Stoically Sapphic: Gentlemanly Encryption and Disruptive Legibility in Adapting Anne Lister

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Abstract:
Anne Lister (1791–1840) was a multihyphenate landowner-gentry-traveller-autodidact-queer-lesbian, a compulsive journal writer who lived through the late-Romantic and well into the Victorian ages. While her journals have proven to be an iconographic artefact for queer and lesbian history, our interest here is in the public adaptations of Lister's intentionally private writings for twenty-first-century audiences as found in the film *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010) and the television series *Gentleman Jack* (2019–). Our discussion queries what it means to portray lived queer experience of the nineteenth century, how multimedia translate and transcribe Lister's works onto screen, as well as how questions of legibility, visibility and ethics inevitably emerge in these processes.

Keywords: adaptation, encryption, *Gentleman Jack*, journals, lesbianism, Anne Lister, queer history, queer visibility, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister*, transcription.

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> Lister ought to tell her own story before anyone interpreted it for her. Hers is, after all, the truly authentic voice of the nineteenth century woman caught up in a dilemma not of her own making. She ought to be allowed to tell it as it was, from her own point of view. (Whitbread 1992: xii)

The recent appearance of a woman given the nickname 'Gentleman Jack' in a show focused on a queer woman depicts a subject who writes her life into encrypted journals. In doing so, Lister at once expresses herself fully, while at the same time hiding her non-normative identity from those who may not be sympathetic to her self-presentation.[1] This revelation of the life of Miss Anne Lister (3 April 1791–22 April 1840) was met with varying

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degrees of understanding; one review's title reads "'Gentleman Jack' Finds a Swaggering Woman in Want of a Wife" (Poniewozik 2019: n.p.), while another confusingly headlines a "ripping yarn of a wannabe lesbian coal baron" (Smith 2019: n.p.). Lister, a daughter and devoted niece, was also a multihyphenate landowner-gentry-traveller-autodidact-queer-lesbian, a compulsive journal writer who lived through the late-Romantic period and into the Victorian Age, and represents an intermediary figure for a transitional time in history. The immensity of archival material produced by her is staggering: twenty-six quarto volumes prepared to her specifications that contain between five and six million words with at least one sixth of the text in a personally created 'crypt-hand', unreadable by anyone without the key to the code.[2] Thankfully, the last in the Lister line was an antiquarian who cracked the encryption and found the suggestion to burn the material sacrilegious. That said, John Lister may have hidden his own homosexuality (Liddington 1993: 52), and as a result saw fit to 'closet' Anne Lister's journals in an especially created unit behind wall panels in her family home, Shibden Hall.

In this way, he neither destroyed nor acknowledged the coded sections' existence, while at the same time writing about Lister's day to day activities recorded in the cursive sections for the *Halifax Guardian*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's conceptualisation of queerness suits this point, in that "'[c]losetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity […] in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 3); both the encoding and closeting of the journals make them potentially lost to queer history.[3]

The trove was found; Helena Whitbread's first unredacted translations of the coded passages, *I Know My Own Heart* (1988) and *No Priest But Love* (1992), have given us some of the encrypted works, but, as of July 2019, the West Yorkshire Calderdale Archives are undertaking a volunteer-based project to complete a transcription of Lister's entire non-fiction oeuvre, detailing her life, opinions, travels and remarkably extensive descriptions of her relationships with other women (Liddington 1993: 47). The content is diverse and engaging, written with a sense of energy, excitement and involvement in her daily activities, business dealings, social interactions, and sexual experiences and freely expressing her personal opinions and private feelings. Indeed, Lister's writings were recognised in

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May 2011 by UNESCO's Memory of the World programme as a "comprehensive and painfully honest account of lesbian life and reflections on her own nature" that make them essential to preserve for future generations (United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO 2011b: n.p.). With no sexual or gendered script beyond heterosexual convention, Lister's queerness emerges as a singular, complex and ongoing construction of self that is repeatedly enacted and recorded in her texts and now transmediated onto the screen.

While Anna Clark rightly reminds us that neither Lister nor any woman of the time could "develop a lesbian identity, because no such notion exited in their culture" (Clark 1996: 24), there is political aptness in granting the historical Lister a sense of non-normative, even 'queer' (in the historical sense) identity centred around same-sex desire – one that we will here refer to as 'lesbian identity'. Lister's queerness can be read as an early form, *avant la lettre*, of early nineteenth-century lesbianism. We thus use a flexible understanding of (a)historicity, and, in so doing, not only acknowledge what might be called the *transhistoricity* of lesbian desire, but also centre the potential for twenty-first century lesbian self-recognition in Lister, both for those inclined to watch adaptations of Lister's life and those re-reading the historical archives.

While Lister's writings continue to prove iconographic artefacts for queer and lesbian history, our interest here is in the public adaptations of her intentionally private writings for twenty-first-century audiences: the film *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010), directed by James Kent and written by Jane English for BBC Two, and the series *Gentleman Jack* (2019–), created by Sally Wainwright and directed by Wainwright, Sarah Harding and Jennifer Perrott for BBC One/HBO. Both adaptations, we suggest, foreground ethics and queries as to what it means to portray lived queer experience of the first half of the nineteenth century. The fact that, as in Sarah Waters's first three novels, neo-Victorian lesbians are often depicted as writers or performers of some kind elucidates not only a need to re-process the heteronormative long nineteenth century but to somehow provide a physical lexicon for a largely undocumented history of the period. If adaptations of Lister's words into visual media try to transcend time to allow her to speak with her own voice, then the adapt/ive/ed Lister literally and figuratively closes the gap between the secrecy, silence and shame of the Victorian lesbian and the open, on-screen portrayal of neo-Victorian

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lesbian experience. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham regard such queer screen narratives as compelling in that they bring together the study of the medium of television and its distinctive characteristics with queer theory, in which queerness is a location of sexual alterity as well as a praxis of dissidence and political abrasion that allows for many potentialities in the viewing experience (Davis and Needham 2009: 1). That said, to make the liminality of queerness legible to the twenty-first-century viewer, the neo-Victorian representations of Lister hold in tension their own status as art objects as well as their representations of the real, tragic, intentionally obfuscated, singular lesbian and lived experience of their historical subject.

1. The Journals Made Manifest

It is important for scholars to transcribe and multimedia-translate these works to investigate questions that emerge about legibility, visibility and ethics, especially in the wake of the two existing screen adaptations, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* and *Gentleman Jack*. These adaptations expose private documents and move Lister's identity into a public sphere in direct opposition to their conceived safety in the private sphere. Both adaptations' attempts at characterising Lister's lesbian identity for the screen must align her with her nineteenth-century context as well as a modern conception of what lesbianism is, how it can be signified onscreen, and how Lister's lesbianism becomes a neo-Victorian investigation of the silenced aspects of her life. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn warn against any perception of the Victorians as a "homogenized identity" and remind us that the neo-Victorian project does more than represent historical fiction in multimedia genres; instead, the neo-Victorian narrative must "*self-consciously engage* […] *with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 2, 4, original emphasis). Both the narratives themselves and our readings of them investigate how such stories remain relevant in/to postmodern cultures, because to reread and rewrite "is something that defines our culture as much as it did theirs" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4), while at the same time recognising there is no homogeneous culture in either the past or the present. This reading of visually representing Lister's writing will demonstrate that her perspective becomes a dual representation of both Victorian and neo-Victorian (or modern) versions of the lesbian, attempting to characterise Lister's queer identity as both individual and identifiable.

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Consider just one example: in order to recognise Lister as the 'First Modern Lesbian' and an LGBTQ+ pioneer, the first ever rainbow plaque was unveiled at Holy Trinity Church in York in July 2018. It celebrates Lister as a "[g]ender-nonconforming entrepreneur", who "[c]elebrated marital commitment, without legal recognition, to Ann Walker in this church" on "Easter, 1834" (Anon. 2018: n.p.). Controversy erupted immediately with suggestions that the inscription should instead be "Anne Lister, 1791–1840, of Shibden Hall, Halifax, Lesbian and Diarist, took sacrament here to seal her union with Ann Walker, Easter 1834" (Anon. 2018: n.p.). Such nuances are integral to our own conversation about the representation of Lister; i.e., there must be an acknowledgement of the difficulty of language to express her complex personality. Certainly,

> [p]art of the challenge of reading Lister's diaries comes from recognizing the absence of stable identity signifiers and also the felt need to have them, which means that she tacks between a number of sexual registers: same-sex desire, the Romantic language of intimate friendship, a language of gender transitivity, and a masculine discourse of sexual libertinism. (Joyce 2019: 604)

Lister's multifaceted use of expression may suggest the difficulty in linear representation or sometimes contradictory terms when her own language to designate gender identity is not the same as the wider possibilities we have today. Furthermore, these nuances may, or may not, be inclusive of her love of women, her manner of self-presentation, her intellectual abilities as well as her trials and tribulations as a woman unusual in her own time as she seeks to construct her own persona.

Any adaptation of Lister's story must be self-aware of the challenges of representing nineteenth-century lesbianism. Chris Roulston reflects on whether we are "excavating Lister's diaries on their own terms, in all their richness and contradictions, or are we using them to serve our own political and affective needs? The answer probably falls in between" (Roulston 2013: 268). Lister does serve our political and affective needs. Certainly, there is political importance and legitimacy in striving for the fulfilment of these needs of twenty-first century lesbians/queers – an empowering recognition and re-living of a transhistorically understood, lesbian desire. We are

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encouraged to see Lister as a version of a lost past and present paradigm, to position her as the connective tissue between the modern world of the neo-Victorian twenty-first century and her own nineteenth-century world. Like any historical inquiry, or literary investigation, "what we gain is perhaps not so much a clear knowledge of what life was 'really like'", but, in Lister's case, we do, plus the "opportunity to examine (and even build) our own paradigms, categories, and definitions" (Frangos 1997: 44). Each in their own way, *The Secret Diaries* and *Gentleman Jack* interpret Lister as their interpreter/narrator whereby she translates her own experiences into modern lesbianism in a neo-Victorian setting.

This editorial difficulty, interwoven with interpretation and context, extends easily into similar ideas of adaptation and screenwriting. The problem of the journals' current status as only partially transcribed/ translated sources means that only so much is currently known about Lister's recorded life. *The Secret Diaries* inevitably struggles to situate a portion of Lister's millions of words within the frame of a two-hour film. English's script covers and condenses a period of about twenty years, beginning in 1816 with the disruption of the triumvirate of friends – Lister (Maxine Peake), Isabella Norcliffe (Susan Lynch) and Mariana Belcombe (Anna Madeley) – with the unexpected marriage of Mariana to Charles Lawton (Michael Culkin) and ending just after Lister's sacrament ceremony with Ann Walker (Christine Bottomley) at Easter 1834. As in any biofictional work, there are choices made as to which aspects of Lister's life to prioritise as emblematic of her life. The film's portrayal of her lesbianism is extensive, while her travelling, medical, business, scientific and literary interests are nearly absent. In contrast, *Gentleman Jack*, by virtue of its eight one-hour episodes (now with a forthcoming second season), has the potential to be more inclusive of a larger period of time. In the first series, Wainwright instead chooses to focus on a much briefer period of about eighteen months, beginning in 1832 when Lister (Suranne Jones) returns to Shibden Hall and, like the film, ending at the same moment when Ann (Sophie Rundle) and Lister come together.

Although the two adaptations differ greatly in the periods they cover and in the details they provide, they are remarkably similar in their constructions of lesbianism from Lister's perspective. They both depend on the source material for issues of love, sexuality and language; however, their differences in crafting Lister as a character who reflects neo-Victorian

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values are striking. They interpret Lister's status as a gentlemanly woman – a dual portrait of non-conformity for the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries – who is bound by both her conventional world and her own ideological constraints. It is repeatedly emphasised on screen that we are witnessing a collapse of Lister's historical, lived experience and her potential for a queer history reading. Roulston has made a compelling argument about the journals: Lister's duality is critical in our reading because Lister aligns with certain tropes of a masculinised woman. However, rather than being a limitation, her disruption of expectations may "transform lesbian history for us, if we can interpret her correctly, and with the proto-modern lesbian subject who does not require decoding as she is already 'one of us'" (Roulston 2013: 267-268).

The Secret Diaries encourages this kind of doubling in the way we see Lister. The film opens with Mariana and Lister happily lagging behind their families to steal a moment to have sex in an unidentifiable, romanticised wood (Kent 2010: 0:03:30-0:05:10). Disruptively, the scene then shifts to an enclosed, socially constrained parlour in the interior of the Belcombe home; uncomfortable within a traditional familial context, Lister sings badly at the piano while Mariana stands with her family, before it is abruptly announced that Mariana is engaged to the widowed Charles Lawton, an older, heavy and old-monied man (Kent 2010: 0:06:00). The swift juxtaposition implies that the woods are not randomly chosen but rather situated in walkable distance of the Belcombe property, providing a parallel with Lister's sexuality that, for nineteenth-century society, is on the edge of constraint; however, the audience's discomfort is created by the family scene, not the sexual encounter between the two women.

Much more emphatically, *Gentleman Jack* foregrounds the complexity of its own transmediated representation. A top-hatted, greatcoat-wearing, skilful driver races a team of horses hitched to a carriage occupied predominantly by men. The driver has, quite literally, burst into the nineteenth century. Our introduction to the protagonist is performed by a surrogate male who berates the reckless driver; only then do we realise the driver is Lister, inciting our dual perspective. Just as we recognise Lister as an unusual female, who sartorially and temperamentally signifies masculinity to the heteronormative gaze, the passenger – an actual man with conventional understanding of nineteenth-century gender binaries – is unable to recognise her as female until she faces him at close quarters, toe to

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toe ready for a fight (Wainwright 2019b: Ep.1, 05:14-06:08). In one brief significant moment, Lister breaks the fourth wall: that first look from Lister directly into the camera speaks to her own self-awareness and to queer potential existing outside the frame in the audience (Wainwright 2019b: Ep.1, 06:34).

As author of her own narrative, and commentator on her current biofictional treatment, Lister is both unashamed of her lesbianism and proud of her highly conservative values in relation to class, economics and politics. Queer history searches for "a modern past" (Roulston 2013: 268) that speaks simultaneously to the history and the future of queerness. While Wainwright's series acknowledges Lister's capacity for self-representation, both adaptations are intrinsically aware of perhaps wilful or disingenuous, narrative gaps. Even though *The Secret Diaries* allows Lister and her journals complete authority over the adaptation in never leaving her or her perspective, *Gentleman Jack* frequently abandons Lister in favour of a wider picture of rural English life in the 1830s and repeatedly calls her perspective into question. The series' camerawork often leaves Lister behind to go downstairs to the kitchens, or even further to the rural farms on Lister's land, or else to show how she engages with society of different classes and concerns, providing a self-consciously neo-Victorian perspective on Lister's particular privileged class position by characterising the conditions of those around her. It is clear that the social mobility Lister achieves for herself when added to her class is, to a certain extent, "accelerated by her genius for cultivating advantageous friendships" that also allow her "to enjoy considerable licence" in her everyday life (Liddington 1993: 71).

The *Gentleman Jack* series opens not with Lister but with a carriage accident near Shibden Hall, in which the landed gentry, Ann and Aunt Walker (Stephanie Cole); the working class, William and Alice Hardcastle (Joel Morris and Natalie Gavin) and the tradesman Christopher Rawson (Vincent Franklin) literally collide (Wainwright 2019b: Ep.1, 01:20), so as to foreground the class collision that the entire series represents. Through her depiction of the failed illegitimate pregnancy of Eugénie Pierre (Albane Courtois), and the patricide by Thomas Sowden (Tom Lewis) of his drunken, violent father (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 53:06), Wainwright illustrates both the conditions of the less fortunate and the multitude of things that Lister either does not or cannot know. Of course, these events are speculative, but the subplots do the neo-Victorian work of reframing

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Lister's knowledge indicating that, in spite of and intrinsic to her journals, she has an abundance of authority in some areas and is woefully powerless in others. Lister's intense Tory conservatism is not neglected in the series; she laments the 1832 Reform Bill openly and consistently evaluates whether others are below or above her in status. In adapting the series in a neo-Victorian framework, it is made clear that these distinctions are evidence of a now-unacceptable classism and snobbery while, at the same time, celebrating how Lister, a lesbian, feels entitled to an equally free life as the men who hold similar status.

Both adaptations, particularly the one by Wainwright, work to place the private documents on the public screen in a non-voyeuristic manner. There is a distinct difference between the role of the gaze across the journals and the gaze as presented in the adaptations. The presence of the male gaze in lesbian narratives is a "knotty problem" with the risk of "a version of lesbian sexuality" being appropriated by "masculinist institutionalized heterosexuality" (Scanlon and Lewis 2017: 1005) that effects both the way lesbians appear on screen and the way we view them. Lister's own gaze represents a key element of the structure as well as Lister's resistance to narrative classification. As Lister wrote of her journals: "*I can write in crypt all as it really is, & throw it off my mind & console myself—thank God for it*" (Lister qtd. in Steidele 2018: 43, original emphasis). The journals were often her only comfort, a testament to her life and sexuality. Perhaps Lister's oscillation between her crypt-hand and her plain-hand indicates "self-censorship" (Choma 2019: 10) and a division of selves for Lister; however, the pragmatism of the code as a means of concealment negates this assumption. Lister intended for her private thoughts to be kept so. As she constructs a version of her lesbian social and sexual identity, she does so subjectively, without intrusive patriarchal interpretations of her queerness, and actively resists conventional interpretations of her femininity.

The process through which the journals are constructed in the adaptations visualises both Lister's private and public self-constructions. Danielle Orr presupposes that "in cases like Lister's her writing was *for* herself as the audience" (Orr 2004: 206, original emphasis), which rightly complicates our viewing of her journals as both physical objects and adaptations. One way to work within the confines presented by the transition from an autobiographical to biofictional format is to foreground the object(s) of interest – Lister and her journals – with shots of Lister's

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notebooks, her quill, her ink, her writing and her struggle to find words that adequately express her daily life, as in *The Secret Diaries* (see, e.g., Kent 2010: 0:10:57). English's screenplay positions Lister's writing as a central focus in the film, but it does so not to emphasise the privacy of the documents but rather their public, universal capabilities in queer literary history. Lister's texts overlay the narrative. At no point in the film does the camera leave Lister's vicinity; her voice and image remain paramount to retain her authority. The images of the code and Lister's writing of it indicate to the viewer that they are encountering what is purposefully illegible, and it is only through Lister, the diary's subject and narrator, that the journals become both legible and disruptive. She is the connector between the modern and the historical as she becomes the authoritative creator and interpreter of her written material, but the adaptations differ in focus, the first concentrating on lesbian community and the second on Lister's singularity.

2. Signifying Lesbian Life

The Secret Diaries shows the characters around Lister in order to identify her with a community or network of lesbians, despite the fact that at least one critic, Anna Clark, identifies Lister's journals as the means through which Lister distances herself from other lesbians. Clark writes that "Lister did not become part of a lesbian subculture, only a fragile network of lovers, ex-lovers, and friends", because "the [lesbian] self that Anne Lister created was not unified but deliberately compartmentalized and contradictory" (Clark 1996: 49). Implicitly, "due to Lister's active and "chronic concealment" of her sexual orientation, she was "not able to create a lesbian network, let alone a subculture" (Clark 1996: 50). The film attempts to resolve Lister's intrinsic individual, separate and guarded lesbian persona by amalgamating her lesbian identity with the identities of the lesbians around her. This amalgamation happens in two ways: through the film's incorporation of Lister's language and through allowing other characters to read the coded text.

Lister's construction of her own identity includes an active engagement with language in order to incorporate coded descriptors into her writing. For anyone "reading Lister's journals as a process" it "involves focusing on the written and the unwritten—the hints and coding, gaps, rituals, patterns, […] and her use of language" (Orr 2004: 205). When we

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approach any adaptation, interpretations of these elements are important to consider, because they inform our ability to read Lister as a subject whose interpretation of events influences the adaptation itself. Since language remained so crucial to Lister both in the act of writing and in the act of self-description, Lister's code is integral to self-definition, self-understanding and self-creation. To do so, Lister repeatedly uses words that she invented, associated or appropriated with her own private meanings. Lister uses the word "kiss" to indicate an orgasm, "*grubbling*" to indicate "using her hands to bring another woman to orgasm", and "*going to Italy*" to mean "making love or having full sex" (Lister qtd. in Choma 2019: 91, original emphasis). For her, and her patriarchal society, lesbian sex does not exist and is philosophically, morally and linguistically indescribable. Lister creates her own set of signifiers to delineate and inscribe the signified moments of her experience; this linguistic and emotional acuity is remarkable in itself, and the importance of her invention of a language around a desire whose modern descriptors we readily take advantage cannot be overstated.

In solidarity with Lister and in a nod to the creativity of Lister's achievement, *The Secret Diaries* endeavours to expand Lister's private sexual dictionary into a public means of slyly signifying lesbian desire. Both Mariana and Isabella ('Tib') use the word 'kiss' on multiple occasions, including Tib's question "how about a kiss from Tib?" (Kent 2010: 0:21:26). Like the mutual sexual encounters in the fictionalised narratives, the three women share this specialised sexual, female-centred vocabulary that we are only now able to encounter because of the coded narratives of the historically real Lister. *The Secret Diaries*' adaptation strategies imply that the vocabulary, although known and used by the lesbians on-screen, is inaccessible to the surrounding heterosexual characters; it is only the viewer, in a collapsing of time and media, who participates in the dramatic irony. At the dining table, Tib uses the word 'grubbling' in an inappropriate, bawdy story. Lister is repelled by the drunken Tib's lack of self-control and potential exposure; luckily, Jeremy Lister (Alan David) and Aunt Anne look puzzled and appear to have no access to the term or its meaning (Kent 2010: 0:45:05-0:45:30). 'Grubbling' safely remains an expressly lesbian signifier, although the term becomes public in the daylight of the dining table. Its meaning in the historical context is still withheld from a heterosexual view, even as it contributes to a future queer lexicon.

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Lister's journals act as a source for clarity and, although this language of queerness may not have been intended for any audience, it is used in the adaptation to establish a queer history that extends beyond Lister. English's screenplay includes mutual understandings in the secretive and subversive lesbian community that reach beyond the characters' use of language in the film to their visual interaction with the code. The encrypted journals remain exclusive to Lister throughout her life – unlike in *The Secret Diarie*s – which places both the journals and the code in public view. When the two lovers meet, Lister allows Mariana to read a crypt-hand passage. Although she struggles initially, she reads it aloud, translating it for the viewer (Kent 2010: 0:28:40-0:29:06). Mariana's shy ability and Lister's willingness to let her into the privacy of her written world indicate the film's ambition to quantify the private words as public documents through which lesbianism becomes perfectly legible on-screen to both history and the present time.

While *The Secret Diaries* works to make public Lister's queerness through its adherence to her perspective, Wainwright's *Gentleman Jack* complicates the journals' public presence in the series' neo-Victorian framework. Physical images of the central objects important to the telling can be seen in the periphery of the action in the series, safely put away in her personal study/library whereby they are often identified with her private perspective and further imply – as the journals are arranged on the desk alongside the works of poets and philosophers, scientists and engineers – the sage wisdom of their author.[4] In the episode 'I was Just Passing', Lister opens the trunk that contains her diaries and relapses into memories of her recent heartbreak (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 1, 21:24-23:59). Afterwards, she attempts to tear out the pages that contain the painful passages of her memories written in code, but she seems unable to bear permanently destroying the narrative (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 1, 24:00-24:09). Lister's inability or reluctance to tear out the pages – to thus self-censor her life – speaks to a larger authority looming over them; perhaps what is not there will provoke more interrogation for its absence than what remains behind. This tension between lived experience and written remembrances does not undermine her authority but, on the contrary, expands her thoughtful perspective and her desire to interrogate her own position.

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3. Holding and Challenging the Gaze: Looking Back at 'Us'

The most fascinating addition *Gentleman Jack* makes to the portrayal of Lister is her constant addresses to the camera. Wainwright's creative choice in allowing Lister to address the audience through breaking the fourth wall complicates Lister's position as an entirely Victorian or neo-Victorian subject. Lister addresses her narrative to the viewer, distancing herself from the other onscreen Victorians around her, including other women. Her awareness of the viewer implies that Wainwright has purposefully made Lister's queerness, and by extension nineteenth-century lesbianism, legible to the modern viewer. The series' visual signifiers for gender performativity and gender transgression, created through Lister's androgyny, complicate not only what modern audiences think of as the boundaries of masculinity and femininity in the nineteenth century but also how lesbianism, or queerness more broadly, might have been performed in the Victorian era, in accordance with the overall project of neo-Victorian narratives. The series is adapted from non-fiction and, while the fictionalised Lister invites us to 'read' her life on screen, the written words disrupt legibility of gender and queerness with the difficulty posed by her cursive quill-writing and the encryption of the text. These direct addresses by Lister encompass anything from pointed looks and literal diary quotations to scripted lines, although she speaks to the camera only when she is alone.

Lister is both subject and narrator in her performative addresses to the camera; her narrative breaks begin to replicate the written form of her diaries in that they serve as verbal representations of the acts of self-construction. Lister's individuality and self-admitted desire for greater recognition is well-represented in the adaptations, which, like much women's writing, conveys

> repressed content […] not [only] erotic impulses, but an impulse to power: a fantasy of power that would revise the social grammar in which women are never defined as subjects; a fantasy of power that disdains a sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation. (Miller 1988: 41)

These eruptive glimpses imply that, while Lister might perform different personas in different environments, her genuine moments of liberation are in

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her addresses to the camera, when she speaks to her future 'readers'. Mary Eichbauer writes that Lister, rather than attempting to create a perfect persona, "shows us the different faces she turns to those she intended to impress with her political savvy, manipulate into helping her reach a goal, or coax into her bed" (Eichbauer 2000: 116). Lister is publicly stoic but privately, at times, she does not feel seen in the society in which she lives.

The series is rife with dramatic irony in that we are consistently aware of Lister's motives even as she turns another face toward the characters. Of course, this begs the question whom Lister is speaking to in the first place. She may be addressing her own journal or some future iteration when she has a chance to write as a means of literally speaking to herself. This self-address could account for Lister's ability to speak truthfully; however, what seems to be more valid, given that quotations only make up a portion of Lister's narration, is that Wainwright wants Lister to speak, quite literally, to 'us'. Her first address to the camera comes in 'I Was Just Passing' as she alights from the carriage in her first scene. Eugenie vomits, and Lister says, "must be my driving" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 1, 06:34). Neither a quotation, nor a mirror of the syntax of Lister's usual literary voice, this is a specifically modern turn of phrase that works beyond its inherent comedy to render Lister a recognisable ally to the viewer and *vice versa*. Lister's second address comes shortly after her first. She stands in a Romantic posture atop the Wordsworthian landscape overlooking Shibden Hall and declares, "I've been an Icarus. I've flown too near the sun, and now I crash back to earth at Shibden" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 1, 06:56-07:03). The series seamlessly melds Lister's wit with modern colloquialisms, transperforming the private text into public document while updating Lister in order to bring her forward as the modern series' hero/ine.

In this way, in *Gentleman Jack,* Lister's narrative interjections are complicated. Lister's addresses allow her to slip out of time and into a space where she is able to address the modern viewer in defiance of her historical moment. With a turn towards the camera, Lister further problematises both her already-unstable position as a Victorian woman and the viewers' assumptions about her, shocking the viewer into an awareness of Lister's own challenging gaze. She is able to see us in the same way that we are able to see her, because she possesses the same vision of futurity. Lister's articulated perspective is shared only with the audience; however, the viewer's perspective is known because twice, while Lister is speaking,

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Marian looks at the camera. As Lister expounds upon the "quiet dignity of [her] ancient lineage", Marian responds reactively to the camera as she would to a confidante with a look of confusion (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 2, 20:06). Later, in the episode 'Do Ladies Do That?', Marian turns to the camera after Lister leaves the room, abandoning their conversation mid-sentence, to share a look of hopeless frustration (Wainwright 2019b: ep. 6, 37:35). *Gentleman Jack* often contradicts Lister's authority over Marian's personhood by allowing the viewer to glimpse moments that critique Lister's class snobbery, her brashness or her rather precious outlook on her family lineage. These moments fronted by Marian show Lister's more conventional Victorian aspects as moments of hilarity rather than earnestness.

One other person shares the ground between Lister and the camera: Ann Walker. That said, her relationship with the viewer functions differently. In 'Oh Is That What You Call It?', Ann asks Lister if she has ever "done this before", meaning either a relationship with a woman or, more specifically, sexual contact with a woman, to which Lister replies "no, of course not" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 41:47-41:50). As the viewer – who is privy to Lister's internal, intellectual and passionate life, and who is encapsulated in the secrets of Lister's world thus far – we know that this comment to Ann is a bald-faced lie. Lister moves her eyes to the camera, which is positioned over Ann Walker's shoulder, to link the viewer with the conspiracy of her deception. However, as Lister looks, Ann turns and casts her eyes about the room, asking "what are you looking at?" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 41:53). Ann's interjection speaks volumes about the series' ambitions, as we are discouraged in that moment from aligning ourselves completely with Lister and her deception. This mediation of Lister's public perspective denies her full authority, because it disrupts her attempt at singular authority within the community of women.

Nevertheless, acts of looking and seeing function differently in the onscreen adaptations. Although the adapted journals were hidden from the male gaze, the portrayals must do their own work to usurp or thwart that very gaze. This work is a complicated exercise, since we must continually struggle to think outside of dominant (mis)conceptions of lesbian culture. *The Secret Diaries* and *Gentleman Jack* seem to thwart such patriarchal voyeurism with different levels of awareness. One of the tensions relates to the pervasive surveillance present in Lister's social circle. In *Gentleman*

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Jack, the exemplar is Mrs. Eliza Priestley (Amelia Bullmore), who intentionally spies on Lister and Ann, moving from enthusiastic supporter to harbinger of doom. Rudely evading the protective butler, Mrs. Priestley barges in upon an intimate scene she cannot process (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 53:36-55:18). Reactively, she proceeds to alert the people around her to Lister's sexuality, inciting the massively heteropatriarchal, surveillant gaze of her fellow townspeople. In *The Secret Diaries*, this surveillance is enacted primarily through the figure of Charles Lawton who, once alerted to Lister's lesbianism by Christopher Rawson, watches Lister in an effort to control his own wife who is enamoured with her (Kent 2010: 0:58:22).

Following this subtle destabilisation of male surveillance through the figure of Mrs. Priestley, in *Gentleman Jack*, there is a performative refusal of the male gaze in its portrayal of lesbian sex. Lister's intercourse is a domestic act in a place where men are not included without invitation, with all but one of the intimate scenes occurring with an established partner in a setting that implies privacy: Lister's bed, Ann Walker's bed (or house), and Mariana's bed.[5] These enactments work to conceal the sexual act itself; blankets and nightclothes obscure the female body in such a way as to conceal the performance of the act from view. This modesty serves not to indicate a culture of shame around the act itself but rather renders the performance of the act uninteresting for the audience; it forecloses any potential voyeuristic thrill. In fact, the naked female body is mostly invisible, apart from rare moments of Mariana's breasts being exposed in view of the camera, and even these brief views are interjected with both couples debating their relationship and coming to different conclusions about their partnership; these are not titillating scenes for the audience but domestic reality (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 7, 32:04-34:20). In 'I Was Just Passing', Anne also wipes her hand on the blankets after her first sex scene with Mariana (Wainwright 2019b: ep. 1, 42:53), indicating both a sexual routine and a casual, unexciting sexual maintenance to domesticise lesbian sex in its most mundane iteration. The sexual act and the female body are obscured not because they are inappropriate but because they are commonplace. Sexual encounters between female lovers in *Gentleman Jack* thus work to place lesbianism as a far more prevalent act than we have previously believed to be the 'truth' about the nineteenth century.

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4. Realness and Human Nature: She is Herself

A particularly remarkable feature of Lister's observances is her certainty that her nature, and her love of women, was ordained by God, even when "Lister often faced the problem of reconciling her strong Anglican religious beliefs with her own powerful sexual desires" (Clark 1996: 35). She spent a large part of her life investigating her own humanity and the human body in order to understand her own nature. As we see or hear about in *Gentleman Jack*, her journals record that she went to France, studied anatomy, performed autopsies, observed medical and post-mortem examinations, and read widely on multiple subjects. Her studies give her an interesting linguistic prescience when her private word for female genitalia, 'queer', appears to her as "*a distortion of the word 'quim' or 'queme', a slang word used to describe the same area of the female body*" (Lister 1993: 55, original emphasis) that also stands for an adjective "meaning 'strange', 'odd' or 'wrong'" (Steidele 2018: 129). Lister admits, "*my manners are certainly peculiar, not all masculine but rather softly gentleman-like. I know how to please girls*" (Lister 1988: 136, original emphasis). Although "*odd*" with admitted "*oddities*" (Lister 2010: 172, original emphasis), Lister is clear that she is not and does not want to be a man; however, she does feel entitled to male and landowner rights while at the same time not believing in universal suffrage. It is on this point that the ideology of the adaptations seems to align directly with Lister's own ideas. Both *The Secret Diaries* and *Gentleman Jack* reflect Lister's natural acceptance of her sexual preference as a component of reflecting modern lesbianism to the neo-Victorian viewer.

The Secret Diaries shows us Lister's eccentricity while repeatedly identifying her with nature and the natural. Characters, like the viewer, first perceive her through her appearance, which cuts a startling figure in everyday Halifax. It is on this point that the adaptations seem to overlap most noticeably in their depiction of Lister. Kent and English, as well as Wainwright, position Lister as the eccentric individual she was in life with a kind of "rakish gender transitivity" (Brideoake 2005: n.p.). Lister's queerness "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is, by definition, *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*" (Halperin 1995: 62, original emphasis). Indeed, in our reading, Lister's self-construction is far more complex than to say she is 'masculine' *per se*.

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Much takes place in both texts to convey her complex gender presentation and her resistance to feminine ideals. *Gentleman Jack* frequently pictures Lister in pragmatic but astonishing clothing with her hair arranged in side curls.

These intimations and anxieties create another instance of doubling in the text wherein Lister moves beyond and between historical moments. As Lister says in *Gentleman Jack*, "nature played a challenging trick on me, didn't she, putting a bold spirit like mine in this vessel in which I'm obliged to wear frills and petticoats? Well, I refuse to be cowed by it" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 13:41-13:56). The sartorial choices are expressive of her individuality. While Lister's nature, as conveyed through her appearance, reads easily to us as the dismantling of binaries, both adaptations are careful to also depict the Victorian consequences and confusion that come with such a breakdown.

The adaptations make a point to cover the period after Lister begins to wear black for the remainder of her life in an effort to naturalise her grief and loss. This ritual is complicated, since her mourning cannot, in a literal sense, be true within a "heteronormative culture" as Lister's black clothes […] bear no emotional or marital connection to a man"; further, Orr argues that Lister's ritual is a complex part of her lesbian identity, because her

> clothes are not a product of her sexuality; they are part of an embodied and complex process by which Lister's sexuality could be constructed, enabled, and expressed, a specific sartorial ritual that enabled her to express her homosexual grief for a woman. (Orr 2004: 212-13)

The film and series picture her in mourning to lend credence to both Lister's emotional attachment and to her lesbian identity. *The Secret Diaries* depicts Lister's choice to wear black as one of visible mourning directly related to Mariana's wedding.[6] After that point, she is not pictured in any other colour throughout the film, even after her marriage to Ann Walker. *Gentleman Jack*'s depiction of Lister's grief is more complex. She is pictured as wearing black to the wedding of Vere Hobart (Jodhi May) and says to her by way of explanation that "I started wearing black because of a wedding. When my friend Mrs. Lawton got married sixteen years ago to a charmless buffoon it seemed inexplicably appropriate. It's a tradition I've continued"

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(Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 2, 55:44-55:56). Later, when Lister is presented at the Dutch Court to Queen Marie (Sofie Gråbøl), the latter inquires about Lister's choice and whether she always wears black, to which she responds,

> Yes, always. […] It suits me […]. I was engaged to a person, and the person to whom I was engaged married someone else […] and ever since then, your majesty, I have been in mourning for my loss and that's why I rarely – very rarely – wear anything other than black. (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 8, 17:30-17:53)

Both *The Secret Diaries* and *Gentleman Jack* foreground Lister's clothing as significant, and Wainwright exposes how quickly Lister's mourning attire becomes emblematic of her persona. The Danish Queen invites Lister to her Birthday Ball at which all the women must, without exemption, wear white. Fully bedecked in white silk with a bird of paradise stuck in her hair (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 8, 18:53-20:34), Lister recounts to Ann her awareness of her own absurdity, while at the same time Wainwright's visual story points to how conventionally-codified fashion is not, necessarily, suited to everyone.

The Secret Diaries struggles with framing Lister's gender visually, keeping her dressed in more traditional clothing that matches the other, more feminine women around her and drawing back her signature hair. Both adaptations focus on Lister's gendering, reflecting her life as a transgressor of Victorian binaries while retaining a respectful disinclination of either transvestism or transgendering. Such disinclination, however, is not shared by other characters on screen, as both series and film highlight the socially disturbing ambiguity surrounding Lister's dress code. In *Gentleman Jack*, for instance, Lister is first asked by the otherwise silent Hardcastle boy, Henry (Dexter Hughes), if she is a man (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 2, 16:20), and even Mariana decries her unconventional dress sense:

> Do you know what miseries, what agonies, I went through being seen with you? The way you used to look, the way you used to dress. Everyone whispering about you behind your back about how masculine you were. I was snubbed, too, just for being seen with you. At least nowadays you do try to look

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> a little like a lady, but then, good lord. (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 7, 40:00-40:16)

In *The Secret Diaries* too, Lister's perceived deviation from conventional femininity repeatedly occasions unease. Aunt Lister questions her niece about her manly pursuits such as shooting with the Rawsons, while brooding associates seek to demean her with comments such as "let the gentleman pass" and "does your cock stand?" (Kent 2010: 1:17:20).

Both neo-Victorian adaptations contest the legitimacy of this social unease, as the framing of her gender is Lister's own: she sees herself as natural. The film's opening scene in the woods pictures lesbian sexuality as overtly connected with nature, and Lister's grief over Mariana's marriage is juxtaposed with their sexual encounter when she returns later the same day to the same spot in the woods to weep over the woman she has just lost. In both adaptations, other characters comment on Lister's nature as a uniquely positive one. Mariana's mother says in *The Secret Diaries* that "you're an odd one, Anne [Lister]. I always tell people you're natural. The most natural person I know. But that nature was in an odd freak when it made you" (Kent 2010: 0:17:55-0:18:06). *Gentleman Jack*'s Mrs. Priestley makes a similar comment to Ann:

> I've always been a great champion of Miss Lister, haven't I, William, despite what others say. You see, I appreciate her clever mind and her adventurous spirit. It is true, she isn't always as feminine as some people would like her to be, but she's an original. She's natural. She's true to her own nature, and as she herself says, "when we leave nature behind, we leave our only steady guide". And we can hardly blame Miss Lister if Nature was in an odd freak on the day she made her. (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 1, 47:00-47:29)

Of course, the adaptation moves the viewer to lose faith in Mrs. Priestley when she begins to insist that "Miss Lister is unnatural" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 5, 28:22). These comments, particularly in *Gentleman Jack*, disclose the series' ambition to recast Lister's homosexuality as implicitly and universally natural, moving beyond Lister's individual sexual

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preference while at the same time celebrating her originality and genuineness as valuable.

Lister has a key monologue later in the series that definitively characterises her perception of her own nature. An intimate, careful, reassuring Lister explains to an emotionally distraught Ann that lesbianism is not a criminal offence in England:

> What men do is completely different to what we do. […] First of all, between men, it's illegal – it's a criminal act. Between women, it isn't. […] We haven't committed a criminal offense. We can't be hanged for it. […] However, if it were a criminal offence, if it were to become one, well, then, I would have to put my neck in the noose. Because I love, and only love, the fairer sex. My heart revolts from any other love than theirs. These feelings haven't wavered or deviated since childhood. I was born like this. And I act as my God-given nature dictates. If I was to lie with a man, surely that would be unnatural. Surely that would be against God, who made us, every one of us, in all of our richness and variety. (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 5, 37:55-39:08)

Lister operates within a Christian framework, and her sentiments on marriage are profound. She admits her fear that it may potentially become illegal at some point and is clear in her unwillingness to bend if such a thing were to become the case, because for her to go against the dictate of her God-given nature would be against God. Her monologue serves as the powerful overall message of how lesbianism and queerness were a part of the natural course of Lister's life, the lives of her silent contemporaries, as well as the portraits of lives in neo-Victorian narratives.

In another of Lister's final painfully self-aware monologues, she tells Ann:

> I understand why you can't commit to me. It's impossible, I know. How could anyone? What am I? Every day … every day I rise above it. The things people say. I walk into a room or down a street and I see the way people look at me, and the things they say, and I rise above it, because I've trained

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> myself to, not to see it and hear it until it's become second nature to me and I forget just how impossible it is for someone else to accept that. (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 6, 53:14-54:16, original ellipsis)

Lister, our neo-Victorian connection between historical moments, here conveys a vulnerability that we rarely see anywhere else in either adaptation: she reveals her own precariousness, one that she risks embracing in order to be true to her nature. We see Lister's bravery in this context but also her physical danger as a woman when horridly assaulted by a man who attempts to rape her at the same time as he calls her a "dirty fucking Jack"; she fights him off, looks toward the viewer in recognition of her survival, and lifts her chin up with pride (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 5, 56:31-57:43). Lister refuses to conform to the idealised, silent, angelic femininity that might be expected of her and which she paradoxically, and hypocritically, admires in her own potential wives. In order to be true to herself Lister must develop a second nature of resilience and resistance, performed by her with increasing comfort with her chosen pragmatics of clothing as well as her dashing, silver-tipped walking stick, her expensive and shining top hat and her clearly expensive cravat. Although in *Gentleman Jack* she says of her wounds, "it's nothing" (Wainwright 2019b: ep. 6, 01:29), Lister acknowledges the intense emotional strength and courage her life path requires and the struggle that many of her partners have had in accompanying her. One of Lister's remarkable features that comes through in the diaries is her profound mental acuity. Wainwright writes that "as well as her robust physical health, it's clear (between the lines of the journal) that she enjoyed robust mental health too" (Wainwright 2019a: x). Certainly, a large part of Lister's ability to construct her own lesbian identity is due to her mental and emotional fortitude. Her confidence becomes our own and so does her bravery. Both neo-Victorian adaptations show us that these choices are not a performance for others but simply convey who she is in an accurate and exceptional representation of nineteenth-century lesbian history.

5. Happily Ever After?

Like so many Victorian cultural productions, both adaptations are focused on marriages of various kinds. They question what forms of marriage are

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valid, who can get married and which partnerships will be rewarded with happiness. Lister's conception of marriage was a conventional one: finding emotional and romantic stability encapsulated in a female partner for life becomes an increasingly central ambition of hers. The pain of setbacks in pursuing this goal is made palpable in both adaptations – in one she rends her dress and in the other she weeps in private – because her society revolves around heterosexual marriage models and patrilineal systems of inheritance. For Lister, "the institution of marriage becomes […] an ongoing reminder of [her] exclusion from normative modes of social belonging and participation" (Roulston 2013: 274). Nonetheless, when her relationship with Ann progresses, Lister aligns herself with the traditions of normative marriage in such a way as to validate, for herself (and the viewer), her queer yet devoted relation to conventional dogma. She properly courts Ann, calling on her repeatedly, and when she finally proposes their "setting up home together" at Shibden Hall as companions, she and Ann both treat this offer as "the same as a proposal", citing that it would "be prudent in any – in all circumstances – for both parties to fully consider everything" (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 3, 37:19-38:50). Ann and Lister both work within the heterosexual marriage model matrix, adapting it for their own purposes; they repeatedly reference not having children (a goal society believes should be their primary ambition), and they engage in pre-marital sex (refusing the exchange of virginity for status inherent in many marriages). Theirs is a partnership of equals with appropriate ritualised performances of courtship, proposal, engagement, ceremony and rings.

As a figure living in a heteronormative, Christian social framework, Lister's own perception of partnership is embedded in these ideals. Anne Choma believes that the Christian Lister, whose own same sex-desires she believed to be the dictate of God, "craved the permanency, and, ironically, respectability of a romantic union solemnized in the same way as a marriage. She saw no reason that she and the woman she loved should not declare their commitment before God"; indeed, "to Lister, the exchange of rings and taking of the sacrament together in church meant marriage" (Choma 2019: 114). Lister has her own conception of herself and her position within society; she advocates that marriage can be an inclusive practice. While *The Secret Diaries* presents Mariana's marriage model as oppressive, to be endured solely out of familial duty and financial necessity, in *Gentleman* Jack the juxtaposition of Mariana's unhappy heterosexual

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marriage with Lister's happy same-sex union tells of Lister's desire to expand the institution beyond traditional, heterosexual practice. The joy captured in the scene of Lister's marriage to Ann Walker is full of quiet exultation (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 8, 53:19-56:51). Further, their marriage is made conventional with the subtle collapse of class and marriage hierarchies between all four characters in the final scenes. Ann and Lister's marriage is visually cut in with scenes from the working-class marriage of Thomas Sowden and Suzannah Washington (Amy James-Kelly), who have also betrayed convention to marry across classes. The private and public ceremonies are collapsed. Lister's family, tenants and others in the series attend the Sowden wedding, signifying a dual audience as we, the audience, bear witness to both ceremonies; we are made acutely aware with a visual closeup of the book that, while the Sowdens may sign the register, the Listers may not (Wainwright 2019b: Ep. 8, 55:22). Here the viewer, rather than Lister, operates as the twenty-first-century connector between these two ceremonies; we are encouraged to see both as legitimate marriages regardless of their circumstances and uneven recognition.

Wainwright perhaps characterises Lister best as a survivor. To the writer/director, Lister lived

> in a world that could easily have had no place for her, a world that would have rendered her invisible if she'd had less about her. She was smart enough and confident enough to construct a self-identity that would allow her to live her life just as bodily, ambitiously and freely as she chose. She refused to be ignored or made invisible simply because she was born with a penchant for members of her own sex. (Wainwright 2019a: x)

Transmedial adaptation of her writing to the screen is a profound exercise in bringing these resilient and remarkable parts of Lister's character to light but, as is always the case with adaptations of previous periods and historical characters, they do so with an eye to do and say more than Lister ever could have done.

One critic who seems to understand the magnitude of the discovery of Anne Lister a.k.a. 'Gentleman Jack' for queer history, in spite of her reservations about the series, is Sophie Gilbert. She questions the

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filmmakers' efforts to make Lister more "palatable" – "*Gentleman Jack* Sanitizes an Audacious, Difficult Woman" – and concludes that the biopic finally fails to do justice to "a truly audacious, difficult, and groundbreaking woman" as well as "19th-century lesbian" (Gilbert 2019: n.p.). The intimate access we have into this woman's mind has just begun, and the full extent of her social transgressions (and/or conservatism) remains to be explored. As Wainwright herself admits, "[t]here are aspects of her character that are hard to love", not least "because she's not a feminist heroine, by any means" (Wainwright qtd. in Saraiya 2019: n.p.), resisting definitive reading. Was Lister "a wannabe lesbian" or "a wannabe lesbian coal baron" (Smith 2019: n.p.)? Or was she "a politically conservative, coal-mining, sidepiece-juggling lesbian" (Saraiya 2019: n.p.)? More significantly, as twenty-first-century subjects, can we now read Lister as a remarkable, bold, queer woman just living her life like everyone else in the best way she knew how? Wainwright presents a protagonist who expresses herself fully, while at the same time needing to hide her non-normative identity from those who may not be sympathetic to her self-presentation.[7] A singular woman, Anne Lister remains the figure who speaks volumes to our own conceptions of the mobility of gender and the richness – and potential precariousness – of lesbian life.

Notes

1. At this early point in the limited availability of the journals' contents, there is no indication that Lister knew of this epithet (Choma 2019: 2).
2. Anira Rowenchild makes a brilliant remark about Lister's choice of descriptor with "crypt" denoting a sense of loss (Rowenchild 2000: 206); we would argue that it has an inherent connotation of a sense of burying or locking away, while 'code' or 'cipher' would indicate or invite breaking for discovery of hidden material.
3. Martha Vicinus makes the point that "we need to be sensitive to nuance, masks, secrecy, and the unspoken. If we look to the margins, to the ruptures and breaks, we will be able to piece together a history of women speaking to each other" (Vicinus 1993: 434); Lister allows us to fill in the gaps but leaves some of her own.

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4. Lister was a voracious scholar and her readings did, indeed, include Pierre Bayle's entry on Sappho, which she found "most interesting" (Lister qtd. in Steidele 2018: 11).
5. There is one other sexual scene in the series where Lister feels her freedom in Paris; flashing back in her mind to studying "anatomy" in Paris, she remembers herself performing cunnilingus on a nude woman (Wainwright 2019b: ep. 2, 27:10-27:46). It is unclear if the woman is a prostitute or a paramour, but the sense of privacy retained for her serious partners is not in play.
6. Apparently the decision to always wear black did not occur until "about a year and a half after" the marriage (Orr 2004: 211), not because of it as depicted in the adaptations.

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