

## DECODING ANNE LISTER

This is the first edited collection of essays on the nineteenth-century diarist Anne Lister. Now recognised as a UNESCO world heritage document, Lister's 5-million-word diaries are paradigm-shifting in terms of their range of material, from social commentary and local and global politics to breath-taking travel accounts. However, they have become best known for their explicit descriptions of same-sex practices, which were written in code and constitute a significant portion of their content. The collection addresses the full variety and interdisciplinary quality of Lister's diaries: her complex negotiations with her own 'odd' identity, her multiple same-sex relationships, her involvement in local politics, her travel accounts and her lifelong thirst for knowledge. It also addresses how Lister studies have crossed over to the realm of popular culture through the successful *Gentleman Jack* BBC-HBO series, and includes an interview with Sally Wainwright and a foreword by author Emma Donoghue. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

CHRIS ROULSTON is Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies and French Studies at the University of Western Ontario. She has been a leading Lister scholar for the past decade. Her essays on Lister's relationship with Eliza Raine, classical literature, queer sexuality, marriage and *Gentleman Jack* have appeared in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2022), the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* (2013, 2022) and the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (2021).

CAROLINE GONDA is College Associate Professor and Director of Studies in English at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. She was the first person appointed to the post of LGBTQ+ Fellow at a Cambridge College. With John Beynon, she co-edited the pioneering collection *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2010). She writes and teaches on literature, gender and sexuality, particularly lesbian narrative and queer reception.

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Edited by Caroline Gonda , Chris Roulston  
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# DECODING ANNE LISTER

*From the Archives to ‘Gentleman Jack’*

EDITED BY

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and

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KIRSTY MCHUGH is Curator of the John Murray Archive and Publishers' Collections at the National Library of Scotland and has recently completed her PhD at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. Trained as an archivist, she is interested in the use of manuscript sources for studying the history of travel writing, and the interaction of manuscript and print. Her interest in Anne Lister grew out of her doctoral research on tours of Scotland and Wales in the Romantic period, and she published the first study of Anne Lister's 1828 tour of Scotland in *Studies in Travel Writing* in 2019.

CHRIS ROULSTON is Professor of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies and French Studies at the University of Western Ontario. Her books include *Virtue, Gender and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (1998) and *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (2010). She has recently published on marriage in *A Cultural History of Marriage in the Age of Enlightenment* (2020), on Mme de Graffigny in *Françoise de Graffigny: femme de lettres des Lumières* (2020) and on Anne Lister in *After Marriage in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2018), *Journal of the History of Sexuality (JHS)*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies (JLS)* and *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Her current project, *School Daze: Queer Nostalgia in Modern British Girls' Boarding School Narratives*, focuses on queer sexuality in girls' boarding school novels, with recently published articles on Rosemary Manning's *The Chinese Garden* in *Twentieth-Century Literature* (2019) and on Dorothy Strachey's *Olivia* in *Modernism/Modernity* (2020).

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ANGELA STEIDELE has written several books about LGBTQ+ lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Love Story: Adele Schopenhauer and Sibylle Mertens* (2010) was shortlisted for the NDR Kultur non-fiction prize, and she won the Gleim Literature Prize for *In Men's Clothes* (2004, revised edition 2021), her biography of Catharina Linck, and the Bavarian Book Prize for her novel *Rosenstengel* (2017). Her biography of Anne Lister, *Gentleman Jack* (2019), was longlisted for the Portico Prize and praised by the *Guardian* as 'a triumph of truth over fantasy'. Her latest book, *Enlightenment. A novel* (2022), was shortlisted for the prestigious Leipzig Book Fair Prize. In 2023 she gained the Klopstock Prize for her entire literary work.

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CASSANDRA ULPH is a specialist in British women’s fiction and non-fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with particular focus on literary and artistic professionalism, women’s intellectual identity and sociability. Her publications include articles on Frances Burney, Hester Piozzi and Anne Lister. She was a Research Associate in Reading Practices at the University of Manchester on *Unlocking the Hamilton Papers*, a major AHRC-funded project to reconstruct, digitise and transliterate the correspondence and other writings of bluestocking diarist and courtier Mary Hamilton. She works at the University of Leeds as the Digital Development Officer for the Digital Creativity and Cultures Hub in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

SALLY WAINWRIGHT, OBE, is a Yorkshire-born television writer, producer and director, who started as a scriptwriter for the BBC Radio 4 drama *The Archers* before launching her television career in 2000 with the television series *At Home with the Braithwaites* (2000–3). In 2009, she won the Royal Television Society’s Writer of the Year Award for her mini-series *Unforgiven*. She is also the creator of ITV’s *Scott & Bailey* (2011–16) and the BBC’s *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012–20) and *Happy Valley* (2014–23), the last two winning the British Academy Television Awards (BAFTAs) for Best Drama Series in 2013 (*Last Tango*), 2015 and 2017 (*Happy Valley*). In 2016, she wrote and directed a two-hour drama series for the BBC on the Brontës, *To Walk Invisible: the Brontë Sisters*, and in 2019, created season one of the BBC/HBO television series *Gentleman Jack*, with season two airing in 2022. She was made a Fellow of the Royal Television Society in 2016.

HELENA WHITBREAD, MBE, is a writer, born in Halifax, West Yorkshire in 1931, whose education was cut short at the age of fourteen, before, in 1965, she gained a BSc (Hons) at Bradford University and a PGCE in Further Education. Following the discovery of the journals of Anne Lister in 1983, she spent five years transcribing extracts from them. The edited extracts have been published in her two books, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010) and *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister, vol. II: No Priest but Love* (2020). She has been employed as a consultant on the following television productions: *A Skirt through History*, episode one (BBC; 1994), the documentary *Revealing Anne Lister* (BBC; 2010) and the first season of *Gentleman Jack* (BBC/HBO; 2019). She was also on *The One Show* (2019), a live BBC TV interview with Suranne Jones and Sophie Rundle. She is presently working on a biography of Anne Lister's early life (1791–1826). In January 2023 she was awarded an Honorary D.Litt. from the University of Sheffield for her research and publications on Anne Lister's diaries. A short biographical film of her life entitled 'The Helena Whitbread Story', filmed at Shibden Hall, Halifax in November 2022, was released on April 3rd 2023.

## *Foreword*

**Emma Donoghue**

‘I dare to say I am like no one in the whole world,’ Anne Lister wrote in her diary in 1823. A ‘curious genius’ from the cradle on, a prodigy known as the ‘Solomon’ of her school, Lister grew up to be an individual remarkable for, and self-aware about, her individuality – what she called her *oddity*. She knew her ‘softly gentleman-like’ manners were distinctly ‘peculiar’, and sounded wryly amused about the *odd freak* Nature must have been in when she made Lister.

These phrasings aren’t just euphemisms for – though they include – gender nonconformity and lesbian desire. Anne Lister was singular in many ways, and even when she could be seen as a type (self-educated lady, say, or Tory landowner on the border between yeoman and gentry), she combined her affiliations unpredictably. Those of us who have been drawn to Lister over the past two centuries, to investigate and write about her, have found different aspects of her most urgently interesting, but I think we all treasure her queerness, in the broadest sense.

In the twenty-first century, Lister has become so much more than an individual. Her archive has bloomed into a cultural phenomenon that includes not just one of the longest diaries in the English language, plus letters, travel journals, and reading and lecture notes, but prose, theatrical and televisual fictions of her life and times, most notably the TV series *Gentleman Jack*, which has provoked everything from Yorkshire tourism to online community and controversy.

As someone who has been fascinated by Anne Lister and written about her on and off for more than three decades, I am delighted to see the ripples made by her life spread farther and farther. I appreciate her not just

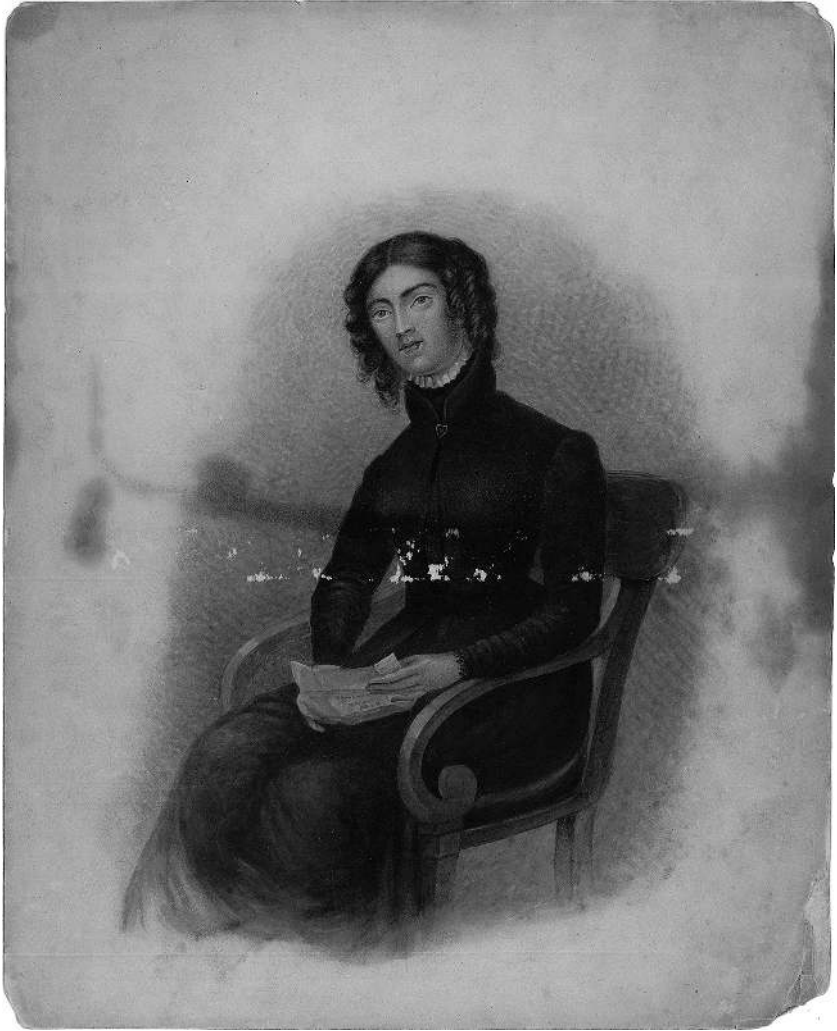


Figure 1 Anne Lister portrait (c.1822). West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, SH:2/M/19/1/1.

for her own odd self but for the peephole her eloquent diaries cut into a hidden world of sociability and sexuality; not just for the path she negotiated through early nineteenth-century English society but for the ways that her some dozen lovers and crushes lived their varied lives. Lister logged everything from prices to gossip to coal mining to masturbation

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with a relentless hunger for understanding that I can only call libidinal, so her writing throws shafts of new light in all directions.

A free spirit who defied gender norms, but also a conservative snob, coldblooded as often as she was passionate, Lister boasted of her consistency, but could be inconsistent to the point of hypocrisy. She vaunted her candour, but lied to her family, friends and intimates, and used fictional techniques to rework the past in her diary. Long after her ‘crypt hand’ code was broken and her handwriting puzzled out, Lister’s paradoxes require interpretation; like an onion, she has layers all the way down.

Perhaps quarrels over which descriptive labels to choose for Anne Lister on plaques marking key locations in her life will always have something absurd about them, because this protean, polymorphous figure would need a mile-wide plaque to begin to describe her properly. This book – the long-overdue first collection of research essays on Lister – is an excellent start at making sense of a phenomenon that will still be demanding decoding for centuries to come.

## *Acknowledgements*

The editors would like to thank Emma Donoghue for her knowledge of and enthusiasm for Anne Lister and her encouragement and ongoing support of this project; Sally Wainwright for bringing Anne Lister to a much broader audience and supporting the digitisation project that has made it possible for scholars to delve more deeply into the diaries; Harriet Monkhouse for her enthusiastic support and encouragement; and Helena Whitbread for her lifelong commitment to Anne Lister and for bringing the first coded sections of the diary into publication. Both editors are also deeply grateful to all the volunteer transcribers who have given their time and energy to making the Anne Lister diaries available online.



### *Note on the Text*

No critical edition of any Anne Lister papers (diaries and correspondence) exists, so citations from the diaries and the correspondence come from a range of different sources: the West Yorkshire Archive Service diary transcriptions, available online but not yet complete; published extracts from the diaries by Helena Whitbread and Jill Liddington, available in original and reprinted editions; published extracts from the correspondence by Muriel Green; and individual websites where transcribers have pursued their own Lister interests. Contributors to this volume have made use of all these sources, which are clearly referenced in the endnotes of each chapter. In general, italicized passages represent the coded sections of the diaries, but not all contributors have distinguished between the coded and non-coded sections. We have also provided a select bibliography of Lister references which we hope will prove useful in navigating this complex archive.

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