An introduction to the 'literary person[s]' of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen

Abstract

Anne Lister eagerly looked forward to her tour of North Wales in July 1822 – a tour made in the company of a dear aunt, and whose principal highlight would be a visit to Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, the celebrated Ladies of Llangollen. Ten days prior to her departure, Lister received a letter from her friend, Isabel Dalton, reassuring her that apparently 'no introduction' to the Ladies would be necessary: "Any literary person especially calling on them would be taken as a compliment". Butler and Ponsonby were accustomed to receiving visits from the best of 'literary persons', including William Wordsworth, Caroline Lamb, Edmund Burke, and Sir Walter Scott. While Lister lacked such illustrious renown, she was certainly qualified to make the visit. Her diaries reveal that Halifax Library was one of her regular haunts, that she kept careful note of her reading, regularly perused literary reviews, and enjoyed performing favourite book passages and songs to friends and family. She relied on her literary knowledge to further her amorous intrigues, was generous in her presentation of bound books as gifts and love tokens, and confided in a select few of her 'ambition in the literary way' and related wish for 'a name in the world'. Unsurprisingly then, the Ladies of Llangollen's 'rustic library' made an immediate impression on Lister, who warmly admired their 'little bookcase with 30 or 40 little volumes [of] chiefly poetry, Spenser, Chaucer, Pope, Cowper, Homer, Shakespeare, etc –'. For their part, Butler and Ponsonby were 'always reading'; or, in their own words, indulging in 'the exquisite pleasures of retirement and the luxury of purchasing books'.

A study of the literary interests and reading practices recorded by Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen offers a valuable extension to our understanding of these fascinating diarists and the importance placed by all three women on the desirability of a literary mindset. In its investigation of the links between textuality and subjectivity, my article considers the meanings associated with different reading spaces, and how the literary pursuits of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen related to their larger academic interests, attitudes to female education, sexual identity, and financial independence.

An introduction to the 'literary person[s]' of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen

Anne Lister eagerly looked forward to her tour of North Wales in July 1822 – a tour made in the company of a dear aunt, and whose principal highlight would be a visit to the Ladies of Llangollen. Her lover Marianna Belcombe had gone on a similar excursion in 1817, and returned with the hope of emulating the lifestyle enjoyed by the Ladies in their celebrated cottage, Plas Newydd (30 Jun3 1817: Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 10). Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby eloped from their native Ireland in 1778, defying their families' wishes in order to set up a life together, in peaceful retirement. Within a few years, they had become something of a *cause célèbre*, the circumstances of their escape and unusual domestic arrangements reported, much to the Ladies' chagrin, by the *General Evening Post*'s article on 'Extraordinary Female Affection'.[1] In the days leading up to her travel, Anne made a range of enquiries, such as how much to tip the gardener for his tour of the grounds, and the best means of introducing herself to the famous Ladies. On the latter point, Anne received a reassuring reply from her friend, Isabel Dalton, whose father had informed her 'no introduction' to Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby would be necessary: "Any literary person especially calling on them would be taken as a compliment" (1 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 191). Anne may have lacked the literary renown that distinguished Plas Newydd's more illustrious visitors (among whom were William Wordsworth, Caroline Lamb, Anna Seward, Edmund Burke, Robert Southey, and Sir Walter Scott), but she was, nevertheless, in her own right, very much a 'literary person'.

[1] 'Extraordinary Female Affection', *General Evening Post*, 20-22 July 1790 (qtd. In Mavor, The Ladies of Llangollen, 73-4)

A keen reader, Anne spent much of her time in Halifax Circulating Library, where she regularly studied, perused the latest literary reviews, and made her selection of books for home loans. Every Sunday, she took it upon herself to read prayers to the uncle and aunt with whom she lived in Shibden Hall, and seems to have relished the privacy afforded by more private moments of performative readings to lovers and close friends. Her diary entries repeatedly acknowledge the important role played by literature in the service of her personal relationships; seen for instance, in Anne's clever employment of her literary knowledge to test her potential success in new amorous intrigues, or the record of her economic – and significant emotional – investment in the bound books she commissioned as love tokens. Be it for pleasure, or more strictly academic purposes, Anne kept a scrupulous record of her reading to date and books for future consultation, including details of her chosen edition as well as the number of pages read at any given time.[2]

Anne's literary habits were paramount to her evolving self-image and related self-respect. Her literariness was also crucial for bolstering Anne's belief that an 'ambition in the literary way', however loosely defined, would empower her to make 'a name in the world' (3 March 1819: Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 82). Such literary sensitivity coloured her first impressions of the Ladies' rustic retreat when, during her tour of the grounds, Anne espied Eleanor and Sarah's 'little bookcase of 30 or 40 little volumes, chiefly poetry, Spenser, Chaucer, Pope, Cowper, Homer, Shakespeare, &c'. (*ibid*., 196). Two days later, having received the invitation to make

[2] Anne Lister's diary entry for 24 March 1821 offers a typical example of her academic reading schedule: 'Before breakfast, from 7 ¾ to 9 ¼, & from 10 ¾ to 2 ½ (including an interruption of 20 minutes) read from v.1304 to 1527, end of *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, & afterwards from p.288 to 296, end of vol. 2, Adams's translation of the 7 remaining plays of Sophocles' (Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 149). A detailed account of her more leisured reading is provided in Anne's diary entry dated 14 February 1821, in which she describes the emotional experience of reading the third volume of Kotzebue's *Leontine de Blondheim*. For the effects the reading of such fictions had on Anne Lister see Lisa Moore's '"Something More Tender still than Friendship": Romantic Friendship in early Nineteenth-Century England', *Feminist Studies*, 18:13 (1992: Fall), 499-520.

a personal call, Anne spent more than forty minutes at Plas Newydd with Sarah Ponsonby, fascinated by her 'manners & conversation'; conversation which, 'shewing a personal acquaintance with most of the literary characters of the day & their works', was carefully preserved in the pages of Anne's diary.[3]

Based on the reading habits and interests recorded in the journals of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen (Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby) this article aims to provide a general introduction to the significance placed by all three women on the desirability of a literary mindset; that is, the ability to respond to works of literature with both appropriate knowledge and sympathetic but critical appreciation. The journals and correspondence of these 'literary' women are often read as productive sources from which to explore Romantic discourses of sexuality and same-sex desire.[4] In recent years, Terry Castle, Anna Clark, Lisa Moore, Anira Rowanchild, and Clara Tuite have offered illuminating insights into the ways in which Lister succeeded in employing her literary knowledge in order to articulate a lesbian identity. In *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993) Terry Castle writes engagingly about Lister's extraction of philosophical justifications from Rousseau and Byron in order to explore her self-called 'oddity'. These same writers feature prominently in Clara Tuite's study of Lister as 'a case study of Romantic style, sociability, and sexuality', whose appropriation of Rousseau serves as an especially telling instance of that

[3] See Anne Lister's long entry for Tuesday 23 July 1822 (Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 200-205).
[4] Anne Lister's voluminous diaries and letters are held at the West Yorkshire Archive Service. The best overview of these available in print are Helena Whitbread's *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1988), supplemented by *No Priest But Love: The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), and Jill Liddington's *Female Fortune: Land, Gender, and Authority: The Anne Lister Diaries & Other Writings, 1833-1836* (London: Rives Oram Press, 1998). The journals, correspondence, and other writings of the Ladies of Llangollen (known as the Hamwood Papers) are held at the National Library of Wales, and have been reproduced in five reels of microfilm, by Adam Matthew Publications. A selective transcription of the main body of these papers was first published by Eva Bell in 1930. Bell's *The Hamwood Papers of the Ladies of Llangollen and Caroline Hamilton* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1930) has been a key source for this article. Elizabeth Mavor's *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* (Middlesex: Viking Press, 1984) adds to Bell's selection by providing extracts from the unpublished journal of 1819, and some of the receipts and entries from the account book kept by Sarah Ponsonby.

author's importance to Romanticism, 'demonstrating the extent to which the genre of the diary and the Rousseauvian sexual confession are performative, as well as socially constructed and sociable' (Tuite, 199). This practice of what Anna Clark helpfully describes as 'reading between the lines for subtle hints of desire between women' has resulted in a productive recovery process for scholars interested in the history of sexuality (Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian identity', 31). My article, while acknowledging the importance of this trend, aims to make its contribution by replacing the focus on sexuality with a much broader consideration of the personal, social, and economic import associated with the literary interests registered in the diaries of Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen.

By mediating between the individual reading patterns and experiences recorded in their journals, this article seeks to offer a dual-perspective on the links between textuality and subjectivity; remaining attentive to the intensely personal impact of many of the readings discussed, while seeking to understand how the cultivation of a literary persona spoke to larger academic interests, attitudes to female education, and social hierarchies. One of the key questions running throughout this article is how women's reading habits during the Romantic period helped inform the ways they felt able to represent themselves through the written word. This is reflected most strongly in the first section of this article, 'Learned ladies', which explores the relationship between lived events and narratives, to consider how the Ladies of Llangollen's and Anne Lister's readings seem to have affected their everyday social and artistic involvement with the world around them. It offers an overview of their favourite books, and their related interpretative frameworks, both internal and external. It also considers the gendered nature of intellectual debates, drawing attention to the Ladies' use of the letter as a vehicle for intellectual exchange, and

Lister's plans for an independent education. To conclude, 'Literary geographies' considers the symbolic value attached to private and public reading spaces. This final section offers a detailed description of the Ladies of Llangollen's Gothic library, and discusses Lister 's membership of the Circulating Library at Halifax and sojourns in Paris during the 1820s.

'Learned Ladies'

On 14 July 1822 Anne Lister and her aunt made their first visit to the grounds of Plas Newydd, home to the Ladies of Llangollen since 1780.[5] The Ladies had eloped from their native Ireland in 1778 defying their families' wishes in order to set up a life together, in peaceful retirement. Within a few years, they had become something of a *cause célèbre*, the circumstances of their escape and unusual domestic arrangements reported, much to Butler and Ponsonby's chagrin, by the *General Evening Post* in an article on 'Extraordinary Female Affection'.[6] Public interest in the Ladies' singular lifestyle meant that during their lifetime, they would receive a host of visitors, including William Wordsworth, Caroline Lamb, Anna Seward, Edmund Burke, Robert Southey, and Sir Walter Scott. Lister may have lacked such illustrious renown, but with 'literary' interests and aspirations of her own, she could feel relatively confident that she would receive a kind reception. Nine days after her first tour of the

[5] The day before, Lister and her aunt had merely viewed the Ladies' house and its grounds from the public road passing close to Plas Newydd (13 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 195). In 1932, Plas Newydd was sold to Llangollen Town Council and has since opened in one form or another to the public. It currently exists in a state that would have been recognizable to the Ladies of Llangollen; General Yorke's extension of the west wing and the construction of an east wing, twenty years later, having being pulled down in 1962. The main difference between the house today, and its appearance during the Ladies' lifetime is the kitchen, which was remodelled by General Yorke into an 'oak room'.

[6] 'Extraordinary Female Affection', *General Evening Post*, 20-22 July 1790 (qtd. In Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 73-4)

estate, Lister was invited to make a personal call – the impressions and impact of that visit carefully detailed in her diary.

Eleanor Butler's ill health meant that during her trip to North Wales, Lister had only the opportunity to meet with Sarah Ponsonby.[7] During their evening together on 23 July 1822, Lister spoke to Ponsonby of the books she had noticed during her earlier tour of the grounds, when she had espied their 'little bookcase of 30 or 40 little volumes, chiefly poetry, Spenser, Chaucer, Pope, Cowper, Homer, Shakespeare, etc'. (14 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, 196). She also asked, somewhat sassily, whether the Ladies had 'classical' tastes,[8] discussed translations, and listened sympathetically to Ponsonby's concession that her reading preferences had become more 'particular' in old age. As they proceeded from the breakfast room to the kitchen gardens, their talk took an even more personal turn. Seemingly inspired by their literary exchange to talk more openly, Lister and Ponsonby touched upon the emotional attachment to one's idea of 'home' and began to consider how quotidian rhythms affected personal relationships. Lister must have treasured Ponsonby's confidence, marked, most notably, by the latter's acknowledgement that the occasional difference of opinion was a necessary part of her relationship with Eleanor Butler, 'though they took care to let no one see it' (23 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 204). But for Lister, who gave so much thought to the literary habits of her friends and acquaintances, Ponsonby's earlier admission that she felt 'almost afraid of reading *Cain*' was likely to have been just as revealing, especially insofar that it

[7] On 13 July 1822, after requesting permission to meet with the Ladies of Llangollen, Lister was informed that 'Lady Eleanor has been couched': 'She ventured out too soon & got cold' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 195). During the course of her stay – and upon her return home – Lister made solicitous inquiries into the state of Butler's health.

[8] For Anne Lister's sexually knowing references to Classical literature, see especially Anna Clark's essay 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7:1 (July 1996), 25-30.

served as a convenient cue for Lister's more loaded question 'if she had read *Don Juan*' (*ibid.*, 203).

On 27 August 1819 Butler had joyfully recorded in her journal: 'The Sale stopped of that horrid Don Juan' (Mavor, *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen*, 162). Lister's diaries, by contrast, present the work as a kind of benchmark against which to measure the literary curiosity – even audacity – of her social circle. On 12 May 1820, she made a note of having shared her opinion of *Don Juan* with Mr Saltmarshe.[9] 'Afterwards' (presumably in private), his wife, Emma, approached her with the confession that 'she had read it at Elvington but durst not own to Kit that she had read more than a part of it' (12 May 1820: Whitbread, *I Know*, 125). A few months later, Lister visited the Saltmarshes for tea. In the company of Mrs Rawson, Mrs Waterhouse, and Mrs Empsom, both Lister and Emma Saltamarshe, when asked about *Don Juan*, refused to comment further: 'I would not own it. Emma said nothing, not a word on the subject' (Whitbread: *I Know*, 131). The repeated emphasis on Emma's silence is significant, carrying an implicit suggestion that Lister had been carefully monitoring her friend's response, readily attentive to any hint of her earlier disclosure.

A year later, on 30 March 1821, Lister's thoughts were once again fixed upon *Don Juan* and Emma Saltmarshe's uneasy response to the work. On this occasion, the stakes were considerably higher, with the Saltmarshes and Lister engaged in 'a long talk about what books were improper & what not'. When husband and wife mentioned *Lalla Rookh* (1817) and 'their not finding it out' Lister waged that she had thought it 'as much so as Little's poems, or even the two first cantos of *Don* Juan' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 151). With the adverbial 'even', heightening the 'impropriety' of

[9] Lister regularly visited the Saltmarshes, who were among her social acquaintances in Halifax.

Byron's poem above Moore's popular, erotically tinged productions published under the pseudonym 'Thomas Little', Lister's diary records the following satirical observation:

> I know not how it is, I thought Emma a little under restraint on this subject before her husband & that he might be a little so, before his wife. (Whitbread, *I Know*, 151)

A work's putative 'impropriety' was not, in itself, sufficient to excite Lister's distaste; to the contrary, in fact. *Lalla Rookh*, whose oriental sensuality enabled her provocative reference to *Don Juan* to pass as a choice 'by association', was greatly esteemed by Lister. On 19 August 1817, Lister had read to her aunt a 'very favourable review' of the poem, reflecting in her diary that 'the extracts from this poetical romance are very beautiful' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 12). Two years later, she commissioned a lavish copy of *Lalla Rookh* as a present for Isabella Norcliffe.[10] Lister's publicly pronounced judgement against *Don Juan* was, in short, deliberately deceptive. Byron was a favourite poet of hers, as confirmed by the pithy eulogy she wrote in response to a magazine account of his death: 'The greatest poet of the age! And I am sorry' (*ibid*., 344). With half the appeal of Byron's works located in their controversy, Lister took obvious pleasure in inflammatory citations of his oeuvre.

The capacity to offend was particularly high in the provincial circles of Halifax where, as noted by E.P. Rouse, it was not unheard of for 'some book previously ordered [by the library]' to be burned as 'improper' and 'unfit' for circulation.[11] In Llangollen, when Ponsonby replied to Lister's question by describing herself 'ashamed' to have read the first canto of *Don Juan*, Lister must have been

[10] Isabella Norcliffe, also known in the diaries simply as 'Tib', was Lister's on-off lover. Lister was a regular visitor of the Norcliffe family, whose seat, Langton Hall, is located in North Yorkshire.
[11] I am grateful to Mr David Glover, Publications and Press Officer of Halifax Antiquarian Society for his kindness in sending me a copy of E.P. Rouse's 'Old Halifax Circulating Library, 1768-1866', *Address to the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, dated 7 February 1911.

reminded of Emma Saltmarshe; speculating, no doubt, on how knowingly the Ladies, and Emma, were likely to have responded to Byron's unashamedly bawdy humour.

Lister longed for a life of sensual fulfilment, and her choice of gift books reflected it. The edition of *Lalla Rookh* that she commissioned for Isabella came complete with illustrations, 'bound in crimson morocco' and 'richly guilt', 'the inside of the binding lined with green satin' (9 September 1819: Whitbread, *I Know*, 99). Intended as a 'specimen of Halifax bookbinding', this copy of Moore's poem was certainly an expensive present, every detail of which had been deliberated with care. Although undeniably 'showy', the gift to Isabella was, at the same time, very much a private one. The fact that in 1821 Lister would define Moore's poem on the basis of its 'impropriety' suggests, furthermore, an especially coquettish inflection to her decision to purchase an illustrated edition. Indeed, Lister invested her present with all the trappings needed to make the poem's sensuality perceptive to the touch. With its green satin binding intended as a sensory tease and the pictures inside as an invitation for voyeuristic day dreaming, Lister's gift was meant to be held close and handled with care.

Thomas Campbell's poem, *The Pleasures of Hope* was another favourite of Lister's which, in 1819, she had 'beautifully bound' for her latest love interest, Elizabeth Browne – not failing to mention the fact to her long-time lover, Marianna Lawton, to whom, as an afterthought, she decided to offer first choice in receiving as a gift either the book or a necklace (19 November 1819: Whitbread, *I Know*, 106). In Lister's relationships, books circulated as affective objects inscribed with intimate meanings directed to favoured lovers.

Ponsonby's transcriptions, although markedly different in tone, were also very much a personal form of literary gift giving. On 5 April 1790 Butler proudly

recorded: ‘My beloved finished her Task. Two quarto Books, twelve pages in each, and a Superb Title page to each. Tinted, Bordered, and inscribed’ (Bell, 249). These artistic talents were given public praise by Madame de Genlis, whose account of ‘The Fair Recluses of Llangollen’ (extracted from her *Souvenirs de Felice L* — (1806)) was published in September 1808 by the popular periodical *La Belle Assemblée; or, Court and Fashionable Magazine*. Warmly applauding Ponsonby’s ‘copies of ‘select pieces in verse and prose’ written in ‘the finest hand I ever saw’ and ‘ornamented with vignettes and arabesques, in the best taste’, Madame de Genlis left her readers in no doubt that Ponsonby’s transcriptions amounted to a ‘most valuable collection’ (Genlis, 100).

Anna Seward, who frequently exchanged letters with the Ladies of Llangollen, was equally enthusiastic about Ponsonby’s craftsmanship. In a letter from Buxton, dated 7 August 1796, Seward sent warm thanks for the beautiful transcription recently received:

> I am shocked to think that my curiosity should be gratified at such an expence of time, precious as Miss Ponsonby’s – but what an admirable specimen of perfect skill of penmanship in this transcript! – the modern print-hand, that of the ancient black-letter type, and the Roman, are proofs of very uncommon skill. (Seward, IV. 237-8)

The slightly embarrassed undertone emerging from this otherwise enthusiastic acknowledgement of Ponsonby’s gift suggests that the transcription arrived in her hands by surprise, leaving Seward ‘shocked’ at its discovery and the ‘expence of time’ such work had cost. The transcription was not, however, an arbitrary or merely decorative choice, as Seward recognises when she identifies the verses as ‘Mr Williams’s translation of the Runic poem, which I had paraphrased in my late publication’. Ponsonby’s successful sourcing of Seward’s paraphrasing suggests that the artistic skills for which she was universally praised were closely linked to her capacious literary knowledge and discriminating sensitivities as a reader.

The letters exchanged between Seward and the Ladies of Llangollen were of an invariably literary character. The publication of this correspondence in 1811, during the Ladies' lifetime, added yet another facet to the role of print in the creation of their public image.[12] The letters are also important sources for a re-consideration of the scholarly dynamics so integral to Butler and Ponsonby's 'romantic friendship'.[13] It is worth noting, for instance, that, with few exceptions, Seward writes individually to her correspondents, refusing to conflate their quite different personalities and talents. While a joint reading of the letters was clearly anticipated, it is notable that those addressed to Ponsonby tend to privilege the artistic vision, while political questions emerge most forcefully in those directed to Butler. Seward would, undoubtedly, have strongly disagreed with the impression later articulated by Charles Kendal Bushe that Ponsonby, Butler's junior by sixteen years, was ' but an accompanist' (qtd. in Jones, 4) to her life partner.

With the authorship of the Ladies' shared journals attributed to 'E.B.', it certainly seems that Butler was the dominant personality. It would be a mistake, however, to overlook the intellectual character of the sweet-tempered and accommodating Ponsonby. The letters reveal, for instance, that not only was Ponsonby quick to identify the original source of Seward's poetic paraphrasing, but that she also envisaged her transcriptions as a form of encouragement for Seward's latest literary projects.

[12] Following the publication of 'Extraordinary Female Affection', the Ladies of Llangollen were careful to protect themselves from further exposure. They declined, for instance, the request of a visit from the London artist Mr Walmsley. 'We have appeared in the Newspapers', wrote Butler in her journal: 'Will take care not wilfully to be exhibited in the Magazines' (Bell, 260).
[13] I refer here to the term 'romantic friendship', as defined by Elizabeth Mavor in her biography of the Ladies of Llangollen: 'Very generally speaking symptoms of romantic friendship were "retirement", good works, cottages, gardening, impecuniosity, the intellectual pursuits of reading aloud and the study of languages, enthusiasm for the Gothick, journals, migraines, sensibility and often, but not always, the single state' (Mavor, *The Ladies*, 80).

Seward's theorisings on the sonnet form were central to all the letters exchanged between Lichfield and Plas Newydd during December 1795. Seward had recently written her poem 'Llangollen Vale', in celebration of the Ladies' life of retirement, and was energetically defending her continued choice of the sonnet form against the contempt of it implied by Johnson's Dictionary.[14] Seward's first letter on this theme was addressed to Butler and followed, a fortnight later, with one to Ponsonby, in which Seward thanked Ponsonby for the high compliment of quoting one of the lines of her 'Sonnet on Winter' and, significantly, for transcribing 'the article from Chambers' Encyclopaedia on the word Sonnet' (Seward, IV. 143). Seward acknowledges that the article 'ascertains, clearly enough, the rules respecting the return of the rhymes, &c. which render it regular, or, as it is termed, legitimate' (*ibid*., 143), but even this alternative definition turns out to be relative, rather than absolute, in its merits. Dissatisfied with the article's explanation of the 'constituents of [the sonnet's] perfection', Seward soon loses herself in an unapologetic rant against Andrew Kippis's editorial role in the Encyclopaedia. Ponsonby may not have foreseen this passionate outburst but, Seward's ego aside, her initiative in sending a definition of the sonnet alternative to that of Johnson had, arguably, the best of effects – encouraging the poetess to reflect upon the sonnet's received meanings, and continue in active pursuit of her own pure vision of the form.[15]

We cannot, of course, be certain that that tutor-pupil relationship with which Butler and Ponsonby's friendship commenced did not extend to Butler's direction of the sources chosen for transcription by Ponsonby. It is significant, however, that the

[14] In his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) Johnson defines the sonnet as 'a short poem consisting of fourteen lines, of which the rhymes are adjusted by a particular rule. It is not very suitable to the English language, and has not been used by a man of eminence since Milton'. For Seward's disagreement with Johnson's definition, see her letter to Eleanor Butler, dated 9 December 1795 (Seward, IV. 131-8; 132-3 esp.)

[15] Sarah's gift of Mr Williams's verse received a similar reception insofar that Seward clearly appreciated her friend's thoughtful and well-executed transcription, but made no attempt to disguise her disappointment with Mr Williams's skills as a translator (See Seward, IV. 238).

journals give no direct indication of this, offering confirmation, only, of Butler's pride in the skills of her 'beloved'. On 11 August 1788, for instance, Butler described in her diary their visit to the Shipleys, detailing the time spent in Louisa Shipley's bedroom and their inspection of Louisa's editions of Dante and Petrarch. A fortnight later, Butler made a note of the Ladies' receipt of a letter from their hostess, with a transcription of the third chapter of Jacques Necker's *L'importance des Opinions Religieuses* (1788).[16] The following month, Butler's entry reads: 'My beloved finished her Transcript for Miss Louisa Shipley of "The Advantages of Sickness", by the late Miss Bowdler' (24 September 1788: Bell, 133). Jane Bowdler's book of poems and essays was a compassionate choice. Written to relieve the hours of suffering experienced by a young and invalid author, the transcription would have presented Louisa Shipley, whose own health was failing, with a valuable source of religious and philosophic consolation. The diary's record of Ponsonby having finished 'her Transcript' includes no reference to Butler's influence but, like her glowing account of Ponsonby's 'two quarto books', constitutes an entry complete in and of itself.

Ponsonby was an intelligent, insightful reader whose opportunities for self-discovery and expression were ably explored through her unique talent for transcription. While this was an acceptable form of female employment, Butler and Ponsonby's joint celebrity meant, however, that the Ladies' other intellectual outlets were somewhat atypical. This is best represented in the journals by their freedom to enter into political and literary debates with their famous guests, including the Count de Jarnac, Louis Antoine de Rohan-Chabot – the aristocratic French émigré who called upon the Ladies shortly after his arrival in Wales, to relate the latest news from

[16] Eleanor Butler had been sent to a French convent at Cambrai, aged 14. Both women's fluency in the European languages was reflected in their marked preference for French and Italian literature. Between 1783-9 they had two English booksellers, and one French bookseller (see Mavor, *The Ladies*, 59).

France and 'all the horrid particulars of the King's capture at which he was present' (27 November 1789: Bell, 235-242). Butler recollects with warmth that in his company 'the hours flew so rapidly that we were quite sorry the clock struck twelve' (Bell, 242).[17]

Anne Lister, on the other hand, received constant reminders of the gendered expectations associated with such debates in early nineteenth-century society. In 1818, she observed, for example, that Elizabeth Browne, had little choice but to read 'by stealth'; her mother having made it clear that she did not like to see her daughter 'poring over books' (8 September 1818: Whitbread, *I Know*, 59). Mrs Browne preferred, instead, the traditional employments of needlework and related domestic concerns: the kind of education that Mary Wollstonecraft had so forcefully advocated *against* in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Lister may not have been a Wollstonecraftian feminist, but she was unwilling to allow herself to be defined by the expectations of others. Ignoring the prescriptive nature of a traditionally female education, Lister embarked on an ambitious study programme, covering algebra, rhetoric, and the Classical languages.[18] For a while, she was tutored by Mr Knight, the Vicar of Halifax, but refused to relent when the latter suggested that she drop her studies:

> *Saturday 23 May 1818 [Halifax]*
> Went to Mr Knight's & sat ½ hour. Mentioning my despair of getting on with my studies, he proposed my giving up altogether the thought of pursuing them. This, I did not think necessary to dissemble, I scouted entirely. (Whitbread, *I Know*, 43)

[17] Butler and Ponsonby seem to have created in their journals spaces in which to re-live moments of sociability. A good example of this is Butler's full account of an evening visit by the Swiss meteorologist Jean Andre de Luc and his wife; an entry that was clearly intended to be re-read by the Ladies at a future date (See 9 July 1788: Bell, 111-112).

[18] Anne Lister's diary entry for 24 March 1821 offers a typical example of her academic reading schedule: 'Before breakfast, from 7 ¾ to 9 ¼, & from 10 ¾ to 2 ½ (including an interruption of 20 minutes) read from v.1304 to 1527, end of *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, & afterwards from p.288 to 296, end of vol. 2, Adams's translation of the 7 remaining plays of Sophocles' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 149).

Mr Knight's suggestion is nothing short of an offence to Lister, who doggedly resolves to continue her education, by any means.[19] Independent of Mr Knight's guidance, she read voraciously at home, kept up her regular attendance at lectures, and even read 'a little Latin [… and] Italian' with Charlotte Norcliffe during her visits to Langton (7 November 1820: Whitbread, *I Know*, 137).[20]

In Halifax, Lister's reputation for bookishness made her comparable to Miss Pickford, a recent arrival whom the local community readily recognised as 'a *bas bleu'*.[21] To the likes of the Mses Hudsons of Hipperholme, Lister's learnedness made her presence nothing short of intimidating: 'they were frightened of me – my Latin & Greek, etc. What nonsense!', reported Lister, vexed but proud (2 September 1819: Whitbread, *I Know*, 98). In an age in which, as Lister herself would pointedly state to Miss Browne, 'ladies, in general' had 'neither time nor opportunity to compete with men of college or liberal education', it should come as no surprise that her scholarly pursuits fuelled local gossip (10 May 1824: Whitbread, *I Know*, 343).

Interestingly, it seems that notwithstanding her literary ambitions, Lister did not entirely disagree with the opinion of Mrs Browne. In a conversation with Miss Pickford she would go so far as to claim that 'Literature was anything but desirable if it interfered with any of the kindred charities of domestic life' (1 March 1823: Whitbread, *I Know*, 238). This comment needs, however, to be read in the context of Lister's nuanced differentiation of her gender and sexuality. Lister's diary entry of 10 March 1819 is an important one:

---

[19] On 10 November 1818, during a visit to Elvington, Lister mentions her friend Ellen Empson's enquiry into her search for a tutor, ' I having also told her my great wish to pursue my studies with someone or other for another year, Mr Knight & his son, James, being both out of the question' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 68).

[20] On Lister's lecture attendance see, for example, her mention of going to Webster's lectures in the Halifax Assembly Rooms on 22 March 1819 (Whitbread, *I Know*, 84). See also, Lister's implication that she and Miss Pickford regularly sat together at lectures (17 February 1823, *ibid*., 234)

[21] See especially, Lister's entries for 30 November 1819 and 23 March 1820 (Whitbread, *I Know*, 106 and 119 respectively).

> Mrs W – thinks me very odd & asked it was owing to education. I said no, I had not begun the sort of education she meant till my native character was sufficiently developed […] Was always talking to the girls instead of attending to my book. (Whitbread, *I Know*, 82-3)

Here, Lister takes care to plot the development of her 'bookishness' against – rather than as a compliment to – her sexual maturity. Confident of her 'gentlemanly' manners, Lister deemed herself entitled to distinguish her education from that deemed acceptable to other women, whose learning she treated with much more circumspection, Lister herself not being an example of 'ladies, in general'.

It is also worth noting that Lister initially defended Miss Pickford from the Saltmarshes' malicious definition of her as 'blue and masculine' (16 February 1823: Whitbread, *I Know*, 234).[22] A month later, however, she decided Miss Pickford was 'too masculine', after all: 'I would rather have a pretty girl to flirt with. She is clever for a lady, but her style of manner & character do not naturally suit me' (12 March 1823: *ibid*., 240). By her own admission, Lister was not 'an admirer of learned ladies', her main objection to which seems to have rested upon her definition of their 'manner' as both temperament and appearance (28 February 1823: Whitbread, 237). Lister's ruling against Miss Pickford's 'masculinity' appears, significantly, after a series of negative observations on her attire:

> I wish she would care a little more about dress: At least not wear such an old-fashioned, short-waisted, fright of a brown habit with yellow metal buttons as she had on this morning. Were she twenty years younger I could not endure it at all. (7 March 1823: Whitbread, *I Know*, 240)

Lister, it seems, was increasingly despairing that as an aggressive intellectual of increasingly slipshod appearance, Miss Pickford was conforming too much to the

[22] The early bluestockings were a group of men and women who met to pursue literary scholarship. By the 1770s, the focus had shifted to the women of the group, with the label used as a term of abuse for women ambitious of learning. As Moyra Haslett explains, while the bluestockings' history began in the mid-eighteenth century, their influence and cultural pervasiveness belonged to the early nineteenth century, when a host of works by members of the bluestocking circle were published posthumously. See Moyra Haslett: 'Bluestocking Feminism Revisited: The Satirical Figure of the Bluestocking', *Women's Writing*, 17: 3 (2010), 432-451.

bluestocking stereotype so easy to ridicule on the grounds of suspect femininity. Her circle of friends in Halifax remained, for the most part, very much 'provincial' in their thinking patterns. It is no wonder, then, that Lister should have counselled Miss Pickford to remain selective in the communication of her intellectualism.[23] Notably, when Lister was confronted by Mrs Rawson with specific questions about her own study programme, she answered on the condition that her interrogator observe full secrecy (14 May 1821: Whitbread, *I Know*, 152).

All this did not, however, preclude Lister from taking an active – and not so discrete – interest in Halifax's self-educated men. In 1817, when Lister hired Mr Sugden to teach her the flute she registered a particular fascination in his formative background:

> He is quite self-taught. He was a fustian-cutter by trade, but this grew so bad he gave it up &, being a single man, supports himself by teaching singing, the flute, or French horn, & writing out music for anyone. (6 May 1817: Whitbread, *I Know*, 4)

Mr Oates, the optician, received similar treatment in the pages of her journal. Although observing that Mr Oates had benefitted from a liberal education in youth, Lister decided that he, too, was 'entirely self-taught':

> John Oates only took up the study of optics & mathematical instrument-making about a dozen years ago. He was then a tanner & had little time to spare – frequently kept at his work till 12 at night &, even then, got up at 3 in the morning, to pursue his favourite occupation. He has made several telescopes, electrifying machines, etc. (19 August 1817: *ibid.*,12)

Added to this biographical synopsis, is a closing observation that Mr Oates 'taught himself optics chiefly from Martin's works'. Lister's reference to 'Martin's works' functions, in this respect, as an instructional memorandum for the diarist, who also woke up early to find time to study, and whose interests were often of a scientific

[23] See Lister's diary entry for 1 March 1823 (Whitbread, *I Know*, 238).

bent.[24] Lister may have been a snob (as reflected so painfully in the course of her courtship of Elizabeth Browne), but upwardly mobile men were, for her, a source of irresistible intrigue.[25] Like them, Lister was also aspiring to new intellectual heights and financial independence; from their stories, it seems, she found considerable encouragement for her own self-devised programmes of study.

Literary geographies

Despite the economic uncertainty of their first years of residence at Plas Newydd, Butler and Ponsonby invested considerable sums of money both on books and the library itself, which was the first room they chose to reform.[26] Newly extended and benefitting from the addition of Gothic windows to the northeast, this 'Saloon of Minerva', as it was then known, featured prominently in all visitors' accounts.[27] Kendal Bushe, who made his visit in 1805, would later describe his half-hour in the Library as an experience almost magical, absolute: 'I peep'd at everything; prints, bronzes, ornaments, books, drawings etc., without reserve, and positively there is no such library of its size in the World' (qtd. in Jones, 4). Lister, who seems to have been admitted to the breakfast room but not the adjoining library, was unable to offer such

[24] Benjamin Martin (1705-1782) was a scientific lecturer, whose interests ranged from experimental philosophy to instrument making. In 1740 he published *Optics* and in 1756 an *Essay on Visual Glasses (vulgarly called spectacles)*. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography lists Martin's invention of 'a portable compound microscope with a micrometer' as a significant contribution to the field of optical science. See ODNB <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/18175>.

[25] On 7 December 1817, for instance, Lister detailed a relatively full account her conversation with a Birmingham tradesman, whom she met on the coach from Market Weighton to York (Whitbread, *I Know*, 23).

[26] The Ladies' expenditure on books was remarkably disproportionate to their income and other expenses. Mavor notes that while their annual rent amounted to £22.15s., their book bills totalled an average of £35 per year (Mavor, *The Ladies*, 64).

[27] For a description of the original cottage and the Ladies' first reforms to Plas Newydd, see Mavor: *The Ladies*, 46-7.

commentary, but her attention to the little bookshelf in the 'rustic library' (as she called the Ladies' summerhouse), and use of quotation marks to transcribe the gardener's claim that his employers were "always reading" offers valuable affirmation of the centrality of literariness to the Ladies' cultivation of their public image (14 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 196).[28]

In her illuminating study of the Ladies of Llangollen's development of the Plas Newydd estate, Nicole Reynolds describes the library as a room that took 'centre stage', not only in their daily routine (consisting mainly of reading, drawing, and journal and letter-writing) but as 'a calculated display that supplanted a traditional seat of masculine privilege and authority' (Reynolds, 219). The reminder that in upper class homes libraries were traditionally masculine retreats, is an important one, often reinforced in the literature of the period. In Mary Hays' sentimental novel *Emma Courtney* (1796), the eponymous heroine follows her father, in silence to the library'. 'My heart bounded', she excitedly exclaims, 'when, on entering a spacious room, I perceived on either side a large and elegant assortment of books, regularly arranged in glass cases'. Longing for time alone amidst such an inspiring collection, Emma nevertheless soon discovers, to her 'inexpressible mortification, that the cases were locked, and that in this intellectual feast [she] was not to be [her] own purveyor' (Hays, 21). Butler and Ponsonby sought, in their library, to re-write this prohibitive controlling of the female intellect by making a public display of the intellectual programme symbolised by their library. While the Ladies may have shied away from too many visitors by hiding upstairs, in the 'state bedchamber', admission to the library would have been the highlight of any tour of the downstairs rooms, and intriguing, also, to the members of the public granted access only to Pas Newydd's

[28] In her excellent biography of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, Elizabeth Mavor observes that 'it was not unusual for them to spend six hours out of the twenty-four in continuous [letter] writing' (Mavor, *The Ladies*, 157).

grounds, rather than the house itself. The library's stained glass windows, "shedding their dim religious light", were certain to excite the imagination of visitors, close or distant.[29]

The library at Plas Newydd measured thirteen feet by fourteen feet and six inches. At its centre there was a wooden octagon-shaped table, adorned with the Ladies' favourite flowers, and often piled with newspapers.[30] Oil paintings, bronze, glass and silverware were prominently on display, with Gothic bookcases to frame Butler and Ponsonby's dazzling collection of antiquarian books. On 13 August 1832, the contents of Plas Newydd underwent a seven-day sale presided by George Robins of Covent Garden as auctioneer.[31] With an atmospheric description of 'the gloomy, yet superior grace of the Library', Robins whetted buyers' appetites for the 'extensive and valuable library of books comprising many Thousand Volumes, elegantly bound in folio, quarto, and octavo, (large and small […])' (Hicklin, 17). This vast collection of books, which attracted some of the highest bids in the auction, spilled over into the bookcases in the bedroom and dressing room upstairs.[32] As Elizabeth Mavor recounts:

> Their books attracted special interest. A friend of Mrs Hughes managed to buy an album of views by Miss Bowdler and other of the Ladies' friends' for thirty-five shillings. A very rare edition of Froissart went for thirty-two shillings and sixpence. (Mavor, *The Ladies*, 195)

---

[29] This description of the ethereal effects produced by the library windows is quoted from John Hicklin's 'The Ladies of Llangollen: as Sketched by Many Hands', p.10.

[30] See Yorke, 26; and Lockhart's description of tables 'piled with newspapers from every corner of the kingdom' (qtd. in Hicklin, 28). The Ladies of Llangollen remained keen newspaper readers during their 'retirement' from society. Eleanor Butler refers to *The Star* as 'our newspaper' (19 July 1788: Bell, 113). Later, in her anxiety to keep abreast of the latest news from London after the King's first bout of ill health, she ends an entry with the frustrated note: 'No newspaper, how provoking' (29 December 1788: Bell, 162). The Ladies regularly had their newspapers bound (see, for example, 15 March 1802: Bell, 327), and continued to receive news from Ireland in the form of clippings sent by correspondents (16 August 1821: Bell, 378). They also seem to have considered newspapers as a special kind of 'currency', with which to negotiate with their booksellers. An invoice to Lackington, Allen & Co. dated 19 March 1812 consists of an order for books, and request that 'a set of newspapers self bound & leathered', 'very regularly & neatly kept' be considered in exchange for other books (Birmingham Special Collections, BU/5).

[31] The sale occurred after Sarah Ponsonby's death, before the house came into possession of its new owners Amelia and Charlotte Andrews.

[32] As Robins notes, bookshelves were also fitted in the bedroom and dressing room located on the first floor (See Hicklin, 12).

Both these books allude to the personal nature of Butler and Ponsonby's library collection, with the edition of Froissart, which supposedly belonged to the Sorbonne library (and is thus presumed 'one of the spoils of the Revolution') serving as a reminder of the many books the Ladies received as gifts. Other examples include Mr Sandford's present of Joseph Priestley's *Lectures on History and General Policy* prefixed with his 'Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life', and *Les Mémoires du duc de St Simon*, a work in three volumes presented to them by Lady Templetown during her visit on 21 May 1789.[33] A seat of erudition, manifesto for their cultural programme, and homely retreat; the Ladies' library was, also, a treasured site for personal collection and memory-making.

The first half of Madame de Genlis's account of 'The Fair Recluses of Llangollen' – free from her later suspicions and anxieties about the sustainability of the Ladies' isolated set-up – offered unequivocal praise for Plas Newydd's 'excellent library composed of the best English, French, and Italian authors' (Genlis, 100). It was an account familiar to Lister, who told Ponsonby that she had read the *Belle Assemblée* article twelve years previous to her visit and 'had longed to see the place ever since' (23 July 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 204). Like many others, Lister must have been stimulated by Madame de Genlis's compelling portrayal of her hosts at Plas Newydd and the intellectual rewards promised to their guests.

Not all the Ladies' visitors were convinced, however. Upon her return from Wales, Anne resumed a busy round of social calls to friends in Halifax. She was surprised to learn that far from sharing her romantic appreciation of Plas Newydd, Mrs Saltmarshe and Mrs Waterhouse were, in fact, most aggressive in their denunciation:

[33] See Eleanor Butler's journal entries for 21 June 1788 and 21 May 1789 (Bell, 107 and 209 respectively).

> Emma launched forth most fluently in dispraise of the place. A little baby house & baby grounds. Bits of painted glass stuck in all the windows. Beautifully morocco-bound books laid about in all the arbours, etc., evidently for shew [*sic*], perhaps stiff if you touched them & never opened. Tasso, etc. etc. Everything evidently done for effect. (10 August 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 211)

It is significant that Emma Saltmarshe specifically upbraids Butler and Ponsonby's choice of lifestyle by attacking their literary characters. She suggests that their preference for highbrow literature (for which Tasso functions as a synecdoche) was undisguised pretension, and that the Ladies' antiquarian books were literally collectors' items – to be displayed, but rarely touched, and much less read. To Emma Saltmarshe, Plas Newydd's literariness seemed all-too deliberate; an illusory way of life as deceitful, ultimately, as any theatrical spectacle. Mrs Waterhouse, whose comments were less acerbic, seems to have agreed on the latter, describing 'little bits of antiques set up here & there' as if to imply the Ladies possessions were essentially stage props (10 August 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 212). While Anne expressed outward respect for the expression of views in contrast to her own, her entry tellingly concludes with the decision that, based on the day's events, she had discovered that among the people she liked best in Halifax, Mary Priestley had now secured a decided precedence over Emma Saltmarshe (Whitbread, *I Know*, 212).

Lister did not come into her inheritance until 1826. Her lack of independence, and the effect this had on the literary co-ordinates available to her, is telling illustrated in her brief account of the family's arrangements for a new bookcase to be installed in the library passage. Lister's mind had been busily scheming 'some better plan of reading in future', her literary ambitions re-ignited by a conversation with Isabella Norcliffe that had left her with the idea of 'writing a work on antiquities' (26 February and 4 March 1821: Whitbread, *I Know*, 147). As such, when Charles Howarth visited Shibden 'about making a bookcase for the library passage', Lister enthusiastically involved herself in the new project, 'measuring & planning about the

bookcase' for most of the evening (7 March 1821: Whitbread, *I Know*, 147-8). Unlike Butler and Ponsonby, however, Lister's freedom to indulge in any literary-architectural schemes were severely curtailed by the whims of her uncle:

> *Thursday 8 March [Halifax]*
> Just after breakfast Charles Howarth came, thinking to measure about the bookcase. Obliged to send him away again for my uncle sat like a post & absolutely would not say a word either he would have it or not. I never saw such a specimen of his temper before & a more stupid or unamiable-looking one needs not be. (Whitbread, *I Know*, 148)

Bitterly disappointed, Lister thereafter drops any mention of the bookcase scheme.

Most of Lister's reading plans were, instead, put into practice at the Halifax Circulating Library; a venue that provided her with an important escape from the loneliness of her quiet life at Shibden Hall.[34] The library was one of the most important cultural landmarks in Halifax's growing townscape. In *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800* (1984), the historian Peter Clark offers a precise explanation of how industrial advances enabled local governments to initiate significant changes to their 'economic, social, and other structures' (Clark, *Transformations*, 14). Thanks to the development of the worsted industry, cultural life in Halifax had been improving considerably since the 1750s, as symbolized by the publication in 1759 of its first local newspaper, *The Union Journal*, and the establishment of the Circulating Library in 1768.[35] It was there that on 6 November 1817 Lister spent nearly half-an-hour reading Southey's letter to William Smith, M.P. on the subject of *Wat Tyler*; a letter she judged 'severe' but 'very good'. It was there, also, that on 20 February 1821 she would stay more than an hour reading the *Monthly Magazine*'s biography of Immanuel Kant, determined to learn more 'about this

---

[34] On Lister's escapist uses for Halifax Library see, for example, her entry dated 1 November 1823: 'went to the library *pour passer le temps*, & delay my return to the place she [Marianna] had left' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 310).

[35] For more detail on civic improvement in eighteenth-century Halifax see E.P. Rouse's 'Old Halifax Circulating Library', and Jill Liddington's introduction to *Female Fortune: Land, Gender, and Authority: The Lister Lister Diaries & Other Writings* (London: Rives Oram Press, 1998).

extraordinary man & his works' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 147).[36] The frequency of Lister's visits to the reading rooms also served an important social function. The library, her favourite haunt, made Lister's whereabouts easy to guess, with Isabel Kelly and Maria Browne going to the library 'on purpose' to see her (7 June 1818: Whitbread, *I Know*, 46). It is no wonder then, that this convenient meeting point would, like church, double as a courtship venue for Lister and Elizabeth Browne (7 September 1818: *ibid*., 59).

Lister was not alone, of course, in taking advantage of the opportunities offered for social contact in the library reading rooms. Butler rarely mentions visits to the local library at Oswestry, but it is significant that when she does, on 23 December 1807, she includes a list of whom she encountered there (Bell, 344). In the Ladies' diaries, much more common are the references to closely related spaces, such as Edward's the Booksellers. In Butler's entry of 15 March 1802, for instance, she mentions stopping by to pay their bill and leave newspapers to be bound (Bell, 327). The bookseller's was also an important space for Lister, who regularly visited bookstores in Halifax and York. Whitley's, of Cheapside, in Halifax, was a favourite. There, she browsed the latest additions to the catalogue, purchased blank journals and sheet music, and made her first enquiries for a music teacher – Mr Sugden, the flautist, playing in the rooms above the shop.[37]

The relatively carefree sociability of the bookseller's represented a space quite different to the reading rooms at Halifax where, the Library Committee stipulated strict rules on the subject of subscription fees, borrowing arrangements, and the

---

[36] A detailed account of Lister's more leisured reading is provided in her diary entry dated 14 February 1821, wherein she describes the emotional experience of reading the third volume of Kotzebue's *Leontine de Blondheim*. On Lister's affective response to reading such fictions see Lisa Moore's '"Something More Tender still than Friendship": Romantic Friendship in early Nineteenth-Century England', *Feminist Studies*, 18:13 (1992: Fall), 499-520.

[37] See Anne Lister's journal entries for 29 April 1817; 6 May 1817; and 20 March 1819 (Whitbread, *I Know*, 2, 4 and 83 respectively).

enforcement of penalties. These rules were for the compliance of all members: Lister, ever the individualist, seems, however, to have felt quite differently about her use of the reading rooms, and her borrower's rights.

At Halifax, the amount of books available for issue by any given subscriber was closely monitored, as the 1789 *Supplement to the Catalogue of Books* makes clear:

> At the annual meeting of
> Sept. 6th, 1786
> Resolved
> That if any subscriber take out more books from the library, than are allowed by law 9, or shall take out any book without having it entered to his account, he shall forfeit, for every book so taken, the sum of two shillings and six-pence. (*Supplement*, n.p.)

'Law 9' refers to the provisions, laid out in the 1786 *Catalogue*, on the sums to be forfeited if members exceeded their loan dates. It also refers to the stipulation that 'No Member shall have more than two Books out of the Library at one Time' (*Catalogue*, 65). By 1820, Lister had come up with alternative arrangements, deciding to pay the librarian 'five shillings […] every half-year on condition of his managing to let me have as many books at a time as I wanted'. The diary entry for 4 January 1820, in which this resolution first appears, ends with the mischievous afterthought: 'Not, however, that I think of exceeding the regulated allowance by more than two' (Whitbread, *I Know*, 113). In early July that year, Lister made a note of having paid the librarian 'his half yearly five' (3 July 1820: *ibid*., 156), making it clear that she was not shy to offer a variation of 'hush money', if it meant having a greater say in the books within her reach.

Lister's desire to increase her book allowance is likely to have been driven, to a large extent, by the Committee's decision to transfer the library from its original premises in Old Cock Yard to a larger house at Ward's End, adjoining the theatre (10 January 1818: Whitrbead, *I Know*, 35). The move had not won her support. On 12

January 1818, with the new library barely fit for admission, Lister and her father sneaked-in for a quick inspection:

> We went to see the new library room which was just finished & a woman was washing it. We were both instantly struck with the awkward, ugly, inconvenient manner in which the entrance is contrived. A complete glass box from the ground floor to the floor above, which is the library, & no communication whatever to the rooms above (2 heights of chambers consisting of 4 very good rooms & which will soon be wanted for books) except for a common ladder, stuck up between a window & one end of the glass box & by which you are to creep up thro' a square hole cut in the floor above!!! (*ibid*., 35)

Lister's disappointment with the library's new aesthetics was eclipsed by her serious, more practical concerns as a regular library user. To her, the new library seemed 'awkward', 'inconvenient', and lacking in communication: an architectural failure that left Lister exasperated, imagining having to climb a common ladder in order to 'creep up' to the top floor. The use of the triple exclamation mark, so unusual for her, makes a striking re-appearance a few sentences later in Lister's description of the plans for a new staircase; adding further stress, where none was needed, on the importance she ascribed to this public space – and her frustration with its relocation.[38]

Throughout her adult life, whether at home or away, Lister was conscientious in making the provisions needed to sustain her literary regime. In August 1825, concerned with her aunt's ailing health, she arranged for a trip to the spa-town of Buxton. As soon as they had settled in, Lister went to the local library, 'Looked over the catalogue. Subscribed for a month' (9 August 1825: Whitbread, *No Priest but Love*, 114). The year before, during her long sojourn in Paris, she had spent many an afternoon walking and reading in the Tuileries Gardens, discussing books with her new circle of friends, and making regular expeditions to Galignani's bookstore.

Galignani's, which had opened in Paris in 1801, was located on Rue Vivienne, not far from the Bibliotheque Nationale. For Lister, still wrestling with the finer

[38] Happily for Lister, the rooms in Ward's End turned out to be a short-lived venture, with the Library moving again, in 1824, to new premises on Harrison-lane.

details of the French language, the bookshop offered the convenience of a reading room specialized in English language publications. It also served as an important point of contact for English communities abroad, providing the opportunities for sociability so valued by Lister. On 4 September 1826, when she returned to Paris in the company of her aunt and Marianna, Lister visited the shop to check if any correspondence had been left for her – a confirmation of the frequency of her visits the year before, and the multitude of uses associated with her reading space abroad (4 September 1826: Whitbread, *No Priest*, 190). In 1826, she also took the opportunity to order a three-month subscription to 'Galignani's paper'; *Galignani's Messenger* being a daily newspaper that provided its readers with an important source for English politics and social gossip.

It is worth noting that Lister does not mention taking out a subscription during her much longer stay of 1824 – the duration of which is likely to have made the *Messenger* all the more desirable. This seems to confirm that the decision, in 1826, to subscribe to the paper for three-months, at a cost of twenty-five francs (the equivalent of one pound sterling) was determined by Lister's new status as a woman of means . This was in sharp contrast to the diary writer who, four years earlier, in conversation with her uncle, had needed to remind herself: 'I must be very cautious how I seem to spend money […] Not a word about all these additional books' (14 October 1822: Whitbread, *I Know*, 225).

The year 1826 saw Anne enjoying a new sense of financial emancipation following her uncle's death. When she returned to England, she brought with her 'a complete set of Byron's works in seven large volumes' – books for which she had only window-shopped in November 1824, then weighing the price and quality of Baudry's 'Lord Byron's works, 12 vols. 18 mo., printed for himself, 30 francs', with

Galignani's edition 'in 16 vols. 12 mo., or small 8vo. on better paper' (November 1824: Whitbread, *No Priest*, 54).[39] As time passed, however, and Lister's new role as heiress became ever more of a reality, she began to load her trunks with a new selection of books. In July of 1826 as Lister prepared for an excursion to Wales and Ireland – this time with both Marianna and Charles Lawton – she packed her travelling bag and trunk 'full of books for making my accounts, etc., & Gifford's 'English Lawyer' […] borrowed from my father' (10 July 1826: Whitbread, *No Priest*, 181). As the director of a revised management project for the family estate, Lister recognized that "retirement, books, domestic quiet" now seemed to belong to another time (9 July 1826, *ibid*., 181).

By the mid-1820s, the financial circumstances of the Ladies of Llangollen had also considerably improved, permitting them an even greater enjoyment of the 'exquisite pleasures of retirement, and the Luxury of Purchasing Books' that had first attracted them to Plas Newydd (4 December 1785: Bell, 65). Mrs Saltmarshe and Mrs Waterhouse surely deserved the right to voice their opinion that at Llangollen, literariness was 'all for show': but can today's reader, granted privileged access to the Ladies of Llangollen's journals, account books, and letters, be left in any doubt of the genuine pleasure, sociability, scholarship, and financial independence associated with their life of books? To the audacious, free-thinking, intelligent, and sensitive Anne Lister, the visit to Plas Newydd in 1822 must have seemed the realization of a Rousseauvian dream – an alternative reality where, in contrast to her native Halifax, there seemed no limitations to her impassioned pursuit of literary and philosophical enquiry.

[39] Galignani's editions were well-known for their textual accuracy. In the advertisements for his books, Galignani also boasted compactness and low price – all of which would have been desirable for English travellers. See Giles Barber: 'Galignani's and the Publication of English Books in France from 1800 to 1852', *Library* s5-XVI (4), (1961), 267-286.

List of Works Cited

Anon, *A Catalogue of the Books at the Circulating Library at Halifax. A Copy of the Laws; As they are now in force, and a List of Subscribers*. Halifax: Printed by E. Jacob, 1786.

A Supplement to the Catalogue of Books in the Circulating Library at Halifax. Halifax: 1789.

Barber, Giles, 'Galignani's and the Publication of English Books in France from 1800 to 1852', *Library* s5-XVI (4), (1961), 267-286.

Bell, G.H., *The Hamwood Papers of the Ladies of Llangollen and Caroline Hamilton.* London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1930.

Castle, Terry, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Clark, Anna, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7:1 (July 1996), 25-30.

Clark, Peter, *The Transformation of the English Provincial Towns 1600-1800.* London: Hutchinson, 1984.

Genlis, Madame de, 'The Fair Recluses of Llangollen', in *La Belle Assemblée; or, Court and Fashionable Magazine*. September 1808.

Haslett, Moyra, 'Bluestocking Feminism Revisited: The Satirical Figure of the Bluestocking', *Women's Writing*, 17: 3 (2010), 432-451.

Hays, Mary, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* [1796]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; 2000.

Hicklin, John, *The Ladies of Llangollen as Sketched by Many Hands: with Notices of Other Objects of Interest in 'That Sweetest of Vales'.* Chester: Thomas Catherall, 1847.

Jones, Sarah Pugh, *Llangollen Blue Guide Sheets: Plas Newydd and the Ladies.* Bala, Merioneth; Printed by North Wales Bookprint, 1969.

Liddington, Jill, *Female Fortune: Land, Gender, and Authority: The Anne Lister Diaries & Other Writings, 1833-1836.* London: Rives Oram Press, 1998.

Mavor, Elizabeth (editor), *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen*. Middlesex: Viking Press, 1984.

The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship. London: Penguin Books, 1971; 2001.

Millburn, John R.. "Martin, Benjamin (*bap.* 1705, *d.* 1782)." John R. Millburn*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP, 24 July 2012 <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/18175>.

Moore, Lisa, '"Something More Tender still than Friendship": Romantic Friendship in early Nineteenth-Century England', *Feminist Studies*, 18:13 (1992: Fall), 499-520.

Reynolds, Nicole, 'Cottage Industry: The Ladies of Llangollen and the Symbolic Capital of the *Cottage Orneé'*, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 51:2 (2010), 211-227.

Rouse, E.P., 'Old Halifax Circulating Library, 1768-1866', Address to the Halifax Antiquarian Society, dated 7 February 1911.

Rowanchild, Anira, '"My Mind on Paper": Anne Lister and the Construction of Lesbian Identity', in *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/Biography*, edited by Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 199-207.

'Skirting the Margins: Anne Lister, self-representation, and lesbian identity in early Nineteenth-Century Yorkshire', in *De-centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 145-148.

Russell, Gillian and Clara Tuite, *Romantic Sociability: social networks and literary culture in Britain, 1770-1840.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Seward, Anna, *Letters of Anna Seward: written between the years 1785-1807* in 6 volumes. Edinburgh: Constable, 1811. Volumes IV-VI.

Whitbread, Helena (editor), *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840.* New York and London: New York University Press, 1988.

No Priest But Love: The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826. New York: New York University Press, 1992.

Wollstonecraft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London: Joseph Johnson, 1792.

Yorke, John, *Plas Newydd: As it was and as it is; with A Catalogue of its Contents; And a few reminiscences of the 'Old Ladies'*. Llangollen: printed and published by Hugh Jones, 1884.