‘I can not dress like the rest.’

Gender, Class and Body Techniques in the Diaries of Anne Lister (1791–1840)

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> “Wednesday, 2 April 1817
> Began this morning to sit, before breakfast,
> in my drawers put on with my gentlemen’s braces …
> & my old black waistcoat & dressing-gown”[1]

At the time she wrote this, Anne Lister was 26 years old and lived with both her unmarried paternal uncle and aunt at the family seat Shibden Hall near Halifax. Although both her parents were still alive, Anne Lister had moved to Shibden a few years earlier since she was by then the next direct descendent and with that heiress of the estates and the lands that came with it.[2] The Listers belonged to the minor gentry and although they were not wealthy and far from being able to afford a lifestyle of luxury, they were one of the leading families of provincial Halifax. Halifax was far from the political and cultural centres of London, or even York. However in the early 19th century the town was a centre of the woollen manufacturing industry and sported numerous wealthy families, many of which had gained their wealth in the cloth trade.

Anne Lister was an extraordinary woman: she was widely travelled, well educated and continued to educate herself throughout her life in Greek, Latin, mathematics and philosophy.[3] From the time she moved to Shibden Hall, she took an active part in running the estate, which she took completely charge of after the death of her uncle in 1826. In the following years she managed the entire estate with its tenant farmers and turnpike roads. She undertook extensive building and improvement schemes, engaged in coal mining and was an active campaigner for the Tories. Today Anne Lister is noted because in her diary she states clearly that she is sexually attracted only to women and writes in detail about her erotic life. Although in public discourse she obscured the sexual nature of her preference for female company, she nonetheless stated openly that she would not marry and planned to share her life with a female companion. She had a long-term lover, Mariana Lawton, who had married to be financially secure. This

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1 Anne Lister, *I know my own heart: the diaries of Anne Lister 1791 - 1840*, ed. Helena Whitbread (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1992), 1, title quote, 344.

2 Anne Lister had a younger sister. There were remote relatives in Wales, who will eventually inherent the estate after the death of Anne Lister and her companion Anne Walker.

3 Lister, *I know my own heart*, 6, 9, 12, 49. During her teenage years Lister visited a boarding school in York. It is from this time that she gained her extensive network of friends in York that would play an important role throughout her life.

did not keep the two women from meeting occasionally. In the meantime Lister fell in and out of love with various other women. Longing for a permanent partner and soul mate with whom she could share her life at Shibden and who could act as mistress of the house, her affair with Mariana Lawton cooled.[4] In 1832 Lister decided to concentrate her affection on her neighbour Anne Walker. The two women came to an agreement and formalized their union not only by an exchange of rings and blessings in church, but also by recognizing each other in their individual wills as sole beneficiaries for life of their respective estates. This was not the romantic relationship Lister had dreamed of, but a convenience match with a wealthy heiress who would contribute substantially to the upkeep of Lister's estate and enable Lister to enjoy a much better lifestyle over the next years. Anne Lister died 1840 in Russia while travelling.

Anne Lister's life seems in many ways irreconcilable with the rules and norms – especially the prevailing gender norms – of the society she lived in. To establish and consolidate a position that was officially not available to her, she challenged and transgressed rules and norms and adapted them to her own needs. In this paper, I want to explore what body-"language" and techniques Anne Lister chose to negotiate her place in society and what role gender as a category played in this negotiation process. Looking at what Anne Lister wrote about bonnets, stays and offering her arm to a partner, we can follow a fascinating discourse that is as much about power and differentiation as it is about sartorial issues.

We know so many details about Anne Lister because in 1806 she began keeping a diary. By the time of her death in 1840, the diary – or journal, as she calls it – runs to almost 4 million words over 6,600 pages, much of which is written in a code that Lister had devised for her journal and to communicate with close female friends.[5] Unfortunately, no complete edition of her diaries exists and the few publications that deal with the journals only offer abridged versions of certain periods of the diaries.[6] This paper will deal with the period from 1817-1823, since this is

4 "Mention my wanting a new friend as a constant companion & to keep house for me, sit at the head of my table, etc."(Lister, *I know my own heart*, 304).

5 The Journals are held at the Calderdal District Archives, Halifax – SH: 7/ML/E. I am greatly indebted to Helena Whitbread for sharing her extensive knowledge of Anne Lister and especially for showing me Lister's Halifax. I would further like to thank the staff at Shibden Hall and the Calderdale Archives in Halifax for their helpfulness on my rather spontaneous visit. Apart from the Journals the archive holds various other documents by Anne Lister such as letters and account books. The diaries are available online on the *History to Herstory* webpage: http://www.historytoherstory.org.uk/ (accessed 11 April 2012). However, working with them remains difficult since they are not transcribed.

6 There are a few publications with excerpts from the Journals. Besides Whitbread's edition for the years 1817 – 1823, there is another publication by her which covers some of the time Lister spend in Paris: Anne Lister, *No priest but love: excerpts from the diaries of Anne Lister, 1824 - 1826*, ed. Helena Whitbread (Otley: Smith Settle, 1992). Jill Liddington focuses on a brief period in Lister's later years: Jill Liddington, *Female fortune: land, gender and authority; the Anne Lister diaries and other writings 1833 - 36* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998).

Fig. 1: West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:2/M/19/1/1 – water colour portrait of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall 19th century.

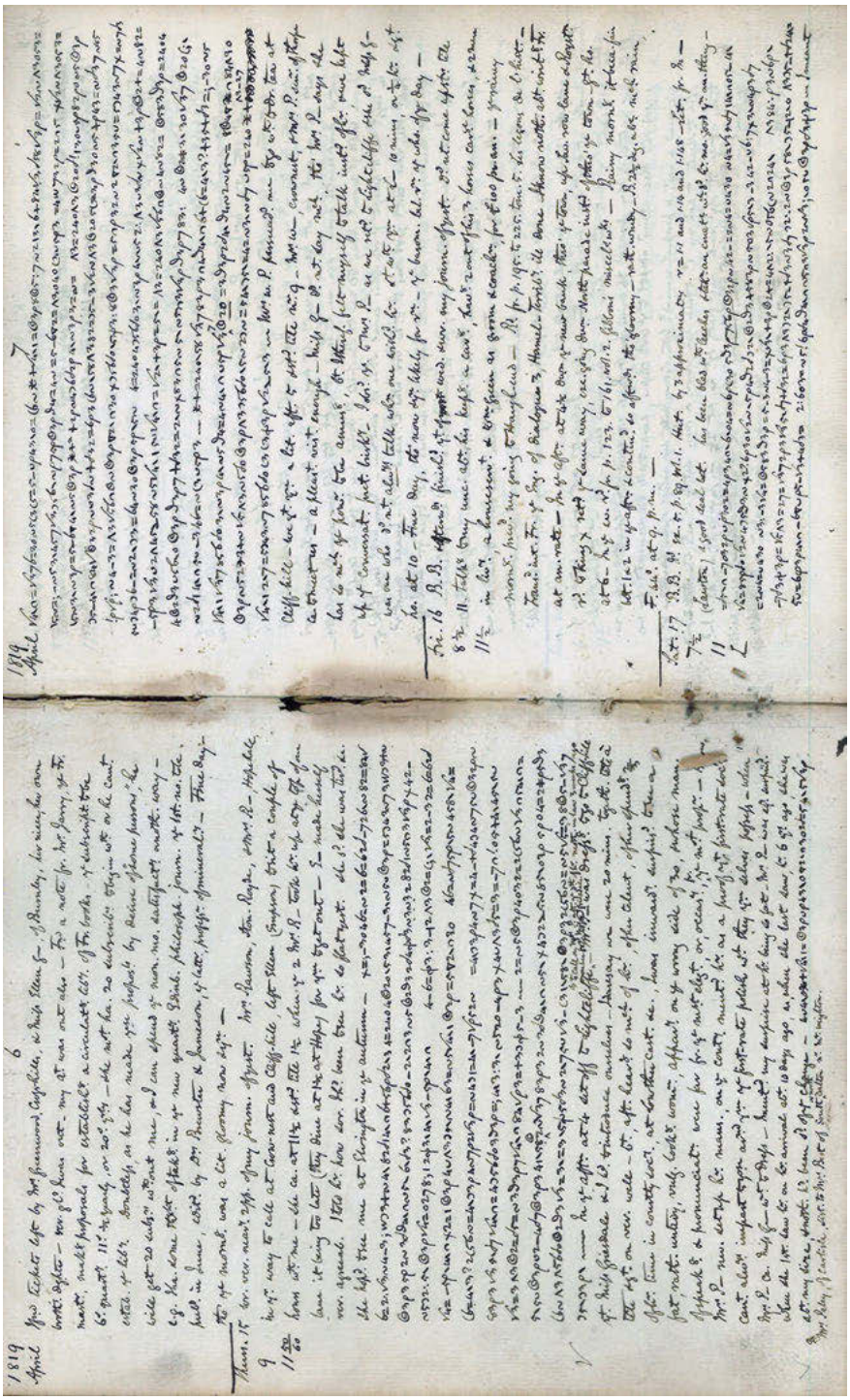

Fig. 2: West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/E/3 – Diary of Anne Lister 11 Apr 1819-22 until Nov 1819 (entry for 14-15 April 1819 – pages 6-7)

the time span covered in Helena Whitbread's edition of the diaries.[7] If one considers how much Lister wrote, it is obvious that Whitbread's publication is a minute view, compiled and filtered by another person with a very specific interest.[8] Although I could work with only a fraction of what Lister wrote during that time, the published extracts contain enough information about the various aspects of dress and body to make informed statements.

Self-narratives such as Anne Lister's journal are sources that can offer a wealth of information on a wide range of topics as well as providing a close-up look at a person and their notion of self. The choice of topics alone is telling, since a person can only write down a limited amount of her or his rich store of personal experience. Authors have to choose, therefore, which memories they want to immortalize. Gabriele Jancke emphasizes that "each report of facts is preceded by concepts of perception and activity which affect the selection, arrangement, collation, weighting, evaluation and interpretation of the details, and in fact everything that is said and narrated about the person."[9] My considerations have been prompted by the arguments of Jancke, who further points out that the writing of self-narratives is an act of communication, and by Natalie Zemon Davis, who argues that people consider themselves always as part of a network.[10] Although Zemon Davis' work is focused on a much earlier period in the early modern time, her argument is valid for Lister's journal because Lister's world was still far more Early Modern than "Early Industrial", and because the existence of a modern individual who acts autonomous of her or his environment is highly questionable. However, self-narratives are notoriously difficult sources. It should be noted that the "voice" of the narrator is absent and the reader is therefore extremely susceptible to misinterpretation of the sentiments or intentions of the author. Furthermore, it is often impossible to verify a claim. But then, it is not "the truth", that makes the self-narrative such a valuable and fascinating source, but to see how people explain their world and make sense of it, and how they define themselves in relation to other people.

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7 There is a new edition of "I Know My Own Heart" under a different title. This is far superior, since it does show what parts of the text are in code and has further additional journal entries and an extensive index.
It nevertheless is hard to understand why the publishers decided to use a still from a BBC production for the cover instead of picture of Lister herself and make the book look like a work of fiction. Anne Lister, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister (1791-1840)*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago, 2010).

8 Helena Whitbread focused on the relationship between Anne Lister and Mariana Lawton.

9 Gabriele Jancke, "Autobiographische Texte – Handlungen in einem Beziehungsnetz. Überlegungen zur Gattungsfragen und Machtaspekten im deutschen Sprachraum von 1400 bis 1620," in *Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, ed. Winfried Schulze (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 73-106 (p. 76).

10 Natalie Zemon Davis, "Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France," in *Reconstructing Individualism*, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 53-63 (pp. 53-54).

Anne Lister's Journal is not a spontaneous end-of-day affair. Lister had literary aspirations and the way she worked on her journal shows this.[11] She mentions that she wrote rough drafts first, and copied them in her journal when she had more time.[12] She often spent several hours a day writing and editing her entries.[13] She copied letters and transcribed whole dialogues in direct speech into her journal. She indexed the journals and inserted cross-references. It is not clear if she planned or hoped that the journal would be read at any time after her death. There are times when she reads from it to her lover. Occasionally, her journal is the object of conversation during visits to her neighbours.[14] She certainly was aware of what purpose it served for her. Besides the entry "I am resolved not to let my life pass without some private memorial that I may hereafter read, perhaps with a smile, when Time has frozen up the sentiments which flow so freshly now.", there are countless remarks that writing in her journal has made her feel better.[15] Often she writes at length and in great detail about an incident that has troubled her or caused pain, concluding with "I feel better now" or "What a comfort is this journal. I tell myself to myself & throw the burden on the book & feel relieved."[16] Apart from serving as an "agony aunt" where Lister can shed her problems, she also uses her journal to examine and analyse her own actions in public to develop new strategies. Lister seems to have had a distinct masculine aura and with her general behaviour transgressed the norms of society in many ways. She faced various forms of social pressure from more implicit forms of her peers to very explicit actions from the "lower sorts". She perceived her body as problematic, although she never writes in detail what exactly is "bad" about it.[17] Besides her masculine physical traits, Lister claims a position for herself that is thoroughly male in connotation: that of an active heir with a female partner.

From the way Lister writes about herself and her performance on the public stage, we can discern that she worked on her*self* and especially on her body at least as painstakingly as she worked on her journals. And just as her text can be seen as an act of social practice and a form of communication, so can her body be seen as such a device. The difference between a text and a body is that the creation of a text comes only from the author, but the creation of a social body is a collaboration of many people. Even if Lister seems fully in charge of her actions and decisions, they are always conditioned by the reactions and sanctions

11 Lister, *I know my own heart*, 92, 168.
12 Ibid., 238.
13 Ibid., 346.
14 Ibid., 37, 260.
15 Ibid., 80.
16 Ibid., 345.
17 At one time Lister records her lover Mariana saying "She meant if I had a feminine body she should be satisfied with the intellectuals..." meaning that if Lister's body would conform to the gender norms, she would accept her behavioural transgressions (Lister, *I know my own heart*, 306).

of her environment. It is in this light that Lister's frequent references to items of clothing or her dress habits should be seen.[18] Items of dress are an important part of constructing and expressing a person's social identity. They send instant messages about the wearer regarding a great variety of factors such as social status or affiliation with specific groups. Because fashion is a very complex set of signs depending always on the social and cultural context in which they are used, there are no ultimate rules of how to convey a certain image. A person is left with the often difficult task of finding a convincing combination of signifiers.[19] Besides making statements to the outside, clothes are at the same time something very intimate, worn in direct contact with a person's body, especially underwear. However, clothes are not only signs and signals that send certain messages about the bearer; they also provide in a very practical way incentives for social contact and interactions. In Lister's time this pertained especially to women, since by then women's costume was much more varied and personalized than men's. As we will see further on, women's clothes facilitated conversations about one's personality, they made very personal gifts and, last but not least, they offered plenty of opportunity for hands-on body contact.

Trying to analyse Lister's *bodytalk*, I have been guided by Judith Butler's idea about gender performance and Jennifer Craik's concept of fashion as a body technique. Judith Butler argues that gender is not a stable part of a person's identity, but something that is constituted over time and by stylized repetition of acts and further through the stylization of the body.[20] Jennifer Craik looks at the body as a technical device that is, with the help of clothing, turned from a natural into a social body.[21] However, body techniques encompass not only clothes or the way a person dresses, but a whole set of modes of expression and tools such as language, gesture and physical comportment that have to match the performance.[22] Body techniques, claims Craik, "... are the product of specific discourses interacting on different levels of power and knowledge and different realms such as social, political aesthetic and psychological forms of knowledge" and that "the performing body refers not only to the body itself but to the space and context in which it performs".[23] What makes Craik's concept of body techniques so attractive is that it – similar to the below mentioned concept of intersectionality – incorporates aspects that are often studied separately and that it takes fashion and dress issues seriously and not as a trivial matter. In the case of

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18 That dress plays an important role in her journal and is evidently a vital form of expression for Lister comes across by the fact that most clothes entries are in code. The other two topics that are usually encoded are sexuality and finances.

19 Fred Davies, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 25.

20 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Dec., 1988): 519-531 (p. 519).

21 Jennifer Craik, *Fashion: The key concepts* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2009), 136-137.

22 Davis, *Boundaries*, 25.

23 Craik, *Fashion*, 136-137.

Anne Lister, we will see that sartorial issues and body actions cannot be dealt with separately, but are both a means of asserting a personal agenda. That gender is something that is *done* is something we can see in Lister's journal especially well. Since Lister did not act according to the gender roles of her time and had no role models in her environment that could have served as a blueprint for her, she tried out various modes of behaviour in a trial and error fashion.

Another concept that is helpful while looking at Lister's performance is that of intersectionality. First formulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw as an instrument that is more sensitive than other approaches to the multiple differentiations and especially inequalities within a society, the concept stresses the need to take various categories into account, instead of focusing on one, and to see how these categories interact and interlock with each other.[24] This is crucial in Lister's case. Although gender seems to be the main issue and motor in Lister's narrative, it is not the only stratification in Lister's society. Class, religion or marital status, for example, mattered at least as much, if not even far more so. A further important category that I will only be able to touch lightly on is sexuality.[25] Lister's acts can only be analysed if one takes all those categories in account.

Although Anne Lister's style in public was not quite as unconventional and openly masculine as in the privacy of her bedroom, she still made sure that she was perceived as different. On Sunday, the 1st of June 1817, she writes:

> "Spent the afternoon in mending some of my things for the wash. After tea, read aloud sermons 13 & 14 of Alison's... the first time I have thrown aside my winter things, having changed my black cloth spencer and straw hat for a black silk spencer and common straw hat. I have almost made up my mind always to wear black."[26]

On the 2nd of September she records the first formal evening visit she undertook in a black outfit. As this was at a time when young women generally wore white or brightly coloured dresses, this was a bold move indeed. Although it is impos-

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24 Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299. For a critical overview and evaluation of the various approaches to the concept of intersectionalty see: Claudia Ulbrich, "Ständische Ungleichheit und Geschlechterforschung," *Zeitsprünge* 15 (2011): 85-104.

25 It is obvious that sexuality is a driving force for Anne Lister. However, to be able to research this topic fully, one would need access to the complete text for at least a certain period of her journals. Sexuality is a good example why a complete transcribed edition of the journals would be an asset for many disciplines. Even from the available material, one can tell that the document would not only change our perspective of the history of same-sex relationships (I would argue it is anachronistic to use the term lesbian for Lister), but also about sexuality in general. Lister's journals give a good impression that many women were far more sexually active in that era than is generally assumed. While Lister states that she only found women sexually attractive, many of her female friends seem to have been less concerned with which sex they engaged in erotic adventures. One can hazard a guess that especially for women outside marriage, same sex partners were convenient since they did not carry the danger of pregnancy.

26 Lister, *I know my own heart*, 9.

sible to know if she really always wore black, there are good indications that she often did.[27] She does not further mention why she decided to wear black. We can speculate that wearing black allowed Lister to set herself aside without transgressing accepted norms too much. She could achieve a grave and sombre look which stood in direct opposition to the cheerfully coloured dresses of the other young women.

In the western world there have been a few periods when black was worn for reasons other than mourning. These fashions, such as those worn for a certain period in Venice or by groups such as the Puritans, have been worn by both men and women.[28] At the same time when historians see for the first time a strict binary polarization of the sexes on account of biological differences, something odd happens in fashion: If until then women and men had dressed in all sorts of colours, and the differences were predominantly that of status, from the early decades of the 19th century onwards, a distinct difference between the sexes' clothings developed.[29] Women's dresses became increasingly body restricting and developed various exaggerated shapes over the next years, often highlighting certain body parts, such as the waist or a woman's back side (for example the dress style known as Cul de Paris) or baring arms and décolleté.[30] The favourite colour scheme for young women was either white or pastel-colours and floral prints. At the same time, in a comparatively brief time a sort of non-fashion developed for men, which has endured to this day. Men have since then, with little alteration, worn an outfit consisting of a shirt, a jacket and a pair of trousers. There is further very little differentiation in respect to factors such as marriage status or age in male dress. The colours are predominantly black and the shape is body negating. While masculine fashion moved away from the ideals of the aristocratic sentiments of leisure, luxury and display towards the values of the new work ethic, female fashion from the early 19th century onwards embraced the aristocratic the ideals to the full.[31] And while masculine fashion became sober and practical, it fell to the women to represent and display the wealth of their families. The way female dress restricted and conditioned body movement underscored the emphasis that women were passive consumers who spend their time in unproductive idleness.[32]

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27 All the clothes she ordered were black and she notes giving away a lot of colourful dress items to her sister.

28 See the article by Nina Mönich in this volume

29 Karin Hausen, " „Die Polarisierung der "Geschlechtscharaktere" – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben: Neue Forschungen, " *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 363-393; Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and morality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 119.

30 Ribero, *Dress and morality*, 129.

31 Sabina Brändli, *"Der herrlich biedere Mann". Vom Siegeszug des bürgerlichen Herrenanzugs im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Chronos, 1998), 105.

32 Ribero, *Dress and morality*, 119

The forerunners of the male dress code and the first to wear black were members of a group that was not noted for its overt masculinity. It was the dandy who first sported that colour - combined with a simple but elegant style. One of the best-known trendsetters of this style was Beau Brummell, the epitome of sartorial excellence.[33] For a dandy, the priority was not the display of wealth or rank, but to look gentleman-like. A maxim was that one cannot always choose what class one belongs to, but anyone who dresses right can join the "rank" of a gentleman.[34] At the same time, dandies were a main target of carricaturists because they were considered effeminate and sexually ambiguous.[35] John Harvey, in his book "Men in Black", calls them "pioneers of gender, exploring an identity that puzzled contemporaries by seeming at once both manly and feminine."[36] This might have been an appealing concept for a young woman who did not fit into the current gender norms, especially since Lister often refers to herself as a gentleman. Another sort of "man in black" who might have provided some form of role model for Lister was the classical image of the scholar. Lister emphasizes her strict regime of studying the classics and mathematics and her attempts to subordinate her body to her mind. She actively promoted her image as a learned person among her neighbours.[37] With simple black clothes Anne Lister could affirm her association with a tradition of learned, scholarly men – which is another group that does not define itself through gender affiliation.

Apart from being clad in black, Lister seems to have accepted and followed the female dress code of her time to a great extent. She writes that her aunt had sent a black silk apron, which she had asked for (this will not have been a work apron, but one to wear with a smart dress), that she mended the seams and sleeves of her gowns and that she wore pelisses and spencers. She worked a lot on her stays. During a visit in London she consulted several tailors and records what she ordered (for example a black pelisse and a black velvet spencer and hat) and included the conversation she had with the tailors. She talked to them about her "bad figure", that she always wore black, that she wanted to be smartly dressed but could only afford one gown per year since she had a small allowance and that she spent a lot of money on books. She is pleased that they took her to be a gentlewoman and a "character".[38]

What is remarkable is that Lister often writes about mending and caring for her clothes and especially her underwear – her stockings, garters, stays and petticoats.

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33 Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 24; Peter McNeil, ed., *Fashion: Critical and Primary Sources: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 23.

34 John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books 1995), 29, 32.

35 Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion*, 26. The dandies were a favourite target of the Caricaturist George Cruikshank 1792-1878.

36 Harvey, *Men in Black*, 32.

37 Lister, *I know my own heart,* 82, 137, 151.

38 Lister, *I know my own heart*, 223.

Although on two occasions she complains about this occupation, one can nevertheless argue that not only did she not dislike the preoccupation with her garments, but that in fact it was very important to Lister.[39] For one, she was spending time to craft bags for buttons and other personal items as well, which indicates that she was not really adverse to needlework. Far more intriguing is the fact that she often writes in detail about her very frequent mending chores and especially that she mainly mentions mending her underwear. This might be due to the fact that underwear was more fragile and therefore needed more care. In this case it would still be unusual not only that she lavished so much care on these items, but that she took the time to note it in her diary. One does get the impression that her mending chores, and especially the fact that she writes about it is yet another part of body-work, of working on her difficult body. When Lister notes that she spent a whole morning re-lacing her stays to alter the fit or that she had been stuffing out her breast, it is an indication that underwear bore a special significance to Lister.[40] Items such as chemises, stays, and petticoats are close to the body and very intimate objects. Lister's unhappiness with her figure was a conversation topic for her – both in her diary and with her acquaintances.[41] This could, of course, have been partly a device to discuss very intimate, physical details with other women. Nevertheless, a few entries signify that Lister genuinely perceived her body as problematic. But it is not only undergarments Lister works on. On the 2nd of September 1817 a typical entry reads, "spent the whole morning in vamping up a pair of old chamois shoes & getting my things ready to go & drink tea at cliff-hill".[42] Journal entries like this give the impression that she is fixing herself a suit of armour to face the world.

One item of clothing Lister repeatedly distances herself from are bonnets. Although her friends frequently comment on how much better she would look with one and even present her with a few.[43] She does cover her head, as custom demands, but with hats.[44] Head coverings are often a conspicuous sign of the marital status of a woman. Matrimony was still a significant part of adulthood in Lister's time and Lister notes frequently that her friends and neighbours enquire about her getting married.[45] For Anne Lister, who repeatedly announces that she does not plan to marry this must have been a difficult subject, especially since it

39 Ibid., 49, 157. The complaint here is probably just as much about Lister's problem of finding her style as it is about the actual job.

40 Ibid., 132.

41 Ibid., 155, 167, 223.

42 Ibid., 14. Another entry reads "Mending my gloves, the trimming of my black bombazine petticoat and all in readiness for this afternoon..." (Ibid., 41).

43 Ibid., 342, 344.

44 Her masculine friend Miss Pickford seems to have similar problems and admits that she occasionly gives in to the pleas of her sister and wears a bonnet.

45 On October 4, 1820 Lister records that after she declared not to get married, her host, Mr. Duffy responded, "I fear it …& more the shame." (Lister, *I know my own heart*, 135).

is clear that a traditional establishment with a wife looking after her household was what she really wanted. About a dialogue with Miss Brown, a freshly engaged young woman of a more modest background with whom Lister flirts for a while and gives advice to, Lister writes, "Said there was a great difference between a married woman & an inexperienced young lady".[46] It is obvious that Lister does not group herself under the heading of "inexperienced young lady". Hence it must have been important for Lister to create an image for herself that was void of clear symbols denoting marital status. This could be well another reason why she preferred the black colour and a simple style for her outfits, since many "official" items of women's wear were coded as well. Lister herself comments often positively on very feminine fashion on the women she flirts with, for example when they wore "virginal white".[47] There are no comments of a general dislike of female clothing. Besides her interest in clothes, Lister spent a substantial amount of her allowance having her hair dressed and notes occasionally that she has been wearing false locks or has them cleaned. Twice she fantasizes explicitly about wearing male clothing; both times it is within a daydream of an erotic adventure with another woman.[48]

That clothes were an important device for Lister to describe and order her world is underscored by the fact that she writes not only about her own dress habits, but she also closely observed and evaluated those of the women in her surroundings. While staying with friends in York, she came across some of her Halifax neighbours at a ball. Lister describes in vivid detail and with acute sarcasm their rather overdone and colourful outfits and concludes that they had been the amusement of the whole room.[49] However, contemporary illustrations of balls and other social gatherings give a good idea that actually Lister herself – a young woman who was not in mourning, yet dressed in black – must have looked far more out of place. Another woman besides Miss Brown with whom Lister frequently socialised is Miss Pickford. The way in which Lister comments on the two women's respective dress shows the difference in the relationships. Miss Pickford is on a similar social scale as Anne Lister and, as Lister describes her, a good deal older. Lister notes shortly after Pickford's arrival in Halifax that she had the reputation of being "blue & masculine. She is called Frank Pickford."[50] Miss Pickford appears to have been rather relaxed about her appearance and thinks Lister the same (apparently Lister's efforts to look smart were really not that successful). To that Lister writes: "As to not noticing dress, etc., she supposes me like herself. How is she mistaken!"[51] Although she notes fre-

46 Ibid., 192.
47 Ibid., 51.
48 Ibid., 151.
49 Ibid., 245.
50 Ibid., 234. Anne Lister's nickname in Halifax was "Gentleman Jack."
51 Ibid., 237.

quently that she disapproves of Miss Pickford's dress habits, she does not record giving her advice about how to dress.[52]

The case with Miss Brown is very different. Although Lister is often very much taken with Miss Brown's style of dress, she still uses dress issues to exert her authority over Miss Brown. After she has established at a meeting that Miss Brown is intimidated by her – because of Lister's "penetrating countenance" – Lister informs her that "I should be always happy to give her any information... I said I would notice everything she said that wanted correction".[53] The very next day Lister sets on her task of improving Miss Brown, for example by telling her how to wear her bonnet. Some weeks before Lister had managed to be alone with Miss Brown. Besides telling her that her gown sleeves were too wide, she also used the opportunity to establish physical intimacy by adjusting a frill around the young woman's neck – which needed to be corrected three times. But even when in love, Lister stayed her critical self and reminded herself that a Miss Brown was an object of desire but could not be considered as her partner. "I think if I should persevere, I can bring the thing to what terms I please... I observed, however...that she had dirty nails & that her gown sleeves were not lined & she had no loose sleeves on. Is she very tidy? But she is pretty and I thought of what I should not."[54]

In Lister's account dress is a main facilitator for socialising and interactions, often transgressing class boundaries. Arranging her hair or altering clothes is often done with the help of female friends. There are further countless references of gifts of new sleeves, exchange of patterns for underwear and of friends or neighbours fitting new petticoats on her.[55] The intimacy of dress provided Lister with opportunities that could lead to physical intimacy with other women. Lister's female environment is apparently rather ambivalent about her masculine image. Besides commenting favourably on it and often ready to engage in gendered flirting, the same women often seemed to try to soften Lister's masculine appearance with advice on dress and gifts of clothing. Apart from the mentioned bonnets, they attached frilly lace over her cravat and tried to make her hair look more feminine.

It is doubtful that the women's attempts were successful, since it is more in the details of her outfit and her manner that Anne Lister showed her masculinity. Lister was using various props to cultivate, often quite playfully, her gentleman image: After a visit to a female neighbour (one of the few she really esteemed and was not appraising as a possible lover) Lister recalls: "I twirled my watch about, conscious of occasionally bordering on a rather gentlemanly sort of style. She

52 On Miss Pickford "I wish she would care a little about dress. At least not wear such an old-fashioned, short-waisted, fright of a brown habit..." (Lister, *I know my own heart*, 239-240).
53 Ibid., 74.
54 Ibid., 63.
55 Ibid., 32, 34, 124,154, 243.

seems to feel but not quite understand this. She would prefer my society to any lady, perhaps scarce knowing why."[56] At another time she muses: "…my manners are certainly peculiar, not at all masculine but rather softly gentleman-like. I know how to please girls."[57] At times "softly gentleman-like" seems to be somewhat of an understatement. When taking a public coach, she notes that she frequently joined the coachman on his box and would even take the reins.[58] Once she even gave money to a blind piper to get his seat on the box. She describes how she purchased pistols, how she tried them out with the shop assistant and then let him show her how to take them apart and enquired about the technical details.[59] During visits to her neighbours, she encouraged conversations about her chasing intruders with the pistols.[60] About Miss Brown she writes, "She mentioned on the moor my taking off the leather strap put through the handle of my umbrella, which made it look like a gentleman's. I said I would do if she asked me but not otherwise."[61] However, Lister obviously did not see the need to act out her masculine image consistently. Instead she decided from occasion to occasion if she wanted to highlight her masculine or feminine side. After a ball in York she notes, "No fan. A pocket handkerchief in my hand all evening."[62]

The common people were nevertheless not prepared to gloss over these obvious transgressions of norms so easily. She received mock marriage offers, both verbally and written, and was openly confronted about her appearance.[63] Lister's diary entry in June 1818 gives a good indication that these were not rare incidents:

> "The people generally remark, as I pass along, how much I look like a man. I think they did it more than usually this evening. At the top of Cunnery Lane, as I went, three men said, as usual, 'That's a man' & one asked 'does your cock stand' I don't know how it is but I fell low this evening."[64]

This entry is revealing in two respects. For one, it shows that Lister certainly met with opposition that often bordered on the popular censorship called "rough music". It does show furthermore, that although Lister on the one hand cultivates her masculine image, she still suffered when confronted too openly with its "freakishness". There seems to be a very fine balance between flirting with her otherness and genuine despair about it. Thus she notes conversations "About my figure, manner of walking & my voice; their singularity, etc." at social gatherings

56 Ibid., 330.
57 Ibid., 136.
58 Ibid., 63, 103, 162.
59 Ibid., 319, 327.
60 Ibid., 55, 319.
61 Ibid., 80.
62 Ibid., 251.
63 Ibid., 64-65, 101, 123 At some point there was even a personal advert in the local newspaper that she was looking for a husband (Ibid., 106, 114).
64 Ibid., 48.

in her presence (as far as one can tell these conversations take place when the gentlemen were not present).[65]

However, it is a physical action that demonstrates that there were certain boundaries that even an Anne Lister was not allowed to transgress. When Lister's lover Mariana is coming for a visit, Lister decides to walk towards the carriage. She meets the carriage in a remote area ten miles outside of Halifax, surprising Mariana who is completely taken aback and shows her annoyance clearly. How emotional Lister is about this, can be seen by the many pages she takes to describe the scene in every detail. After having walked across the moor, she stumbled very excited into the carriage, shouting incomprehensibly. What however is mostly an issue, Lister writes, is that "I unluckily seemed to have taken 3 steps at once" while entering the carriage, which was of course noticed by the coachman and a friend who accompanied Mariana.[66] Lister was deeply hurt at her friend's reaction and writes later repeatedly about the event calling it the "three steps business".[67] What is striking here is the close connection of female propriety and physical deportment. In this incident Lister transgressed several norms: she walked for ten miles alone through wild terrain, she must have been dressed accordingly and she shocked her friend by the way she shouted. What is, however, most present in the two women's ensuing dialogs and Lister's thoughts about this incident is the fact that Lister took three steps at one time. Dress alone does obviously not make a male or female. It is just as much the use and movement of the body, which is conditioned and complemented accordingly by the gendered fashion.

Lister's dilemma becomes even more apparent if one looks at other reactions of her lover. Although Mariana clearly appreciated Lister's masculine side – in letters and private conversations she refers to her as "Fred" and as "my husband", yet at the same time she admitted openly that she was often ashamed of Lister's masculine traits when in public.[68] In Halifax or even in York in the circle of personal friends or in Halifax among families that aspired to be on calling term with the Lister's, people were willing to accept Anne Lister to a certain degree as she presented herself. During a holiday with Mariana in Scarborough, Lister nevertheless had to experience that, outside her personal network, people were not so ready to accept her transgressions. However, Lister seems to have been able to ignore the fact that it was her masculine appearance that led to frictions with her environment. Even when she was openly rejected by others and reprimanded by her lover clearly for her masculine appearance and manner, Anne Lister chose to

65 Ibid.,155. Lister further notes: "speaking of my oddity, Mrs Priestley said she always told people I was natural, but she thought nature was in an odd freak when she made me. I looked significantly & replied the remark was fair & just & true." Ibid., 347.

66 Ibid., 278.

67 Ibid., 292, 285.

68 Ibid., 104, 129, 116.

see the cause for her ill treatment in her cheap clothes and in not being able to dress according to her social standing. Hence she wishes she had a silk pelisse instead of her cheap cloth one.[69]

It is difficult to judge if she simply suppressed the knowledge of the true reason for her rejection, or if she – perhaps rightly – assumed that if she had more financial resources and with that more social clout, people would have to accept her behaviour. Anne Lister was deeply conscious of her social background and attached great value to her social standing. Her class-consciousness is underscored by her political Tory identity (later in life she became an active campaigner for that party) and especially her firm attachment to the Anglican Church – both the institution and its faith.[70]

In her journal Lister stresses that she made sure she only interacted with people according to the etiquette of her time. Thus, she was always considering if she was actually on "calling terms" with new acquaintance (meaning if it was appropriate to visit them at home, which then of course would lead to them calling on her at Shibden). It is difficult to judge just how much of this is due to her own discrimination or to the fact that her uncle and aunt were adverse to visitors. It must not be forgotten that Anne Lister herself was at the time still dependent on her relatives and was inviting people into *their* house, not hers.[71] Nevertheless, there are several indicators that they were her own standards and values she adhered to. Throughout her life she tries hard to gain admittance to aristocratic circles above her own standing. Further, Lister was incredibly strict and often scathing in her judgement and description of the people in her environment. Not many were deemed acceptable by her; "vulgar" is probably the word most often used by Lister when writing about others.[72] That included her father and sister just as much as families in Halifax, which were often on social parity with Lister because of recently acquired wealth and not of ancient family pedigree. Even her beloved aunt does not escape her scrutiny, when they trav-

69 Ibid., 294, 295.

70 She comments on sermons, records private prayers and reading the bible with her aunt and is on good terms with the parish priest who is her tutor during this time. When Lister and Mariana decide to read the same text every day at the same time in their respective homes, it is the New Testament they settle on, not one of the many classical texts or authors Lister so often writes about.

71 Ibid., 56, 58, 83, 84. Anne Lister's abhorrence of her vulgar (yet financially affluent) neighbours comes across as genuine and some events show that her aunt had the same attitude. Nevertheless, there are also entries, where we can see that Lister did not always use her relatives as an excuse for not being able to invite people. On the 19th February 1823, she explains to Miss Pickford that she cannot visit her because she cannot invite anybody to her house. The day before Lister noted: "I have no house to ask her to. I must hope for some society in days to come." (Ibid., 235).

72 About the Greenwoods, a family with newly acquired wealth Lister writes – not in code: "The whole kit of them & vulgar as ever. Miss Caroline's head like a porcupine. Surely Mrs. Greenwood must drink." (Ibid., 73)

elled away from the security of Halifax. During a journey to Wales, Anne comments with dismay: "My aunt is shabbily dressed & does not quite understand the thorough manners of a gentlewoman."[73] Lister meanwhile observes her own behaviour critically and often finds fault with it and need for improvement.

Anne Lister insisted on etiquette and form to an extent that even her environment considered her snobbish and arrogant. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the rules of interaction between the different levels and elements of society are taken very seriously by her compatriots as well and seem to matter much more than gender issues. The fluid boundaries between gender- and class rules are illustrated if one compares her actions and behaviour within the different relationships she has with other women. In Miss Brown's case, Lister refuses to visit her at home because Miss Brown belongs to a social stratum that Lister deems too low to be on calling terms with.[74] The actions of the Brown's show how seriously the family takes their daughter's budding acquaintance with a woman from a higher social class. However, even involving two females, this association is subjected to checks and balances and has to follow certain rituals or the reputation of their daughter could be imperilled. The friendship was a frequent subject when Lister called on neighbours, with the other young women indicating their jealousy and inquiring pointedly which of them was Lister's favourite and especially stressing Lister's need to call on Miss Brown.[75] Lister encouraged the conversation, clearly enjoying talking about her new favourite.[76] However, when Anne Lister showed no inclination of visiting Miss Brown, it was threatening the honour of Miss Brown. After Mrs. Brown overhears the calling-issue being discussed at a tea party, she declares to her daughter that she will not have her talked about and tries to curtail her walks with Anne Lister.[77] Leaving the church, one day Lister observes how family and neighbours leave her and Miss Brown alone and "I never did see two people left more tête-à-tête in my life. In this, I was obliged to offer my arm."[78] Apparently, relationships that cross class boundaries work according to the same mechanisms as those between the sexes. Thus, the party of Miss Brown tried to make the relationship between the two women official by making it visible to others and with that asserting some pressure on Lister to acknowledge the connection. However, their authority was limited and they risked that Miss Brown, as the weaker part of the relationship, might still be compromised and harmed in her reputation.

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73 Ibid., 174.

74 Miss Brown's father is a merchant and Miss Brown is genteel enough to engage in leisure activities such as frequenting lectures on scientific subjects in Halifax.

75 Ibid., 55.

76 Ibid., 44.

77 Ibid., 81.

78 Ibid., 45, 54.

A further example for the blurred line between norms of gender and status, the application of these norms and how people established their own position through them, is Lister's frequent allusions to the custom of offering a partner one's arm while walking. The detail with which Lister describes this act with its fine variations of offering, accepting or taking the arm highlights that this is an acknowledged indicator of a person's position within a relationship. Anne Lister's contact with Miss Brown consists mainly of shared walks. Occasionally Lister notes that she has offered her arm to Miss Brown.[79] However, we can see above that she felt somewhat uncomfortable doing so after being officially left alone with Miss Brown but observed by others. And although Lister teaches Miss Brown how to shake hands, she avoids doing so with Miss Brown when other people are nearby, probably since this would, in Lister's view, have indicated the two being on equal footing.[80] With Miss Pickford the situation is more complex since the two women not only had to work out who was the *leading Lady* and therefore in the position to offer the arm, but also who would take the female position.[81] Lister plays safe: "I take hold of her arm & give her the outside & suit her humor."[82] Apparently Miss Pickford opted for the same approach, since a day later Lister records "She took my arm today. Seemed to do it naturally & never thinks to offer hers".[83] Miss Pickford does however take the initiative in shaking hands.[84] For Miss Brown it would have been a severe breech of conduct to offer her arm to Anne Lister or to take it.[85]

What is fascinating, or even puzzling, is that although Lister defies any clear gender affiliation for herself, she is irritated if others do not act according to gender norms. Thus she finds it unbearable to listen to a new curate because of his feminine voice and finds fault with a female acquaintance because she sticks her elbow out in a masculine fashion.[86] Lister is generally very outspoken in her dislike

79 Ibid., 46, 54.

80 Lister records at other points her strong disapproval with her father or Miss Pickford for shaking hands with people of a lower standing, even if they were considered "respectable".

81 Although Lister has probably a higher social position, Miss Pickford is older and with that enjoys a natural position of authority (Lister, *I know my own heart*, 255-256). This is a good example of the importance of age, which is one of the categories that are often neglected. The relationship of the two women gains further significance through the fact that Miss Pickford confides in Anne Lister that she has an erotic relationship with a woman (Ibid., 269-270). Lister nevertheless does not reveal her own erotic feelings towards women.

82 Ibid., 237.

83 Ibid., 238.

84 Ibid., 236.

85 Lister's entry about a young female acquaintance in York illustrates further how complex the behavioural code is "We walked side by side…I then asked if she ever took anyone's arm & she immediately took mine. She would not have offered but waited for my doing so. After all, I generally meet with a sort of deference I scarce know what to attribute. Do they think me so clever that they shew it to me?" Ibid., 252-253.

86 Ibid., 100,133.

for "learned ladies" or "bas bleus".[87] Miss Pickford is an exception. Although Lister reaffirms at the beginning of their acquaintance her disapproval of learned women, she later admits that she enjoys the conversations with Miss Pickford, since she has the qualities of a gentleman.[88] It is nevertheless obvious that Lister mainly socialises with women. Men feature – as far as one can tell from the excerpts – little in the journals and there definitely seem to be no male role models or men with whom she converses on a regular basis, apart from her uncle. There must therefore have been little opportunity for Lister to talk about the intellectual subjects that are so important to her, but according to her, lie outside the feminine sphere. However, Lister states clearly that although she could not talk to women about learned topics, she would still prefer the company of a young girl to that of a gentleman.[89] It seems that the combination of erotic attraction and power was more alluring to Lister than intellectual exchange.

The journals of Anne Lister provide fine illustrations for various theoretical gender related concepts. Looking at the previous examples, there are many things we can learn. For one, it becomes obvious that our current binary gender system will not get us very far in trying to understand how gender works. Anne Lister clearly did not associate herself firmly with either the male or the female sphere. However, if we look at Lister's actions, we can really see that she performs, that she does gender. Judith Butler's statement that a body is not just matter but a "continual and incessant materializing of possibilities" is what Lister acts out when she tries out gendered behaviour in various versions and degrees.[90] Butler's argument that what we call gender identity is "a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" is clearly visible by how Lister's actions are conditioned by her environment.[91] We can further see how important it is to look at more categories than just one. The way in which Lister depicts herself in her journal underscores that she defined herself far more through categories such as class, occupation and religion than gender and that all her "gendered" actions are conditioned by the other categories. One aspect only hinted at in this paper is sexuality. It is often clear in Lister's narrative that sexuality is a driving force and directly connected to power. It is a power position which Lister seeks and usually claims in her relationships with other people, and which she translates with and connects to masculine terms. Perhaps we therefore should look less for male and female, but more for those who have power and those who do not, and at power structures in general.

Although Anne Lister's power-position was a male connotated one and although she used masculine dress in the privacy of her bedroom and her erotic

87 Ibid., 106, 170.
88 Ibid., 270-271.
89 Ibid., 153, 241.
90 Butler, *Performative Acts*, 521.
91 Ibid., 520.

fantasies, in public Lister did not resort to a male dress code. She wore typical female dress such as pelisses and chemises and used female underwear to shape her body. She spent a considerable amount of time and money to have her hair dressed according to the current fashion including wearing false locks. This might have been because there was but a very fine line between being labelled as a strong individual rather than being perceived as an anomaly, as the various reactions by the general public, her friends and her lover demonstrated. However, in the text available she voices no regret for not being able to wear masculine clothing. She does express however her frustration of her inability to afford good quality clothing and to dress according to her status. She established her sartorial difference through her black and simple dress code and by avoiding the feminine markers of marital status. She established her masculine or, as Lister probably would call it, her gentleman image, mainly through physical performance, which she employed depending on the situation, often when she wanted to impress another female. She was clearly upset when she lost control over when and how her masculine image was appraised.

By adopting a dress-code and other body techniques that differed from "the rest" Lister underscored that she claimed a position that would officially not have been available to her.[92] That her environment allowed her to claim this position to a great extent is mainly because she adhered very strictly to other norms and even enforced them herself, such us class/status, religious and political affiliation.

We can glean from the response of her environment that gender was an important category, but that there were other categories, which were at just as important, if not more so. And we can see that women were not just oppressed victims and that they, like Anne Lister, had enough agency to negotiate their position within their environment.

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92 Lister, *I know my own heart*, 344

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Watercolour portrait of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall 19th century, West Yorkshire Archive SH:2/M/19/1/1

Fig. 2: Diary of Anne Lister 11 Apr 1819 until 22 Nov 1819 (entry for 14-15 April 1819 – pages 6-7), West Yorkshire Archive SH:7/ML/E/3