“I feel the mind enlarging itself”: Anne Lister’s gendered reading practices

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ABSTRACT
This article argues for the usefulness of deploying a trans lens to examine the diaries of Anne Lister (1791-1840). The author contends that a trans reading may expand possibilities for critical analysis of Lister’s gender practices within the context of early-nineteenth-century white, upper-class Halifax society, in addition to existing labels such as “lesbian” and “queer.” Examples to illustrate these possibilities are drawn from Lister’s reading habits, facilitated by some initial quantitative analysis of Lister’s own indexing practices. The article concludes that Lister structures their literary life to enable them to trans certain gender practices, and to fashion a livable gendered existence amidst the competing pressures of class, nationhood, financial security, self-determination, and sexual desire.

Introduction
Anne Lister, early-nineteenth-century heiress and diarist, has captured contemporary imagination, both within and without LGBTQ+ communities. Following the online digitization of Lister’s five-million word diaries in 2018, a community of transcribers known as “codebreakers” has been working to produce open access transcripts, including decoded descriptions of Lister’s sexual activity with other women, as well as myriad other details about their life. Lister has recently gained a televisual avatar in the BBC’s popular program Gentleman Jack, and as Eve Ng (2022) demonstrates elsewhere in this special issue, the show has engaged many new fans with Lister’s diaries, cross-pollinating fandom and scholarship. As larger audiences connect with the diaries through these various media, questions arise about how Lister’s identity should be described, and who gets to make that decision, turning the diaries and their cross-media interpretations into a site of historiographic and cultural power (Joyce, 2019). Lister has largely been named a lesbian, although this word was not available to Lister during their lifetime, but lesbians are only one group of people...
who may find continuities of experience with Lister. This paper aims to introduce some initial thoughts on why analysis that uses a trans lens may produce fresh and relevant knowledge about Lister’s life, and facilitates a reinterpretation of historical gender practices in scholarly and public spaces.

To provide some initial examples of what trans theory may offer Lister scholarship, this article will focus on one important strand of Lister’s diary records: their reading habits. Reading and gender are both nebulous practices. Lister’s reading permeates the diaries; they recorded their reading in detail almost every day. Lister read diverse subjects and formats, and their textual interactions were always in relation to cultural expectations and representations of reading, class, and gender, as I will show. Similarly, in a post-Butler scholarly landscape, gender may be understood as a series of citations and micro-interactions that permeate a lifetime. Lister’s complex reading habits mirror and enact the “complexity of the discursive map that constructs gender” (Butler, 2006, p. 44), providing a useful route into discussion of Lister as a trans subject. Given the nebulous nature of these lived experiences, as well as the magnitude of Lister’s reading records, this article will also suggest that an expansive approach, facilitated by quantitative methods, is necessary for understanding the ways in which Lister’s reading informed and enacted their gender practices.

**Critical contexts**

Questions of language around historical people that lived non-heteronormative lives are often fraught. Labels such as “lesbian” and “trans” were not available to Lister during their lifetime, and using them risks projecting the connotations and assumptions that come with modern identities back through history.1 Elsewhere in this edition, Jessica Campbell lucidly outlines many of the issues with using modern LGBTQ+ terms for Lister, but also argues for the benefits of doing so in some scholarly work.

Campbell advocates for a method familiar to recent Lister scholarship, which treats “lesbian” as a kind of theoretical lens, as a historiographic tool for structuring knowledge production, functioning similarly to “queer.” Others have done similar work with a queer lens (Turton, 2022), to resist categorization of Lister’s sexual and gender practices by denoting them a “figure of rupture” (Roulston, 2021, p. 114). The difference between these methods hinges on Donna Haraway’s (1988) idea of “situated knowledges,” which understands all knowledge as “manufactured” using the “apparatus of bodily production” (p. 581, 577, 595). In other words, all produced knowledge is inflected by the scholar’s identities, embodied experiences, and critical positioning. Queer perspectives offer possibilities for historians
to privilege the subject’s own contemporary language, while still acknowledging their significance to queer historians in a removed present. However, the queer lens can imply a post-identitarian, “objective” positioning for the author, which, following Haraway, belies the reality. Using “lesbian” as a theoretical lens helps to side-step issues of ahistoricism, while still acknowledging the personal perspectives and embodied realities that inflect a researcher’s knowledge production. Whereas using a queer lens risks divorcing the theoretical lens from the researchers’ situated knowledges, reading Lister under “the sign of the lesbian” embraces their inevitable protrusion into the researcher’s interpretation.

This acknowledgment of positionality is vital for sites of increasing cultural power like the Lister diaries. As Campbell (2022) argues, naming Lister a lesbian “can do real work in the present, both communicating to the public that women who loved women have always existed and helping lesbian studies scholars to think critically about what this term means.” This logic could be applied to various identity labels; naming Lister trans can likewise “do real work in the present” on behalf of gender-nonconforming publics wishing to make their own historical forebears visible in mainstream media and scholarly debates. 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. Just as reading Lister under “the sign of the Lesbian” critically engages ways of thinking about sexuality and its textual history, perhaps working alongside trans theory to read Lister’s gender practices as transitional, transnational, transactional, and transitive (in the sense of affecting the world around Lister) may elucidate the functioning of gender citation within Lister’s social and literary landscape.

There has been some preemptive resistance to approaching Lister with a trans lens. Dannielle Orr (2004) interprets Lister’s masculine clothes as expressions of heterosexual unavailability, rather than as serious interventions into gender expression (p. 213) Gender and sexuality are presented here as discrete discourses, rather than entangled lived experiences, which also intersect with race, nationality, and class. Similarly, Anira Rowanchild (2000) draws on the logic of lesbian scholar Terry Castle (1993) in arguing that Lister only “envied... masculine accoutrements and characteristics” because they would help them to “pursue her amorous adventures with women more vigorously” (p. 90). Lister’s interest in masculinities is explained away as a corollary of sexual orientation, and binary gender is maintained.
Having a range of lenses and language available to the Lister scholar is important because these kinds of scholarly assumptions influence how all areas of Lister’s life are understood. When taking the example of Lister’s reading, this critical slant plays out similarly. The richness of Lister’s reading life has led to strong critical attention on this area. Many recent scholars have focused on the relationship between Lister’s reading and their sexuality, particularly Lister’s use of classical reference for coded communication of desire with other women (Clark, 1996; Colclough, 2010; Roulston, 2021). This emphasis is rooted in the earliest scholarship on Lister; their “intensive course of self-education” in a sexually fallow period was characterized by Helena Whitbread (Lister and Whitbread, 2020) as emotional consolation to “sustain Anne through the lonely years which followed Mariana’s defection” (p. 8). This is a convincing interpretation, given that Lister frequently uses the Halifax library space to “passer le temps” in distraction, or rendezvous with passing love interests such as Miss Browne (Lister & Whitbread, 2010, pp. 54, 334). However, distraction or consolation is surely not the only motivation for the years of dedicated autodidacticism that Lister’s diaries witness. As I will argue in a later section, deploying a trans lens offers alternative ways of thinking about an everyday activity like reading, interpreting Lister’s reading as engendering and self-fashioning, rather than allotting romantic motivations.

A trans Lister

There are moments in Lister’s diaries that lend themselves to a trans reading, but have mainly been interpreted through a lesbian lens. Lister was certainly interested in male and intersex embodiment. Their diaries document multiple references to themself having a penis, in dream or idle fancy (Clark, 1996, p. 43). They also document their detailed examination of a wax model of an intersex body at the Parisian Ecole de Medicine. They then repeat almost exactly the same anatomical information when recounting their discussion of the model with a friend later that day, which suggests Lister was fascinated with the possibilities this nonnormative embodiment offered. They especially note that the person on whom it was modeled resembles a “woman’s figure,” but that “the sight of a pretty woman caused most agitation” and they could perform “amanto enterat” (penetrative sex) via a small penis, which Lister assumes is an enlarged clitoris, much like modern FTM genitalia or the eighteenth-century notion of the “tribade” (Lister, 1830). Deploying a lesbian lens, Anna Clark (1996) interprets Lister’s “phallic obsession” (p. 43) in a Freudian sense, as representing their desire for women and masculine privileges, not an indication of gender identity. But if one accepts that this is colored by cis-centric assumptions and instead reads the surface meanings of these
episodes, Lister’s fascination with nonnormative anatomy is instantly recognizable to many transmasculine readers as a trans experience. This discussion of Lister’s penile interest is not intended to pin them to a trans label (indeed, genital transition is an over-emphasized aspect of the trans experience) but to show how multiple interpretations of Lister’s gender practices can exist simultaneously as long as one interrogates cis-normative biases that have shut down other interpretations.

Similarly, Lister expresses discomfort with being interpreted by others as a woman. Lister complains that Mrs Barlow “considers me too much as a woman,” whereas long-term lover Mariana is considerate enough to pretend not to notice their menstrual “napkins” and does not try to “touch” them (Lister & Whitbread, 2020, p. 128). It is clear that Lister’s discomfort with their assigned gender is something agreed upon with Mariana, as they later discuss Lister’s “sensitiveness of anything that reminded me of my petticoats” (Lister & Whitbread, 2020, p. 255). Lister’s feelings of discomfort with their female body and accoutrements chime with the modern trans experience of dysphoria. What Lister’s conversation with Mariana makes clear is that there was some space in their early nineteenth-century social setting for experiences of nonnormative embodied gender to be legible.

The first person to undertake serious examination of Lister’s social gender practices was Jack Halberstam. Halberstam (1998) argues that Lister’s masculinity is not simply representative of their same-sex desire, but instead suggests “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” (p. 72). This engendered lens stops short of naming Lister trans, instead mobilizing a queer methodology that treats gender practices as historically specific. Halberstam names Lister a “female husband” (1998, pp. 10, 65). This phrase was a popular trope in the nineteenth century, but also a slippery one. There is little agreement on exactly what the term connoted, although it is often interpreted through a lesbian lens, and it shifted in meaning across the nineteenth century (Cromwell, 2020, pp. 43-45; Halberstam, 1998, p. 67; Manion, 2020, pp. 1-2; Marcus, 2007, pp. 196-226). Female marriage was certainly known to Lister, as they were notoriously interested in the Ladies of Llangollen (Clark, 1996, p. 30). Lister’s early lovers used the term “husband” for Lister (Liddington, 1994, p. 46), and Ann Walker (Lister’s last long-term partner) described their relationship as “the same as marriage” (Lister & Liddington, 1998, p. 69). Likewise, Lister examines the role of “husband” for themself. For example, their worldly Parisian lover, Mrs Barlow, considers herself Lister’s mistress, and Lister writes, “I think I could not have satisfied her as a husband” (Lister & Whitbread, 2020, p. 207). By adopting the persona of the
husband, this made space for Lister to embrace the profligate privileges of nineteenth-century masculine sexuality by characterizing some lovers as “mistresses.” Similarly, there were non-sexual social moments in their life in which Lister found sensual affirmation through fulfilling traditionally male roles. After a day spent managing the Shibden estate, Lister notes that “all this ordering & work & exercise seemed to excite my manly feelings. I saw a pretty young girl go up the lane & desire rather came over me” (Lister & Whitbread, 2010, p. 290). Here, Lister's knowledge of their gender is produced by their embodied reactions to masculine social conventions.

How might a self-consciously trans reading of Lister differ from Halberstam's queer reading, or go beyond bodily definitions of gender transition? “Queer” inevitably evokes narratives of resistance and transgression. Halberstam confirms this, characterizing Lister's gender practices as a “struggling.” Historians of trans culture, on the other hand, are often concerned with the quotidian. Chu and Drager (2019) recently advocated for a trans theory “that refuses the pomp of antinormativity... for something slower, smaller, more tuned in to the ways in which ordinary life fails to measure up to the political analyses we thrust upon it” (p. 114). There is often an impulse to frame Lister as an icon of lesbian power and queer resistance, but as one works with the diaries' slow march through life in the minor gentry, this transgressive narrative becomes less plausible. Trans selfhood often involves an emotional investment in gender, binary or otherwise. As I will show, Lister was deeply invested in gender hegemony, class distinction, and white imperial power, and they attempted to buttress the cultural outline of the privileged masculinities available to them. To borrow Chu and Drager (2019) formulation, “[Lister] was a nonnormative subject, but that wasn't because she was 'against' the norm; on the contrary, her nonnormativity was what wanting to be normal actually looked like... [Lister] was making do in the gap between what she wanted and what wanting it got her” (p. 107). This trans “wanting” and “making do” is what I wish to mobilize in my analysis of Lister's reading and its relationship with their competing gendered desires.

Although Lister was often mistaken for a man, they could not live as one; as Clark (1996) has noted, “passing as a man” would force them to give up their “respectable position as an heiress” (p. 45). However, Lister was clearly interested in the possibility. The coded sections of Lister's diaries contain various examples of people socially transitioning, living in a different gender from that which they were assigned at birth, which Lister has carefully collected and commented upon. For instance, Lister recounts hearing a story about the housekeeper and confidante of an older Halifax lady “turning out to be a man,” and then repeats the story over dinner that evening (Lister, 1820b, May 12). Lister also recounts at length
the story of James Allen, a trans man who was married and was only “discovered” to have a female body at the inquest after his accidental death. Lister’s lover Mariana reads this account aloud while they are in bed, and they discuss whether or not Allen’s wife knew “more than she owned” (Lister, 1829). The discussion of these episodes with others again suggests a legible trans/nonnormative gendered experience for Lister, encapsulated in Lister’s famous description of themself as “oddity” (Shouls, 2020). Jen Manion (2020) has recently deployed the term “trans’ as a verb” to describe the “ongoing and ever-unfolding relationship with gender” for masculine-presenting people in the eighteenth century (p. 11). This usage is appropriate here; Lister is semi-openly transing their gender practices in collaboration with the people close to them. Through spoken and unspoken agreements to selectively ignore and notice parts of Lister’s body and behaviors, their friends and lovers affirm Lister’s “wanting” and “making do,” to unfold an alternative (trans)gendered space within hegemonic dynamics of nineteenth-century marriage.5

Trans self-narrativizing and problems of scale

Examples taken from Lister’s reading practices lend themselves particularly well to this trans lens because Lister’s reading, like their gender, was simultaneously social and embodied. Lister often notes the sensations of reading as a physical, sensory act, particularly the “pressure” on their eyes (Lister & Whitbread, 2010, p. 167). They also marked their books with a regimented system of marginalia, recorded texts’ material attributes, and described many social readerly practices including discussing books, reading aloud, borrowing and lending, and copying extracts into letters. 6

The problem with examining such omnipresent practices as reading and gender is one of scale, especially with the copious manuscript material of Lister’s diaries. Fortunately, Lister helps here, as they produced a “Literary Index” for each of the diaries until 1829, which map books and periodicals mentioned in the main diary entries. It is important to note that these indices are not comprehensive or objective lists of their reading, but neither are they public displays of selected intellectual credentials, given that parts are in code. Lister often only includes a text when they first interact with it, some texts are omitted entirely, and many records refer to discussions or reviews of books, and “skimming” texts. Instead, the indices function as a memory aid, but also as scaffolding on which Lister may construct a reading persona. The literary indices may therefore be understood as a text in themselves—a densely referential hypertext that depends upon the diaries for meaning, but still constructs a meaning independent of that constructed by the main diary entries. The eighteenth century was the heyday of witty and subversive indices (Duncan, 2021, p. 137), so
Lister had plenty of precedent to draw on for formulating their own literary and social voice via the index form. Likewise, Lister’s self-fashioning practices via the indices can be placed in the context of trans literary history, as self-narrativizing is a core tactic that trans people have used to make themselves legible in culture, to medical professionals, and to themselves. As Jay Prosser (1998) famously observed, “narrative is also a kind of second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be ‘read’” (p. 101). If Lister’s diaries are the flesh of their gendered experiences, then the literary indices are a second skin they wear.

In order to generate meanings from these curated narratives, I am compiling a database to convert the literary indices into a quantifiable dataset, including bibliographic data and information about how Lister interacted with each indexed text. Data entry is now complete for the volumes covering 1816 to 1822, comprising 564 primary records. The final section of this paper will therefore present a few initial examples of interpreting Lister’s embodied and social reading through a trans lens, set in the context of their self-narrativizing via quantitative analysis of their indexing practices.

“The mind enlarging”: intellectual transing

Some initial data analysis suggests ways in which Lister’s readerly self-persona matches and differs from previous critical analyses of Lister’s reading. Roulston (2021) has convincingly argued that “the classics became for Lister the Ur-code for desiring queerly” (p. 121), continuing the general critical emphasis on the classics and sexuality. However, only 20 of the 319 books indexed so far are classical. This does not refute Roulston’s insightful claim, and also does not mean that Lister was not reading more classics than they indexed. But these data do bring into question the primacy of classical sexual communication within Lister’s intellectual sense of self. As can be seen in Figure 1, the indices witness an eclecticism typical of an avid reader with the resources to fuel their interest.

The prevalence of poetry, ancient history, geography, and natural philosophy suggest an attempt to construct a university-style education, from which they were formally barred by their birth-assigned sex. The smaller but repeatedly indexed collection of language learning texts supports this, as does the similar collection of mathematics books, given that during this period at Cambridge University, studying mathematics was a prerequisite to studying the classics (Stray, 2007). Conversely, the indices often exclude “frivolous” or “feminine” reading. Lister read sections of “amateur” historian Lucy Aikin’s Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth at least
fifteen times in 1819 and 1820, mostly reading it aloud to their homosocial circle of female friends and lovers in York, but it is never indexed.

The indices’ university-type masculine persona was supported by Lister’s choice in journals. Their favorite was The Retrospective Review. As soon as Lister heard of this newly-established periodical in late 1819, they note that its authors are “a society of members of Cambridge” and “I must think about taking this” (Lister, 1819). Between April 1820 and July 1822, articles from the Retrospective appear an impressive twenty-two times in the index. Clearly, they are keen to absorb the cultural capital of institutional knowledge.

The Retrospective was a self-consciously antiquarian publication, intent on the imperial project of establishing Britain’s literary history as “the most rich, varied, and comprehensive, of any in the world” (“Preface,” 1820, p. xi), while simultaneously engaging social anxieties about mass reading habits:

![Figure 1. Graphic showing the proportion of genres indexed by Lister (books only, periodicals not included).]
The alluring catalogue of attractive title-pages unfixes the attention, and causes the eye to wander over a large surface, when it ought to be intently turned upon a small though fertile spot. It induces a passion for reading as an end, and not as a means - merely to satisfy an appetite, and not to strengthen the system, and enrich the powers of original thinking.... We present a spectacle of what, perhaps, was never before seen in any age, certainly neither Greek nor Roman, that of a whole nation, employing nearly all its leisure hours from the highest to the lowest rank in reading - we have been truly called a READING PUBLIC. ("Preface," 1820, pp. iii-iv)

This logic denigrates the phenomenon of mass literacy as a sensory experience, “to satisfy an appetite,” and encloses “original thinking” with trained readers with enough leisure time to read “intently.” Lister privileges this kind of immersive reading elsewhere in their diaries, noting that books should be “always read with a pen or pencil in our hand” (Lister 1822a, April 9), as well as quoting from educational books about how to prepare oneself for university education (Lister 1820a, January 1). This is ironic, given that their own reading frequently includes non-immersive practices such as skimming and reading book reviews. Lister is mobilizing university-style reading models and textual material as part of their aspiration to develop a “masculine” intellect. But this is also a specific white, imperial kind of class discourse, which links British intellectual life to taxonomies of classical pedigree and intellectual aristocracy, and which validates Lister’s own sense of exceptionalism.

In one episode in 1818, after being snubbed for ceasing to call on their love-interest Miss Browne, Lister is “determined to devote myself solely to study and the acquirement of that literature which may make me eminent and more decidedly above them all hereafter” (Lister & Whitbread, 2010, p. 58). Through the “slower, smaller” moments that reading offers, Lister’s masculine-style education becomes a shield, an aristocratic persona that they believed would protect their gender transing practices from scrutiny. Until Lister persuaded their uncle to leave them Shibden in his will in 1822c, they remained insecure in their inheritance, as James Lister could have left the estate to Lister’s father or a remote branch of the family in Wales (Shouls, 2020). They needed to bolster their claim to Shibden by demonstrating their good taste and establishing a “self-narrative as custodian of an ancient line,” and they went about this by gathering elite masculine cultural capital, which they believed would command social respect and tie them securely to the ancestral estate Rowanchild, 2000, p. 92). It worked. Years later, Lister materially enacted this cultural capital in their estate, in “landscape and building projects... to display the strength of her claims to local ancestry, her class, taste and wealth” (ibid).

Lister’s reading practices also suggest an ambivalence to the gendered body. They castigate themself for reading in an embodied, sensory way;
worrying that they cannot “bear the stimulus, the fearful rousing, of novel reading” (Lister & Whitbread, 2010, p. 162). Among complex nineteenth-century discourses about gendered reading, novels were often associated with femininity, specifically a degenerate, sensual femininity (Pearson, 1999, pp. 196-218). It is understandable that Lister would want to distance themself from this kind of judgment, but they reject the embodied experience itself, “fearful” of the feminine “rousing.” There are also several instances in which they undertake paperchases through dictionaries and technical texts in search of biological definitions (Turton, 2022, p. 6). In 1823, Lister notes the definition of “female” from their Dictionary of Natural History, which describes “a being generating within itself… in contradiction from the male, who engenders in another.” Reading this episode with a trans lens suggests that Lister is looking for etymological space for gender practices that do not fit into the category they have been assigned, similar to the episode with the wax model. The delicately euphemistic dictionary language allows Lister to read against the grain, and “engendering in another” becomes a useful shorthand for Lister’s way of socially positioning themself as masculine intellectual guide and tutor, policing their female friends’ reading, and frequently gifting books to their love interests (Colclough, 2010, pp. 161, 169).

A good example of this is from 1824, once Lister was relatively secure in their inheritance and has traveled to Paris. Lister seeks advice from their French tutor, Madame Galvani, about a suitable book as a present for a young female friend. They discuss “indecent” passages from Dante and agree that he is “not fit to give to an unmarried lady who ought not to own she had read and understood it” (Lister, 1824). The conversation is framed with Galvani and the unmarried Lister as authorities on the subject, and this section of the conversation is not in code, indicating that Lister feels validated in displaying this authoritative position. Lister then includes an excerpt of the conversation in code, which reads “she knows French men well, is quite sure none would give an indecent book to a woman he respected” (Lister, 1824). It is interesting that the coded section equates Lister’s conversational role with that of “French men.” Lister has privately transed their conversational position, placing themself as a knowing man seeking help from a married woman in understanding what is suitable for an unknowing, unmarried woman, and therefore generating a distance between feminine sensibilities and Lister’s own experience. Lister’ positionality is transitive, dependent on their friend’s understanding of gender norms as counterpoint to make Lister’s gender legible. By deploying reading as a gendered act, Lister positions themself as male by engendering literary knowledge in the proverbial “Other.”
Conclusions

Mapping Lister’s gender transing practices and reading habits could fill several volumes each, so I will close with a final example of what a trans lens may offer Lister scholarship. On 4th July 1823, Lister has been reading a book by John Aikin (1795) that describes the area surrounding Manchester. Travel writing was a favorite genre for Lister, mostly political travelogues and geographical texts (see Figure 1). Lister and their aunt are planning a trip through Manchester and around Wales, and Aikin’s book forms part of their preparatory research. As usual, Lister records their reactions to this book in their journal:

very interesting, I am ashamed to have been so long ignorant of the wondrous works of art our county has produced. If this jaunt into Wales falls through, I am grateful to the thought of it for having gradually led me to the investigation of the great things that are nearer home, I feel as it were the progress of the mind enlarging itself while reading such an author as Aikin. (Lister, 1822b, July 4)

Lister reads travel writing from all around Europe, Asia, and the Americas, so this intellectual rapture over a straightforward piece of local geography seems hyperbolic. But if one examines this episode through the trans lens articulated in this article, then the local “great things” form part of a lifelong attempt to make sense of their gendered state by rooting themself in the white upper-class discourses of early nineteenth-century Halifax. The turn toward “the wondrous works of art our county has produced” comes after years of readerly practices that transed gender conventions, and years of intellectual investment in the patriarchal systems of class-based imperial knowledge propagated by writing such as the Retrospective Review. In this context, the proud tone of Lister’s observations on Aikin becomes that of an educated young aristocrat, wishing to reestablish his position in the surrounding countryside upon inheriting his estate. Their masculine readerly persona is calculated to tie Lister to their county’s agricultural practices, good aristocratic cultural taste, and ultimately to Shibden itself.

Notes

1. Stephen Turton (2022) and Simon Joyce (2019) have both previously speculated on how Lister would identify if living today.
2. Dannielle Orr (2004) has previously drawn on Stanley’s approach, but ironically uses it to close down a trans reading of Lister (p. 208).
3. For this “surface reading” method, see Sharon Marcus’ “just reading” (2007, pp. 73-81).
4. For discussion of the “borders” between trans and queer theories, see Jay Prosser (1998, pp. 55-60).
5. This is also the reason that I refer to Lister using they/them pronouns, to signal Lister’s gender as unfixed and collaborative. Manion has done this with other “female
husbands” of the period, noting that “gendered language and pronouns are a tremendously powerful force that dramatically influences how we see and understand a person” (2020, p. 13). Returning to Campbell’s arguments about deploying modern identities to communicate the existence of queer history to scholarly and public audiences, introducing alternative pronouns as a possibility for Lister facilitates our ability to look past the cis-centric foundations of Lister scholarship and media representation (Lister, 1822, October 13), and makes space for layers of interpretation to accumulate.

6. For their own description of this system, see Lister (1822, October 13). For their worries about book expenditure, see Lister and Whitbread (2010, pp. 244-245).
7. For Lister’s “self-fashioning” more generally, see Roulston (2021, p, 114), Rowanchild (2000, p. 92), and Tuite (2002).
8. This database will be available open-access upon completion. The notion of “queer/trans data” is difficult, as quantitative data necessitates fixing categories for analysis, but queer/trans subjects such as Lister are inherently fluid and uncategorizable. For detailed exploration of this tension, see Guyan (2022).

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