for acknowledging what Doan calls "the vast domain of historical

[3] For a detailed material history of the Lister diaries, see Jill Liddington, "Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791–1840): Her Diaries and the Historians," *History Workshop* 35 (Spring 1993): 45–77.

[4] Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 2.

unknowability" that we encounter when interpreting the past.[5] While Doan's project focuses on early twentieth-century women in the military and looks for moments of rupture in the historical narrative, 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 to 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."[6] 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. Put another way, how do we decode the Lister diaries while respecting their historical encoding?

As a voracious reader and self-made scholar, predominantly attracted to the ancients and the Romantics, Lister provides a wealth of material for clues to the creation of her sexual persona. Clara Tuite has carefully unpacked the extent to which Lister's reading of the Romantics was intricately bound to her development of a Byronic sexual style whose mode of aristocratic masculinity enabled a specific form of sexual sociability.[7] For Anna Clark, in turn, Lister's use of classical and Romantic literary allusions and references was part and parcel of late Romanticism's "fashioning of the self," a form of exceptional individualism that enabled Lister "to create a coherent identity while at the same time recording herself playing many different roles."[8] Anira Rowanchild makes a strong case for Lister's self-fashioning in both its public and private dimensions, arguing that "Lister's life-narrative . . . was consistent and rational to a remarkable degree."[9] Rowanchild shows

[5] Doan, 4.

[6] Doan, viii–ix.

[7] Clara Tuite, "The Byronic Woman: Anne Lister's Style, Sociability and Sexuality," in *Romantic Sensibility: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840*, ed. G. Russell and C. Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186–210.

[8] Anna Clark, "Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (1996): 29.

[9] Anira Rowanchild, "Skirting the Margins: Anne Lister, Self-Representation and Lesbian Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Yorkshire," in *De-centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond the Metropolis*, ed. Richard Phillips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton (New York: Routledge, 2000), 160.

how Lister's dedicated investment in the landscaping of Shibden Hall after she inherited her uncle's estate reproduced the intimacy and secrecy of the diaries themselves, demonstrating Lister's "skillful deployment of her textual and physical productions to shape and discipline her public and private self."[10] Both Clark and Rowanchild convincingly argue for Lister's strategic self-modeling and her ability to extract what she needed to shape her "odd" gender presentation. Early on, Lister chose to wear only black in order to play down her femininity, and she was frequently identified by others as masculine, writing on 28 June 1818: "The people generally remark, as I pass along, how much I am like a man."[11]

Yet these claims to Lister's coherence belie to some degree the fundamental contradiction of Lister's opposing roles as a Tory Anglican landowner and a gender and sexual outlier. Invoking Judith Roof's analysis of queer subjectivity, Clark has already noted how "lesbian readings of cultural texts produce the 'split, self-contradictory, desiring subject'—both taken in by and refusing negative images."[12] While the overall arc of Lister's public and private worlds reveals a carefully managed and curated life, the diaries themselves—on account of their personal and private textual nature—also expose its gaps and fissures. Lister's narrating "I" oscillates between belonging and alienation, the claiming of privilege and acute feelings of exclusion, a need for sociability and a contempt for the world. Arguably, the current emphasis on Lister's agency and self-fashioning reflects an investment in a particular kind of progress narrative that at times masks the destabilizing effects of exceptionality itself, in that Lister's agentic self-creation is also accompanied by self-questioning. This is perhaps best illustrated by Lister's use of what she calls her "crypt hand," the coded language or cipher that makes up approximately 15 percent of the diaries and that deals primarily, although not exclusively, with the intimate and sexual aspects of Lister's life. Although the use of ciphers was not uncommon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—Samuel Pepys's diary being a famous example—in Lister's case it formalizes her awareness of the nonnormative and at times profoundly destabilizing quality of her queer desire.

Furthermore, if Lister is to be defined through her diaries, it is not as a subject of the past whose daring sexuality brings her into recognizable present-day categories but rather as a subject whose engagement with questions of sexuality and identity resists a linear temporality and a standard progress narrative. Lister was not so much ahead of her time as engaged in an ongoing struggle with what it meant to be out of time and out of synch. In terms of her negotiation of gender, class, and social capital, Lister was often moving sideways and even backward as much as forward. While

[10] Rowanchild, 160.

[11] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 60.

[12] Clark, "Construction," 34. Clark is quoting Judith Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 172.

scholars such as Clark recognize this tension, arguing that "the self Anne Lister created was not unified but deliberately compartmentalized and contradictory," the adverb "deliberately" also needs to be placed under scrutiny.[13] As a minority subject nevertheless invested in the privileges of wealth and class, Lister's agency was being pulled in different directions, making her as much subject *to* as a subject *of* her contradictory drives and ambitions, suggestively foregrounded through her varied reading practices.

Lister's intellectual pursuits were framed by the dual goals of self-improvement and a drive for social mastery, and they generally went well beyond those of her largely rural Yorkshire community. Yet because she was an autodidact with little formal education beyond her brief years in boarding school, Lister's reading practices could also be random and idiosyncratic, what Rowanchild has called "a hit-&-miss affair."[14] While both Tuite and Clark have shown that Lister was immersed in and shaped by Romantic culture, reading the ancients created different challenges in terms of Lister's self-fashioning. Alongside Clark's claim that Lister willfully and consciously created her "different roles" through her reading practices, there is evidence in the diaries that her textual encounters with the ancients both challenged and affirmed her sexual and social sense of self.

While Lister read extensively in multiple genres and several languages, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the Romantics to philosophy to natural history to the novels of the day, her engagement with the ancients was among the most arduous of her intellectual endeavors. Unlike the majority of Lister's other texts, the classics required a turning away from the present and an immersion in the past, and in contrast to the Romantics, they demanded not only a lifelong apprenticeship in Greek and Latin but also a questioning of particular logics of temporality, gender identity, and knowledge acquisition. In this sense, as much as offering clues to her sexuality, the ancients produced in Lister a fragmented and not always comfortable dialogue with the process of her self-invention.

During the Regency period, the rediscovery of ancient Greece in the eighteenth century led to the birth of "popular classical awareness," creating what Mark Bradley has called an "organic relationship between British identity and classical antiquity."[15] The influence of the ancients during this period extended from the school curriculum to modeling notions of aesthetics to defining relations of empire. Although there was some concern during the Regency period about "the dangers of ancient texts to the moral well-being of young men," by the time of the Victorians, as Edmund

[13] Clark, "Construction," 49.

[14] Anira Rowanchild, "'Peeping behind the Curtain': The Significance of Classical Texts in the Sexual Self-Construction of Anne Lister," in *The Victorians and the Ancient World: Archeology and Classicism in Nineteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Richard Pearson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 140.

[15] Mark Bradley, ed., introduction to *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

Richardson argues, the "classics monopolized the curriculum in Britain's leading schools," and in terms of the overall culture, "Victorian classicism was world-bending and omnivorous."[16] Although Lister lived outside of metropolitan London, where the cultural influence of classical antiquity would have been most strongly felt through institutions such as the British Museum and its important collections of classical artifacts, her diaries show the extent to which she absorbed the importance of the ancients as representing a key form of cultural currency.[17]

Exceptionally for a young girl, Lister began learning Latin at the age of twelve with the local vicar, Mr. Skelton, recording her schedule as follows: "Two Latin Grammar Lessons everyday except Tuesday & Saturday one in the morning & one in the Afternoon."[18] By 1806, at the age of fifteen, Lister was taking lessons in Latin from the Halifax theologian Mr. Samuel Knight. By May 1817 Lister was also learning Greek: "For the present, I mean to devote my mornings, before breakfast to Greek."[19] And the following month: "Read . . . Demosthenes & . . . Leland's translation. This is the 4th Greek work I have read thro' & I certainly feel considerably improved."[20] Lister's acquisition of Greek and Latin, as with her other more challenging scholarly commitments, such as mathematics and, later, anatomy, had an ethical dimension; she believed that this knowledge embodied a sense of both moral and intellectual virtue. Over the course of 1817, Lister appeared determined to master both ancient languages: "I am now a better Grecian than I ever was in my life. Indeed I have read more Greek within the last year & a half than all I ever read before—& as for Latin, whatever I may have lost is certainly not in construing."[21] For Lister, the acquisition of the classical languages formed the bedrock of her autodidactic enterprise, one that existed in parallel with her ambitions to become a successful businesswoman and landowner once she inherited the Shibden Hall estate. Rowanchild notes that as soon as Lister came into her inheritance in 1836, she established an impressive library that included a range of classical authors.[22] Each form of ambition therefore not only challenged the gendered norms of her time and removed Lister from the limitations of domestic femininity but also helped generate a mode of masculinized autonomy.

Yet Lister's classical studies also remained sporadic, often interrupted by unforeseen circumstances. In May 1818 Lister wrote: "Mentioning my

[16] Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 143; Edmund Richardson, *Classics and the Victorians*, Oxford Bibliographies, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0283.xml.

[17] See Bradley, introduction, 4.

[18] Quoted in Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 140.

[19] Anne Lister, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago Press, 2010), 14.

[20] Lister, 18.

[21] Lister, 27.

[22] Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 141.

despair of getting on with my studies, [Mr. Knight] proposed my giving up altogether the thought of pursuing them. This, I did not think it necessary to dissemble, I scouted entirely."[23] That Mr. Knight should be the one to suggest Lister abandon her studies foregrounds the highly gendered codes under which this learning took place and Lister's very precarious access to it. While Lister's study with Mr. Knight was specifically interrupted during this period by the illness and eventual death of her mother and her Uncle Joseph, implicit in Mr. Knight's recommendation is that studying the ancients is neither a proper nor a necessary occupation for a woman. However, Lister's refusal to give up her studies, in spite of interruptions that included both social and familial duties, bespeaks a mode of resistance not only to the gendered expectations that surrounded her but also to how knowledge was being controlled through a set of masculinized power-knowledge relations. Mapping these entries provides a sense not only of the nonlinear quality of Lister's mastering of Greek and Latin but also of the social and ideological constraints surrounding such an acquisition.

The classics, in this sense, did not provide a transparent relation between text and identity formation. Indeed, they seem often to produce in Lister a sense of temporal asynchrony, a feeling of being out of time with her own learning and of always having to catch up with herself. To this extent, reading the classics placed Lister in queer time, one that is nonsequential, nonlinear, and belated.[24] Although the diary entries imply that Lister would eventually become a more accomplished Greek scholar than her theologian tutor, Mr. Knight, ever was, certain of them refer as much to the loss of knowledge as to its acquisition: "I long to begin my studies again, yet dread to find out how much I may have lost," she wrote in July 1818.[25] This loss is potentially melancholic, as well as intellectual, to the degree that Lister invested in the classics in part to achieve a form of social capital that often remained elusive in terms of achieving the same kind of recognition accorded to her male peers.

Lister's claims to legitimacy as a scholar of Greek and Latin are therefore repeatedly tempered by a persistent awareness of her illegitimacy, of her not quite being where she should be, which in turn becomes a metonym for her complex relationship to gender itself. Just as Lister often feels she can never occupy a fully legitimate masculinized subject position in relation to her female lovers—particularly in terms of not being able to offer them marriage—she also realizes that she can never occupy fully the place of the classical scholar. In this sense, the study of the ancients, rather than offering

[23] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 54.

[24] For an overview of the notion of "queer temporalities," see Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Chris Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 177–95.

[25] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 109.

Lister an uncomplicated form of knowledge acquisition, foregrounds instead her impostor status—that of the not-quite-authentic subject—a feeling that pursues her even as she asserts her exceptionality.

As Stephen Harrison argues, certain Latin authors such as Horace "consistently served as a means by which the elite, and those who aspired to belong to it, engaged (consciously or unconsciously) in self-definition and self-fashioning, and in claiming and maintaining their elite status."[26] For Lister, however, Horace's cultural centrality in shaping elite masculinity could only remain aspirational in that it figured a collective idealized mode of masculinity from which Lister was excluded. Whereas Byron, for example, alludes to Horace in his various works as "a marker of gentlemanly education and status," Lister read Horace in the absence of an intellectual community and as a female subject, which positioned her outside the very affiliations and forms of cultural capital ensured by the circulation of Horace among the male elite.[27] Although Lister appropriated Byronic masculinity as a sartorial and sexual style, she could not appropriate the classics in the ways Byron himself did. The classics remained for her a more private endeavor, one that highlighted her alienation from as much as her connection to masculinity and the kinds of privileges it made available. For example, after Lister inherited her uncle's estate in 1836, she foregrounded her desire to belong to the educated elite through the creation of a family motto for Shibden Hall, which she based on Horace and elegantly carved into the paneling of the oak stairs: "Justus Propositi Tenax" (just and true of purpose).[28] While the motto was strategically placed in Shibden's public reception area, it also remained contained within the domestic sphere, symbolically signaling Lister's ambivalent agency with regard to her erudition.

Paradoxically, Lister's exclusion from privileged masculinity also affected her relationship to femininity. Indeed, by choosing to learn the classics "like a man," Lister was necessarily disassociating herself from accepted codes of femininity and the kinds of alliances they generated. In this sense, she was outside the normalizing contours of both femininity and masculinity, hence her frequent references to herself as "odd" and "unique." While scholars have tended to present this as a marker of Lister's strength and independence, Lister was also burdened and on occasion worn down by this constant nonbelonging. In response, she at times weaponized her learning to claim her status in Regency society. For example, on 7 June 1818, as Lister was contemplating a closer acquaintance with Miss Browne, a new love interest, she wrote that she found herself snubbed by certain members of the local community as she was leaving church and later responds with the following diary entry: "Determined to devote myself solely to study

[26] Stephen Harrison, *Victorian Horace: Classics and Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1.

[27] Harrison, 16.

[28] Quoted in Choma, *Gentleman Jack*, 51.

and the acquirement of that literature which may make me eminent and more decidedly above them all hereafter."[29] Erudite learning became for Lister a kind of social and cultural armor that allowed her to navigate the uncertain territory of seduction by appropriating a position of knowledge usually reserved for privileged men. In every education, Lister risked being misread; she was positioning herself as both man and woman, and she was using the trappings of heterosexual seduction to entice young women into same-sex erotic practices. While, as Clark and Rowanchild have argued, Lister's learning was intimately tied to the fashioning of her sexuality and her gender presentation, this often occurred in a circuitous and at times confrontational manner. Examples such as this one expose the quality of isolation in Lister's exceptionality, which not only could pit her against her social circle but also failed to create alternative forms of community. For example, on several occasions Lister sought to distinguish herself from other *bas bleus,* or learned ladies, such as Miss Pickford; in December 1819 Lister carefully records how her friends found her "in every respect superior" to Miss Pickford.[30]

In light of such examples, the richness of Lister's engagement with the classics lies in its radical ambiguity, for through it Lister simultaneously sought conformity and nonconformity, belonging and difference, community and radical individualism. In cultural terms, the valorizing of the ancients was weighted with the discourse of Empire, the overvaluation of British civilization and the sustaining myths of British superiority and cultural sophistication. According to Bradley, not only did British concepts of empire influence classical scholarship, but "the British Empire itself was [also] informed, shaped, legitimized, and evaluated using classical models."[31] Greek and Roman civilization played a key role in establishing norms of heroic masculinity and colonial expansion, norms that Lister implicitly supported yet that she could not fully embody. Lister's own investment in the classics speaks to this tradition and simultaneously undoes it, in that Greek and Latin are redirected from the realm of a shared nationalist discourse and the affirmation of elite masculinity to one of feminine affect and desire.

As Clark, Rowanchild, Tuite, and others have shown, Lister used her wide-ranging readings, from the Bible to Rousseau to the Romantics, in very specific ways, often translating them into a coded language for sexual expression. The classical texts possessed an added esoteric layer for her in that they not only required a literal translation from Greek or Latin into English—which would involve cracking a linguistic code—but also represented the home of same-sex desires and practices. In contrast to the Bible, which addressed homosexuality through the language of prohibition, classical writings represented homosexuality directly and explicitly, if not

[29] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 58.
[30] Lister, 122.
[31] Bradley, introduction, 10.

always favorably. The classics became for Lister the Ur-code for desiring queerly or in a nonconforming way.

At age twenty-three, Lister developed a detailed Latin-based vocabulary naming topics specifically related to sexuality, including the clitoris, tribadism, eunuchs, pederasts, and hermaphrodites.[32] In this sense, Latin enabled Lister to become not only a classical scholar but also a scholar of sexuality, providing the "pattern of a disciplined, open-minded quest for knowledge and sexual knowledge itself."[33] Somewhat ironically, Lister's scholarship anticipates that of the late nineteenth-century sexologists, for whom, as Daniel Orrells argues, "the sexual vocabulary of Rome became the technical terminology of modern sexology."[34] In this turning backward to the ancients for specific technical knowledge, Lister anticipates the vast mapping out of human behaviors that would become the social sciences. With her text-based sexual education taking place largely through the reading of Martial, Juvenal, and Horace, Lister mines the past to project herself into the future as a subject of knowledge, hungry precisely for words and labels. Once again, this out-of-synch temporality—in this case, gesturing toward queer futures—not only places Lister as out of step with her historical moment but also radically challenges the era's assumption of women's sexual ignorance and innocence.

Yet even as she was developing her sexual knowledge through the classics, Lister's understanding of her "odd" sexuality was something she spent her life trying to define and to render intelligible. Clark argues that Lister's reading of the classics created a space of autonomy and choice and that the paucity of representations of same-sex desire between women in these texts gave Lister "more freedom to flesh out her sense of self."[35] However, it is also possible that Lister's relationship to the classics involved an ambivalence in relation to the very knowledge she was acquiring, leading to both a turning away and a turning toward. Clark's concept of "more freedom" assumes a sense of being untethered by the norms of the Regency period. Yet it is clear from the diaries that Lister was profoundly shaped by those norms; she wanted their privileges yet refused the conventional means by which those privileges might be acquired, such as, for example, a heterosexual marriage of convenience. Lister's dual status as a gender and sexual outlier, on the one hand, and as a highly conservative member of the landed gentry, on the other, puts in play a movement between recognition and misrecognition. As Susan Lanser argues in her analysis of what she calls "Tory lesbians" in the eighteenth century, Lister was constantly "negotiating potential tensions

[32] See Clark, "Construction," 32; and Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 144.

[33] Clark, "Construction," 35.

[34] Daniel Orrells, "Roman Receptions / Receptions of Rome: Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*," in *Ancient Rome and the Construction of Modern Homosexual Identities*, ed. Jennifer Ingleheart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 128.

[35] Clark, "Construction," 35.

between upper-class propriety and sustained relationships with women" to the extent that these "sustained relationships" tended to be sexual in nature.[36] This makes the idea of freely fashioning an identity more difficult to mediate, and in this sense, Lister's lifelong engagement with classical scholarship foregrounds the tension between the conservative desire to belong and the rebellious pull to resist the social and sexual norms of her day.

Lister's duality can usefully be theorized in terms of José Esteban Muñoz's concept of identification and disidentification. For Muñoz, the notion of *disidentification* can work to map how queer and racialized minority groups were "working on and against" dominant ideological paradigms, so that the subject who fails to identify with the norm "tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a [given] cultural form."[37] According to Muñoz, while majoritarian subjects can access "the fiction of identity . . . with relative ease," minoritarian subjects "need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own sense of self."[38] While necessarily embedded in the dominant culture, these subcultural fields rework its signifying chain and "invest it with new life."[39] While it is important to recognize that Muñoz's theory of disidentification addresses contemporary disenfranchised queers of color, Lister's privileged yet sexually marginal position produces a similarly complex relationship to identity formation. While Lister engages in the interface with classical texts in order to develop her "own sense of self," redirecting the classics from the realm of elite masculinity to that of a queer and nonconforming female sexuality and thereby creating a new subcultural field that invests this bastion of masculinity with "new life," this redirection also risks producing a form of loss and self-fragmentation. Once again, this invokes Roof's "split, self-contradictory, desiring subject."[40]

To this extent, disidentification remains embedded in identification, leaving its political possibilities in a state of indeterminacy. As Muñoz argues, disidentification can create an effective counterstance "through the worldmaking power of disidentificatory performance."[41] This mode of performance can challenge dominant norms either locally or more globally and help to create alternative political possibilities. In Lister's case, the performative element in her reading of the classics was private or covert rather than public and theatrical. As we will see in her relationships with women, Lister used classical references in order to generate a specific channel of communication and to create alternative modes of belonging and

[36] Susan Lanser, "Tory Lesbians: Economies of Intimacy and the Status of Desire," in *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. J. Benyon and C. Gonda (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2010), 177.

[37] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11, 12.

[38] Muñoz, 5.

[39] Muñoz, 12.

[40] Roof, *Lure of Knowledge*, 172.

[41] Roof, i.

affiliation. At the same time, she also maintained an identification with the dominant culture that prevented these moments of disidentification from becoming politically transformative. Indeed, her political conservatism to some degree enables her sexual dissent in that it provides a public cover for her private sexual liaisons. Nevertheless, Lister's inability to identify with heterosexual femininity also forced a mode of resistance that, as Judith Butler argues, becomes a "point of departure" for challenging the constraints of femininity itself.[42] Applying Butler's terminology to this case, we might argue that Lister stood under "a sign to which [she] does and does not belong," claiming agency for the very female subjectivity with which she was not fully identified.[43] It is, in a sense, in Lister's "failure of identification" and in the "misrecognition" of her gendered self that she is at her most disruptive and her most vulnerable.[44]

In her reading of the classics, Lister both identifies *with* the wealth of information they provide on nonnormative sexualities and disidentifies with much of *how* that information is communicated. On the one hand, she became a detached reader who could absorb what she needed while distancing herself from the often vicious satire against women found in Martial, Juvenal, and others. The work of disidentification as a mode of performative resistance also appears in the ways in which Lister and her contemporaries made coded classical references to signal what we would today call queerness. On the other hand, this queer reading practice at times disrupted and destabilized Lister's own sense of her gendered and sexual style. As much as the classics functioned as a form of intellectual armor, they also kept Lister in the realm of masks and codes and were thus a constant reminder of her precarious access to the sexual persona she was creating. In the second part of this article, I examine how Lister and the women she encountered used knowledge of the ancients as a specifically social tool that put into play, by means of coding, the dual processes of identification and disidentification.

In his work on coding and the media, Stuart Hall maps the relationship between encoding and decoding, arguing not only that "there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code" but also that "the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical."[45] While the encoded message reflects the "deep semantic codes" of a given culture and affirms its social order, the process of decoding may deviate from the intent of the encoded message and produce varied responses, including what Hall calls "negotiated codes."[46] These "negotiated codes" in turn operate

[42] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), 219.

[43] Butler, 219.

[44] The terms are Butler's (219).

[45] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 95, 93.

[46] Hall, 97, 102.

through "situated logics . . . sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power."[47] Although Hall is focusing on the television media of the 1980s, his analysis offers a productive way of reading the process of encoding and decoding present in Lister's and her like-minded friends' use of the classics.

While Lister was already reading in a coded manner, searching for clues to her own sexuality, classical references also formed part of a signifying chain that was renegotiating the "deep semantic codes" the classics represented. Through these acts of "negotiated coding," references to the classics enabled the circulation of queer knowledge, with Lister occupying the role of an early queer reader, both scanning texts *for* hidden or explicit sexual content and using textual references *to communicate* sexual content; as Clark suggests, Lister "convey[s] her intentions, and her knowledge, in coded terms."[48] Furthermore, the crypt hand Lister used to write the intimate and erotic parts of her diary was made up of Greek letters, numbers, and other symbols, which gives ancient Greek a key role as both "deep semantic code" and cipher. While the use of cipher was fairly widespread, Rowanchild argues that Lister was especially influenced by classical texts in that the use of codes and ciphers was also common practice in ancient writings.[49]

Classical references therefore had the dual function for Lister of decoding nonnormative sexual practices and of coding her encounters with other women. On several occasions, there are key interchanges between Lister and her friends and acquaintances that employ the classics in "a covert signal of transgressive sexuality."[50] These encounters involve acts of coding and decoding that in turn challenge the embedded semantic meanings of the original encoded reference. In light of this, I examine sample conversations and encounters with six of Lister's acquaintances and lovers: Miss Frances "Frank" Pickford, Miss Mackenzie (Miss Mack), Mrs. Maria Barlow, Miss Sarah Ponsonby, Miss Elizabeth Browne, and Miss Ann Walker. While other scholars have also touched on these encounters, I show how the use of classical references produced sites of discomfort and anxiety and created queer connections—in the nineteenth-century sense of unusual and unexpected and in the contemporary sense of erotic—between those who used them.

Lister tended to place the women she met into two categories: those who were young, feminine, and seducible and those who were like her—usually more intellectual and masculine in appearance—and with whom she engaged in a complex dance of recognition and misrecognition. One such example is Miss "Frank" Pickford, mentioned earlier, an acquaintance who appears to have most resembled Lister in manner, style, and interests. In August 1823 Lister and Pickford had a discussion about why Miss Pickford's friend

[47] Hall, 102.
[48] Clark, "Constructing," 38.
[49] Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 142.
[50] Rowanchild, 148.

Miss Threlfall "did not marry," and Lister makes it clear she understands why this "was no wonder at all."[51]

> Asked Miss Pickford if she now understood me thoroughly. She said yes. I said many would censure unqualifiedly but I did not. If it had been done from books & not from nature, the thing would have been different. . . . [A]s it was, nature was the guide and I had nothing to say. There was no parallel between a case like this & the Sixth Satire of Juvenal. The one was artificial & inconsistent, the other was the effect of nature & consistent with itself. . . . We parted mutually satisfied, I, musing on what had passed. I am now let into her secret & she forever barred from mine. Are there more Miss Pickfords in the world than I have ever before thought of?[52]

As with all of Lister's records of conversations around same-sex desire, codes within codes create a palimpsest of interpretation. To begin with, the figure of Miss Threlfall is a placeholder through which Lister and Miss Pickford can obliquely communicate their own modes of identification. Juvenal's sixth Satire is then invoked to emphasize the artificiality of books: while Juvenal is "artificial & inconsistent," Miss Threlfall's case is "the effect of nature & consistent with itself." As a classical reference, Juvenal is invoked here in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, he is necessary as proof of the existence of homoerotic practices, while on the other, he represents that which is against nature and therefore functions for Lister as a source of disavowal and disidentification. According to Lister, "nature" is that which is experienced directly rather than through Juvenal's "artificial and inconsistent" satiric style. Lister wants to argue precisely for the naturalness of same-sex erotic practices and desires, as that which is "consistent with itself." Yet even as he is being disavowed, Juvenal remains necessary as a classical locus, whether "artificial" or not. It is therefore only by invoking Juvenal in a gesture of identification or proof that Lister can then disidentify with him and develop her own language of authentic female same-sex eroticism.

Furthermore, the invocation of Juvenal assumes that Miss Pickford understands the reference and that it requires no explanation. Although many classical texts were accessible only in their bowdlerized versions, John Dryden translated Juvenal's *Satires* in 1693 in a fairly explicit manner, including the lines "Laufella lays her Garland by, and proves / The mimick Leachery of Manly Loves."[53] As Emma Donoghue argues, this translation, although somewhat freely adapted, clearly suggests that Laufella is "mimicking" masculinity by engaging in sexual activity with a woman, and the text would have been relatively available to female readers.

[51] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 296.

[52] Lister, 296.

[53] Quoted in Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668–1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), 212.

As in most Latin writings on homosexuality, Juvenal is far more explicit about male "boy lovers" than about female homoeroticism, and part of his antimarriage diatribe in the sixth Satire includes a recommendation that the husband-to-be would be better off with a boy lover than a wife. For readers such as Lister and Pickford, the references to male homosexuality become "negotiated codes" that involve a form of cross-gender translation; if homosexual acts exist between men, it follows that they should exist between women. Juvenal also plays satirically on the question of gender reversal. As part of his critique of women's insubordination, he invokes the figure of the female gladiator, a "helmeted woman who spurns / Her very own gender."[54] Once again, such references would have offered Lister and Pickford a way of reimagining femaleness outside existing codes of femininity and in ways that reversed gender norms. Paradoxically, Juvenal's satirical critique provided images that could be literalized and taken up in unironic ways.

More generally, in order to circulate as code, classical references had to be available to a broader public. Martial's *Epigrams*, from which Juvenal borrowed, are in fact far more direct and explicit. Martial's famous lesbian epigram, *To Phileanis, a Tribade* (7.67), includes the lines "But girls she'll gamahuche for hours, / Their juicy quims she quite devours."[55] In this first English translation from 1868, which postdates Lister, "gamahuche" is a nineteenth-century French term for cunnilingus or fellatio, and "quim," a term Lister herself used, is an eighteenth-century word for vulva. Although Lister does not seem to have had direct access to Martial, Clark points out that she was able to gain an understanding of Martial's influence on Juvenal through the seventeenth-century Latin commentator Lubinus, "who revealed another layer of Juvenal to her: a mine of information about homosexuality, both male and female."[56] Through her tenacious research, Lister would have been one of the few women in her circle to have a deeper understanding of the explicit homoerotic language present in these texts. While Rowanchild argues that Lister's scholarly approach enabled her to "gain a certain cachet among her women lovers for this masculine display of learning," it also created a hierarchical rather than an egalitarian structure in the relationship with her female peers.[57] In other words, Lister at times mimicked elite masculinity by using the classics as a form of mastery over other women.

The encounter with Miss Pickford ended with Lister's blocking of further intimacy, a move Lister performed with those she had no interest

[54] Juvenal, *The Satires*, trans. A. S. Kline (2011), 41, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineasjuvenal.php.

[55] *Martial in English*, ed. J. P. Sullivan and A. J. Boyle (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 250.

[56] Clark, "Construction," 33.

[57] Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 141.

in seducing. Lister also appears convinced that Miss Pickford has exposed herself in a way Lister has not: "I am now let into her secret & she forever barred from mine." However, Lister's final rhetorical question concerning Miss Pickford ("Are there more Miss Pickfords in the world than I have ever before thought of?") returns us to the question of identification. By referring to "Miss Pickfords" in the plural here, Lister has turned her friend into a type, one to which Lister clearly belongs yet with which Lister has carefully refused full affinity. Indeed, in recording her conversation with Miss Pickford, Lister reports actively disidentifying with her: "The difference between you & me is, mine is theory, yours practice. I am taught by books, you by nature. . . . I don't, in reality, go beyond the utmost verge of friendship."[58] Here, Lister sets up a series of boundaries between friendship and what might exist beyond it, between theory and practice, and between books and nature, so that Miss Pickford is positioned as the lowlier body to Lister's more high-minded scholarly pursuits. While on the surface this can be read simply as a gesture of self-protection, it also reveals the extent to which an excess of identification generates a counteridentificatory response. It also begs the question, If Lister is not one of the "Miss Pickfords," who and what is she?

An uncannily similar conversation took place during Lister's visit to Paris in 1824, when she met Mrs. Barlow, one of a group of English women staying at a pension at the place Vendôme. The key difference between Miss Pickford and Mrs. Barlow is that Lister and Mrs. Barlow actually became lovers. But at the beginning of their acquaintance, a similar cat-and-mouse game took place: "Here Mrs Barlow feigned an ignorance, which gave me the hint that she wanted to pump me but I declared I was the most innocent person in the world considering all I had seen & heard, for everybody told me things. She said she should not have mentioned it but she knew she was not telling me anything I did not know before. I said I read of women being too fond of each other in the Latin parts of the works of Sir William Jones."[59] In this case, the classical reference is considerably diluted, as Lister invokes a classical scholar rather than an original classical text.[60] Yet once again it enables Lister not only to disidentify with her interlocutor but also to code her erudition in a particular manner. As Mrs. Barlow attempts to force Lister into "confessing" her knowledge ("she knew she was not telling me anything I did not know before"), Lister uses that knowledge as an intellectual shield to mask her "nature" from Mrs. Barlow. On these occasions, the fact that Lister uses classical rather than Romantic or even biblical references resonates in specific ways, as the classics were the least

[58] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 296.

[59] Helena Whitbread, ed., *No Priest but Love: The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824–1826* (Otley: Smith Settle, 1992), 32.

[60] Sir William Jones (1746–94) was an Orientalist and a Latinist who studied at Oxford and who mastered twenty-eight languages during his lifetime. See Whitbread, 44n3.

accessible reading materials for women. By invoking the classics and classical scholars—Sir William Jones was a reputed Orientalist and Latinist—Lister was implicitly identifying with the male privilege the classics bestow, and she was subtly deploying her intellectual power. Far from identifying with the nonconforming women she met, even those with whom she had sexual encounters, Lister's pattern was to use her erudition to maintain control over the codes she employed.

Still at the place Vendôme in Paris, a slightly different coded conversation took place with Miss Mackenzie, another member of the group. Crucially, it was Miss Mackenzie rather than Lister who invoked the classical reference: "Said Miss Mack, 'I have a question to ask you.' She wrote it. 'Êtes-vous Achilles?' I laughed and said she made me blush. She said it was from my manner of talking to Mrs Barlow just as she had heard gentlemen talking to her."[61] This conversation includes several stages of translation or transition. To begin with, Miss Mack makes an oral request to ask a question, but the question itself cannot be spoken; it has to be written down and, in this sense, taken out of circulation. In a further act of encryption, the question itself—"Êtes-vous Achilles?"—is asked in French rather than English, and it also requires a shared classical knowledge to be understood. Achilles was a complexly layered figure with regard to gender; an emblem of heroic masculinity, he also had a male lover, Patrocles, and in his youth he was sent by his father, dressed as a girl, to the court of Lycomedes on Syros in order to escape the prophecy that claimed he would perish in the Trojan War.[62] The gender-bending allusions therefore go both ways, feminizing Achilles and masculinizing Lister. In this case, the classical reference acts as shorthand for a sexual subculture that, while not quite constituting community, enables fragile links between knowing participants.[63]

This brief encounter shows how classical references could be taken from the hands of learned men and placed in those of "deviant," in the sense of nonconforming, women, thereby renegotiating and temporarily subverting dominant modes of encoding. These encounters also put into play Butler's notion of citationality, in which the original citation can be reproduced in a different context and acquire a new meaning. As Butler suggests, this "resignification" has political potential. "What [does] it mean," asks Butler, "to 'cite' the law"—in this case, the law of erudition and foundational cultural narratives—in order "to produce it differently . . . [and] in order to reiterate and coopt its power?"[64] Yet resignification is still tied to norms,

[61] Whitbread, 26.

[62] See Whitbread, 29–30n28.

[63] Although Lister herself was not part of an urban lesbian subculture, there is evidence that a lesbian equivalent to male molly houses was developing in London over the course of the eighteenth century. See Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (London: Routledge, 1991).

[64] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15.

highlighting the "paradox of subjectivation," whereby "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms."[65] In Lister's world, where categories such as "the Miss Pickfords" and the "sapphic" continue to be fluid and porous, references to "Achilles" and "Juvenal" operate as delicate threads of communication that can produce simultaneous moments of affinity and disavowal.

This raises the further question of how such encounters helped shape the structuring of identity. In this case, Lister analyzes the conversation further, writing: "She [Miss Mack] said I was the only one in the house to whom she could have written it, because the only one who would have so soon understood it, that is, who would have understood the allusion to take it that way."[66] This passage is marked by repetition, as Lister seems to need to explain for herself what Miss Mack was seeking to communicate. By focusing on Lister's "being the only one" in terms not only of understanding the classical reference to Achilles but also of understanding it "in that way," Lister has to deduce whether Miss Mack is assigning her to a nonnormative gender presentation or a nonnormative sexuality, or both. Is Lister's identity being confirmed or forever deferred through these codes within codes, which are explainable only through the process of decoding and readable only through the body of the other, of Achilles? A little further on, Lister wrote: "She said I had the qualities d'un[e] dame et d'un homme [of a lady and of a man]," once again coding this double gender embodiment through the use of French.[67] French language and culture, with its strong eighteenth-century erotic literary tradition—particularly in the works of the abbé Prévost, Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, Choderlos de Laclos, and Denis Diderot, among others—was associated in Britain with a freer and more liberated sexual culture, which is in part what attracted Lister to Paris. The gathering of these English women at the place Vendôme to some degree anticipated the largely Anglophone lesbian subculture that would develop in Paris a century later, in the 1920s.[68]

Miss Mack's observation also echoes an earlier conversation Lister had with Miss Pickford in February 1823, prior to their coded talk about Juvenal. As Lister wrote in her diary: "Miss Pickford spoke of the moon being made masculine by some nations, for instance, by the Germans. I smiled & said the moon had tried both sexes, like old Tiresias, but that one could not make such an observation to every one. Of course she remembered the story? She said yes. I am not quite certain, tho', whether she did nor not.

[65] Butler, 15.

[66] Whitbread, *No Priest*, 26.

[67] Whitbread, 26.

[68] The lesbian subculture in 1920s Paris was centered around Natalie Clifford Barney's salon at 20 rue Jacob and included names such as Radclyffe Hall, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Colette, Rachilde, Romaine Brooks, and Renée Vivien, among others. For an account of the period, see Suzanne Rodrigues, *Wild Heart: A Life; Natalie Clifford Barney and the Decadence of Literary Paris* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

'Tis not everyone who would."[69] Once again, the classical allusion to Ovid's Tiresias enables a moment of mutual recognition by these masculine women. In this case, it is Miss Pickford who begins the discussion by pointing to the arbitrariness of gender pronouns for objects. In German the moon is gendered male, while in French it is gendered female. In English there are examples of the moon being gendered as either female or male depending on the context. Lister is quick to pick up on this distinction through the ambiguously gendered figure of the blind seer, Tiresias, who was turned into a woman for seven years—in some accounts by the goddess Hera—after Tiresias struck a pair of mating snakes. As Rowanchild notes, in Ovid's version the gods then ask Tiresias, "Which sex experiences the greater sexual pleasure and, finds that women do."[70] Lister seems to be invoking Tiresias as a moment of rapprochement between Miss Pickford and herself, in that each understands what it is to be both feminine and masculine while also understanding female same-sex desire. While Tiresias embodies all these things, the appeal to his name is also what disrupts the flow of communication. Lister is not sure whether Miss Pickford "remembered the story" or not, and the allusion can never be rendered transparent. The figure of Tiresias therefore defers transparent communication as much as it enables a coded intimacy.

Classical references not only are code but also encode these encounters in specific ways, always deferring full disclosure. Lister both wants and does not want Miss Pickford as her ally. The Tiresian moment of identification is also a potential threat. As Lister wrote a little later: "She is a regular oddity. . . . She is better informed than some ladies and a godsend of a companion in my present scarcity, but I am not an admirer of learned ladies. . . . [H]er style and manner of character do not naturally suit me. She is not lovable."[71] Lister can neither desire Miss Pickford nor, it seems, intimately befriend her. Once again, Miss Pickford's similarity to Lister exposes a potential excess of identification that threatens to obliterate Lister's own sense of uniqueness. The classical references that unite the two women by the act of encoding simultaneously threaten to undo the coherence of the very self these references enable.

One of Lister's deepest conversations about the classics takes place when she makes her long-awaited visit to the Ladies of Llangollen in July 1822. Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby were two upper-class Irish women who scandalized their contemporaries by leaving Ireland in 1780 in order to settle in a domestic partnership in Llangollen, North Wales. They became somewhat of a media sensation and were visited by several of the Romantic poets, including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and William Wordsworth, who wrote a sonnet about them. The pair were famous by that

[69] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 257.
[70] Rowanchild, "'Peeping,'" 145.
[71] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 262.

point, and Lister recorded being very taken with Sarah Ponsonby's genteel manner and conversation. Lister of course also registered Ponsonby's gender presentation: "Mild & gentle, certainly not masculine, & yet there was a *je-ne-sais-quoi* striking."[72] For Lister, the Ladies of Llangollen represented her dream of idealized domesticity with a female companion, expressed in a diary entry from July 1817: "I felt that my happiness depended on having some female companion whom I could love and depend upon."[73] In terms of the Ladies of Llangollen, Lister tentatively speculates that their relationship was "something more tender still than friendship," and in the conversation she reports with Ponsonby, Lister attempts to elicit an answer through the practice of coding: "Contrived to ask if they [Ponsonby and Butler] were classical. 'No,' said she. 'Thank God from Latin and Greek I am free.'"[74] As with Lister's other conversations revolving around the ancients, Latin and Greek are code here for same-sex eroticism. Although Ponsonby blocks Lister in the same way Lister has blocked other like-minded acquaintances, such as Miss Pickford, Lister records that Ponsonby "somehow mentioned Lucretius, but it was 'a bad book & she was afraid of reading it.'"[75] According to Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie, Lucretius was known as a "pugnacious, blaspheming figure" in the nineteenth century, so that in this exchange of references each interlocutor seems to take one step forward and one step back.[76] In terms of the translations of classical texts, Lister "observed that [Ponsonby] might think all the classics objectionable. Yes! They wanted pruning, but the Delphin editions were very good."[77] Here, the conversation seems to slide between sexual coding and erudite editorial concerns. This encounter also takes place within the context of a broader discussion of texts that include Virgil, Tasso, and Byron, among others, giving it a literary flavor. Yet it shows how coded classical references could, in certain circumstances, circulate freely among educated groups of women, creating a textual subculture that was surprisingly available and explicit in spite of its subterranean undertones.

While classical references acted as shorthand for the communication of nonnormative forms of sexual knowledge, Lister also used them to mold and fashion her objects of desire. Miss Browne, mentioned earlier, is one such example: an attractive young woman whom Lister noticed at church, she was also from a lower social class and far from being Lister's intellectual equal. Lister's infatuation nevertheless grew and took up a substantial portion of the year 1818. In June 1818 Lister was torn between devoting herself to her studies and continuing her flirtation with Miss Browne, contrasting

[72] Lister, 220.

[73] Lister, 19.

[74] Lister, 229, 221.

[75] Lister, 221.

[76] Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

[77] Lister, *Secret Diaries*, 221.

impulses that seem to take up all of Lister's attention and focus. While on Sunday, 7 June 1818, Lister wrote that she would "stick diligently to [her] watchword [and] devote [herself] to study," on the following Sunday, 14 June, Lister's focus on the classics has been redirected to a focus on Miss Browne: "Walked from church with Miss Browne. . . . Offered Miss Browne (Kallista, as I shall call her) my arm. . . . Having the two keys in my hand belonging to the seat [in church] I smiled and told Kallista if they were the keys of heaven I would let her in."[78] Kallista—Greek for "most beautiful"—was Diana's favorite nymph and was seduced by Jove, who disguised himself as Diana. As a punishment for Kallista's betrayal, Diana turns her nymph into a bear. Clark offers a useful reading of this entry: "If Miss Browne was Callisto, who did Anne see herself as: Jove or Diana, or one in the disguise of the other? As Jove, Anne could inflame her fantasies of 'taking' lower-class young women in a masculine disguise. As Diana, Anne could imagine a comradeship of free, virginal young women hunting and loving in the forest and identify with her rage when Jove raped Callisto, just as she resented the marriages of the young women she admired."[79] As Clark shows, Lister's borrowing of a classical reference enables a series of fantasies that feed into Lister's seduction narrative.[80] Yet the scenario is fraught with a mix of innocence and aggression, revealing both predatory desire and the exclusion of the love object from the realm of knowledge. As Clark argues, "This duality between female companionship and masculine sexual predation permeated Anne's relationship with women."[81] While in Lister's diary entries Miss Browne becomes Kallista, when Lister reports that she "told Kallista if they were the keys of heaven [she] would let her in" it is not clear whether Lister is addressing Miss Browne as Kallista in public or as a private diary entry. In either case, Lister employs classical references to manipulate those to whom she is attracted—even if that manipulation is privately expressed—and to distance herself from those who resemble her too closely. Once again, Lister's use of these classical allusions challenges as much as it makes possible a stable, coherent sense of self in that it generates coded layers that endlessly defer full transparency.

The conflation of the classics with sexuality emerges with full force during one of Lister's contentious arguments with Ann Walker. Walker became Lister's final companion, the one with whom she shared the sacrament to affirm their union in the Holy Trinity Church in York in 1834 and with whom she combined her finances. Their relationship, however, was fraught and uneven; whereas Walker was cautious by nature and subject to depression, Lister wanted to expand her horizons and travel the world. Indeed,

[78] Lister, 58.

[79] Clark, "Constructing," 41–42.

[80] The name Callisto can be spelled with either a *C* or a *K* as the first letter; however, Lister has also chosen to feminize the ending, replacing the *o* with an *a*, hence, Kallista.

[81] Clark, "Constructing," 42.

Lister spent time in Paris, went on several European tours, and traveled to the Russian Caucasus with a reluctant Ann Walker. It was on that final trip that Lister caught a fever and died, and it took Walker six months to bring Lister's body home. When Lister and Walker first became involved, Lister was distressed by the possibility that Walker was not as innocent and virginal as she initially appeared. Lister suspected that Walker might have had previous sexual relations either with an earlier male admirer, Mr. Ainsworth, or with a close female friend, Catherine Rawson. The latter also happened to have been tutored by Lister in the classics, leading Lister to make the following diary entry: "Catherine's classics might have taught her the trick of debauching Miss W——. Yes, Miss W—— has been taught by someone. . . . Have she and Catherine been playing tricks?"[82] In this metonymical displacement, Lister interprets the teaching of the classics as the teaching of sex. Having inadvertently taught someone else her "tricks," Lister finds herself temporarily outmaneuvered. In this entry, pedagogy paradoxically produces adultery, with Lister excluded from the sexual narrative she habitually orchestrated. The code, in other words, always risked subverting the user.

We can therefore see how the ancients offered access to a language of nonnormative sexualities that could be appropriated, deployed, and coded in a variety of different ways and with different results. What seems to be absent from the Lister diaries are direct references to Sappho herself, a figure who nevertheless haunts the classical tradition and whom, as Clark points out, Lister certainly discovered through her reading of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary Historical and Critical* and other works.[83] Paradoxically, by the early nineteenth century, Sappho was either being read as heterosexual through her doomed passion for Phaon or being turned into the adjective "sapphic" to describe decadent sexual practices.[84] The eighteenth-century socialite Hester Thrale (1741–1821) was known for actively condemning the queen of France, Marie Antoinette, who, Thrale wrote in her diary, "is at the Head of a Set of Monsters call'd by each other *Sapphists.*"[85] Lister records how Mrs. Barlow also references the sapphic practices of Marie Antoinette: "Somehow she began talking of that one of the things of which Marie Antoinette was accused of was being too fond of women."[86] In another conversation with Mrs. Barlow, Lister refers to "Saffic [*sic*] regard" and says, "There was artifice in it. It was very different from mine [hers]

[82] Diary entry from 11 October 1832, quoted in Steidele, *Gentleman Jack*, 200.

[83] Clark, "Constructing," 33.

[84] See Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) for a detailed account of how Sappho has been taken up by European and especially French culture from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. Of Sappho in the eighteenth century, DeJean writes: "The eighteenth century's capital Sapphic fictions are perhaps most striking because of the total silence with regard to the issue of sapphism" (117).

[85] Quoted in Donoghue, *Passions*, 265.

[86] Whitbread, *No Priest*, 31.

& would be no pleasure to me."[87] Sapphic practices here are associated with the use of dildos, which Lister always objected to as constituting the artificial and the unnatural.[88] While Lister was clearly interested in Bayle's depiction of Sappho as a poet who wrote "an Ode to one of her mistresses" and "whose amorous passion extended even to the persons of her own sex," for Lister, Sapphism was tied to the decadent practices of an obsolete French aristocracy against which, by emphasizing the authentic and the natural, Lister was trying to define herself.[89] In her diary entries, Lister tended to be more closely aligned with Rousseauian authenticity than with eighteenth-century libertinism, even if her sexual behavior could at times be aligned with libertine practices.[90] While Lister was always looking for the traces of Sappho as a key to understanding her own sexuality, she also actively disidentified with what Sappho had come to represent in her own time.

The ancients therefore infiltrate the various strands of Lister's universe, from the cultural to the social to the erotic. They were an invaluable source of self-fashioning, cultural capital, and sexual knowledge, and they also permitted flows of coded communication between like-minded subjects in a world in which same-sex erotic practices between women were considered entirely unacceptable. Lister's use of and engagement with the ancients reveals her ongoing identification with the cultural richness these foundational canonical texts made available. Yet Lister's desire to affirm same-sex erotic practices between women and to render such practices real and intelligible through classical references was constantly challenged by the paradoxical encodings of classical discourse itself, for the classics' embodiment of a masculinized form of cultural capital also deferred access to the very authenticity Lister sought to achieve. Classical references were both an assertion of the existence of female homosexual erotic practices and a melancholic disavowal of authentic identity formation.

In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle asks: "Why is it so difficult to see the lesbian—even when she is there, quite plainly, in front of us? In part because she has been 'ghosted' or made to seem invisible by culture itself."[91] Lister, to some degree, was herself ghosted by the ancients, engaging with them as an absent presence, simultaneously identifying and disidentifying

[87] Whitbread, 49.

[88] Knowledge of dildos in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was made popular through accounts of female husbands, such as Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband* (1746). While Lister did not approve of dildos for herself, her diary entries show she had full knowledge of their existence and function. See Clark, "Construction," 34, and for a more general account of dildos in the literature of the period, see Donoghue, *Passions*.

[89] Pierre Bayle, *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr Peter Bayle*, vol. 5 (1734–38; New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 45.

[90] In a diary entry from 19 August 1823, Lister quotes the opening paragraph of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782–89): "Je sens mon coeur, et je connais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent" (*Secret Diaries*, 306).

[91] Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 4.

with the status they bestowed and the promise they withheld. In this sense, the ancients reminded Lister as much of what she was *not* as of what she *was*. Yet they also enabled Lister to articulate the unthinkable and the forbidden. Perhaps the only fitting conclusion is to leave the last word on the ancients to Lister herself. In November 1833, while Lister was visiting Copenhagen on one of her European tours, a certain Madame Hage asked Lister whether she "had read Virgil, Horace, Homer in their originals," to which the unabashed Lister replied: "Guilty."[92]

About the Author

Chris Roulston is professor of French studies and gender, sexuality, and women's studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. Her books include *Virtue, Gender and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (1998) and *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (2010). She has recently published chapters titled "Representations of Marriage" in *A Cultural History of Marriage in the Age of Enlightenment* (2020), on Mme de Graffigny and marriage in *Françoise de Graffigny: Femme de lettres des Lumières* (2020), and on Anne Lister in *After Marriage in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2018). She is also coediting a collection of essays with Dr. Caroline Gonda on Anne Lister, *Decoding Anne Lister: New Critical Readings*. Her current project focuses on queer sexuality in girls' boarding school novels, with recently published articles on Dorothy Strachey's *Olivia* in *Modernism/Modernity* (2020) and on Rosemary Manning's *The Chinese Garden* in *Twentieth-Century Literature* (2019).

[92] Quoted in Choma, *Gentleman Jack*, 238.