



“Two Fortunes are Better Than One” :
The Performance of Class Identity in Anne Lister and Ann
Walker’s Same-Sex Courtship

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Table of contents:

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Courtship, Desire, and Economic Strategy	9
Chapter 2. Legal Strategy and the Construction of Social Validity.....	26
Chapter 3. Gender Roles, Domestic Performance, and the Representation of the Self...38	
Conclusion.....	56
Works Cited.....	60

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Abstract:

This MA Dissertation approaches the relationship between Anne Lister and Ann Walker from 1832-1837 through the primary perspective of Anne Lister's diaries. My research seeks to explore how the written representation of their same-sex partnership was defined by early nineteenth-century social scripts, gender roles, and class identity, and argues that their relationship functioned as a mechanism through which they could consolidate their rank and social status, despite not being legally recognized as a marriage in their time. Through using the lens of New Historicism to assess the roles of gentry rituals in their courtship, legal and social strategies to reinforce elite status within their community, and the gendered rituals and dynamics present in their later domestic life, this thesis seeks to examine Lister and Walker's relationship not as ahead of their time but defined by it. In analyzing the dynamics of gender, literary self-construction, and power reflected in Lister's diaries, I argue that their partnership functioned as a means for the women to socially construct identities aligned with the norms of their era while preserving independence within the limited rights provided to women in the early nineteenth-century, in a relationship that was both groundbreaking and in many ways conventional.

Keywords: Anne Lister, Ann Walker, Social Class, Gender Roles, New Historicism

Introduction

While it is generally accepted that people in same-sex relationships have existed long before the terms ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay’ existed to refer to them, the possibility of living openly while outside the dominant norms of gender and sexuality has always been one of unequal opportunity. Sometimes referred to as “the first modern lesbian” (Rictor, Roulston¹), Anne Lister and her diaries have captivated many scholars in what they offer to our understanding of how same-sex relationships between women functioned in the early nineteenth-century. Anne Lister appears to have felt no shame surrounding her sexuality and saw her attraction towards women as completely natural, her sexual preferences existing as a sort of ‘open secret’ in her town of Shibden where she was at different moments an object of both admiration and social attacks. Far more than just a woman who pursued numerous relationships with other women, Lister was also a landowner, landlord, and devoted Tory who wrote often in the latter half of her life of frustrations that despite her family's elite rank, her inheritance could not allow her the social position and freedoms that she wanted. While marriage would have been the conventional route to money and rank for a respectable woman, Lister resented the idea of marriage to a man. Instead, she would find an alternative option in wealthy heiress Ann Walker, the two women beginning a courtship and eventually settling into a domestic partnership that merged social, legal, and financial bonds in a way that she saw as “*quite as good [as marriage] or better*” (Lister’s Diaries, 27 September 1832).

Contemporary study on Anne Lister’s diaries began with Helena Whitbread’s 1992 book *I Know My Own Heart*. As Lister wrote many of her diary entries in code (indicated in this

¹ See: “The Revolting Anne Lister”.

dissertation through diary entries in italics), Whitbread began the process of decoding the diaries and publicly revealing the explicit same-sex romantic and sexual practices within them. Jill Liddington expanded on this research within her books *Female Fortune* (1998), *Nature's Domain* (2003), and *As Good as Marriage* (2023), which extended study on the diaries into the latter half of Lister's life, including her relationship and 'marriage' to Anne Walker. Scholarly research has maintained a strong interest in Lister's sexuality, including major contributions by Terry Castle (1993) and Anna Clark (1996, 2017) that focus on her construction of lesbian identity, as well as Jack Halberstrom's 1998 chapter in *Female Masculinity* focusing on Lister as a "female husband". Michelina Olivieri has focused on placing Lister in conversation with other romantic writers (2021), while others have looked at her under a trans lens (Charley Matthews, 2022), through her relationship to the classics (Chris Roulston, 2013, 2021), under the lens of self-construction in diary-writing (Anira Rowanchild, 2000), or have asked whenever or not she could be considered a lesbian at all (Jagose 2002, Charles Upchurch 2022). My research in particular builds off Catherine Euler's 1995 PhD dissertation which argues Lister's construction of identity as reliant on both gender and class, as well as Susan S. Lanser's essays (1998, 2023) on Lister's relationship to her conservatism.

Despite its same-sex nature, the partnership between Anne Lister and Ann Walker was a product of the era in which they inhabited, and their relationship was one steeped in early nineteenth-century gentry norms. Like any other courtship, there were visits, letters and gifts, plans for the future made, and discussions of the match with families, and Lister writes of her close aunt's joy at hearing of such a good prospective financial union (*Female Fortune*, 62). As was common in nineteenth-century gentry courtship, their union was as much about money as love, if not more so, and Lister's desire to increase her financial means while still living in accordance

with her desires. While previous scholarship on Lister has often focused on how their relationship was remarkable for its time— and in many ways it was—my research question asks what ways their relationship was also defined by the era in which they inhabited and how rank, nineteenth-century social scripts, and gender roles influenced and defined Lister and Walker's written representation of their relationship. Through looking at the diaries through the lens of historical contextualization as well self-representation, my thesis statement argues that Lister and Walker's structured alignment with gentry social norms, including heterosexual gender roles, was guided by a desire to construct and consolidate upper-class social identities, living in line with both their traditionalistic views and social differences.

One of the primary challenges that Lister and Walker's relationship faced was their ability to maintain social acceptance in their community while in many ways appearing to break social norms. While Lister's family did not generally object to her relationship, Walker's family certainly had many more reservations about this unconventional partnership she entered, as did some members of their shared upper-class social circles. The explicitly romantic and sexual elements of the union between the two women existed behind closed doors and presented under the veneer of female friendship, although there were those who suspected or knew there was much more to their relationship. It is notable that Anne Lister's diaries indicate her primary desire was not to be liked by her community, but rather to be respected, and to have the financial and social means to be above any verbal attacks on her lifestyle. As such, accessing Walker's fortune offered Lister the resources to increase her social authority, and therefore reduce the power political rivals or enemies may have in attempting to socially criticize her.

In an inherently unconventional relationship, the question can be asked what value mirroring heterosexual social scripts had if it was impossible for their relationship to ever be fully

accepted as equal to that of their heterosexual peers. As a partnership that by necessity could not exist fully in the public eye, this enactment of marriage rituals and domestic social scripts cannot be thought of as only for the community around them, but also for the women themselves. Jill Liddington notes in *Female Fortune* that “Anne Lister was no social reformer. She was determined to preserve *all* the old privileges of Protestant ruling class” (45-46). It is clear that she was not seeking to radically expand the possibilities for women or same-sex relationships, as Lister at times separated herself as different from other women as well as from ‘saffics’². Instead, Lister enacted nineteenth-century social scripts with Walker as a means of cementing their relationship along appropriate gentry norms, while her diaries reflect a construction of masculine identity that helped to allocate her more sexual freedom than was typically available for women. The union between Anne Lister and Ann Walker included not only a domestic union, but a complex legal and financial partnership where Lister gradually took control of many of Walker’s assets and used her partner’s money in her financial investments, which helped enable her to increase her class standing in spite of her rejection of traditional marriage.

My approach starts from the beginning of their relationship in 1832, with my first chapter moving from the mechanisms and norms under which their courtship fell into, to the often-ambivalent dynamics of the courtship, and finally to representation of desire and power within the early stages of their relationship. I touch here on the idea of the ‘seduction novel’ and how Lister appears to fit into this archetype of an older masculine figure manipulating an innocent younger woman (in this case to access her wealth), but how her diaries reveal a more emotionally nuanced perspective wherein I analyse the myriad of power dynamics influencing their courtship, from

² ‘Saffic’ here is an alternative spelling for Sapphic, referring to sexual and/or romantic attraction between women. Lister makes occasional mention of this subject: “*Got on the subject of Saffic regard. Said there was artifice in it. It was very different from mine & would be no pleasure to me*” (13 November 1824).

wealth, rank, and the gendered nature of gentry unions. I consider Anna Clarks's notion of Lister holding "masculine sexual privilege" (68) and apply it to her courtship with Walker, which sets certain double standards within their relationship that I elaborate on in my third chapter. While Lister pursued Walker with the knowledge that she "*had money and this might make up for rank*" (17 August 1832), I aim not to present Walker as a figure lacking her own agency and discuss the ways in which the diaries reflect Walker as a figure that actively expressed desire as well as received it. Their union also offered the pair a chance for normativity outside of inhabiting normative identities, Lister writing fearfully that she would be alone forever as she saw her female lovers married off to men, desiring a domestic life without "[selling] her person to another for a carriage and a jointure" (31 August 1818).

My second chapter begins after their 'marriage' has been sealed, looking at how their relationship sought to develop legal security and socially elite statuses within their upper-class community once the two had settled together. I look at the role of the joint wills the two women wrote that bonded them legally beyond 'romantic friendship', and the ways in which they presented themselves externally throughout key political and social moments during their union. I look at the social attacks their relationship faced during their relationship as well as their responses to them and touch on the legal intertwinement of fortunes, with Lister set on restoring her estate of Shibden Hall through Walker's money as a form of consolidating the class status of both women.

Finally, my third chapter examines their relationship from the perspective of domestic performance, gender roles, and self-representation, focusing on the more day-to-day behaviors of their relationship. I argue that the ways in which their domestic relationship divided routines and responsibilities through masculine and feminine gender norms ultimately reflected relationship

norms of their times as well as allowing Lister to reinforce her class status within her masculine presentation. I consider the different social spheres the women inhabited and how they were guided by gender, while acknowledging the inherent limitations and marginalization women faced within the early nineteenth century. Chris Roulston in her own research argues that Lister often “mimicked elite masculinity” as a way of positioning herself over other women (126), a point that I touch on here in considering how Lister’s assumption of masculine gender norms affects her relationship with Walker. I also consider the notion of literary self-representation, and the ways in which the process of diary writing by both Lister and Walker reflects the construction of specifically gendered identities in line with their class.

I base my approach in the literary theory of New Historicism in seeking to understand Lister’s diaries and relationship as evidence of the ways in which same-sex relationships could function and be enabled by class in early-nineteenth-century England, rather than seeing Lister as anomalous or ‘outside her time’ as has been a common reaction in past scholarship. I consider this alongside authors like Jack Halberstam who focus on gender and queer theory in my discussions of Lister’s self-construction of identity and gender. I also introduce the idea that Lister’s maintenance of traditional gentry social scripts in her relationship mirrors some aspects of the twentieth-century idea of Homonormativity, wherein queer relationships assimilate dominant heterosexual social norms in order to gain social legitimacy. I do not apply this term to Lister and Walker’s relationship, as Duggan’s 2002 conception of homonormativity relies on the late twentieth-century ideology of neoliberalism and therefore stems from a completely different historical and cultural origin than the one Lister inhabited. Instead, I touch on this point to trace the ways in which my contemporary perspective on queer studies as a scholar has influenced my perception of the relationship detailed in the diaries, as well as trace how same-sex relationships

have been influenced by privilege, class status, and maintenance to the status quo throughout history.

My analysis of Lister is limited to her relationship with Ann Walker between 1832-1840 and therefore does not discuss diary entries related to Lister's construction of identity with previous female partners, including her decades-long relationship with Mariana Lawton. In particular, I am focusing primarily on diary entries from their courtship in 1832 until the first years of their union in 1837. My research on the diaries was undertaken through Jill Liddington's books as well as through the West Yorkshire Archive Service, which contains extensive digital transcriptions of both Lister and Walker's diaries that I relied on for this dissertation. While research on Lister's relationship with Lawton as well as her other partners through the same lens of class would provide valuable to our understanding of Lister's self-construction of identity, it is outside the scope of this paper, and similarly so are explorations of the earlier half of her life before she inherited much of her family's fortune. My research is also necessarily skewed towards Anne Lister over Ann Walker due to the substantially higher amount of previous scholarship and diary entries available on the former³. While my thesis contains brief mentions of Walker's diaries and my third chapter looks to an extent at cross comparisons between Walker and Lister's diaries from 1834-1835, this remains a valuable area for future research as Walker remains academically sidelined compared to her partner. Additional explorations into this field of research could also benefit from looking at other same-sex relationships during this time period, such as *The Ladies of Llangollen* (Briecoke)⁴, and analyze how Lister and Walker's performance of class standards related to or differed from other same-sex couples living in the Romantic era.

³Walker's diaries were first rediscovered in 2020 (Diane Halford et al.).

⁴Referring to Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby.

Overall, I hope my approach towards Anne Lister and Ann Walker's relationship can add to the growing scholarly research and interest on how Lister's diaries can help us better understand the mechanisms in which same-sex couples existed within the early nineteenth century and the influence of rank onto the behaviors and feasibility of same-sex domestic relationships in this era. Lister's diaries reflect an active construction of identity that sought to both be boldly different, yet which was also guided and formed by gentry social expectations. While an extraordinary and markedly unique woman, Lister cannot be seen as external to the period in which she inhabited. Instead, I seek to approach Lister as a figure whose extraordinary life and 'marriage' was shaped and enabled by the norms of her time period, and how social class affected who had the ability to pursue unconventional relationships, how they went about it, and the (not so extraordinary) structures and manners under which those relationships existed.

Chapter One: Courtship, Desire, and Economic Strategy

As Anne Lister entered the 1830s and into her forties, the life of female love affairs of her youth began to shift towards a sustained yearning for stability, partnership, and economic expansion. Much of the earlier scholarship on Lister has focused on her younger years, during which Lister had a variety of both serious and casual partners (single and married alike), most famously with her decades-long lover Mariana Lawton. However, by 1833, Mariana had long since chosen to marry a man for economic stability and Lister had watched many of her other former flames leave to pursue more secure heterosexual marriages. While Lister had cynically thought about “*marrying for rank some old peer of seventy*” (12 February 1830)⁵ in order to gain the same economic security, she ultimately rejected the idea and set out on securing herself a ‘wife’ of her own. In this chapter, I explore Anne Lister’s courtship with her future life partner Ann Walker from 1832-1834 through the gentry norms and social scripts prevalent throughout the beginning of their relationship. I consider their relationship from the perspective of financial and rank-based strategies and argue that the two women mirrored many of the same social norms as heterosexual courting couples in the early nineteenth century, including the assumption of masculine and feminine gender rules. In this, I also consider the dynamics of desire, seduction, and the potential for manipulation that was present in their at times tumultuous courtship and compare this idea briefly in regard to the seduction novel. Ultimately, I argue their courtship as one guided by economic strategy more so than love, their relationship fulfilling a desire for intimate companionship as much as it was seeking to enhance both women’s social positions.

⁵ As I mentioned on page 2 of the introduction, italics indicate diary entries that were written in code.

Though she had been economically reliant on her family for much of her young adulthood, by 1826 Lister had inherited the Shibden Hall estate from her uncle, and in the years following she would grow increasingly interested in remodeling her estate and expanding her business prospects—and increasingly frustrated by the insufficient financial means that her inheritance offered her to do so. While the Lister family had a claim to elite rank, by early nineteenth-century standards their income was far below that of many other gentry within their community (*Female Fortune*, 8) and Anne Lister was well aware of this. Lister had written in her diaries for over a decade by this point of her desire for a “companion” and an “establishment of her own” (30 October 1819), afraid that she would inevitably end up alone. In setting out on finding a life partner, Lister was pursuing a long-held goal of finding a woman to live with as if in marriage, but also the ability to build an “establishment of her own”, hoping to finance her aspirations through her partner. In other words, as referred to by Jill Liddington as “like any other masculine suitor with an estate income lower than his ambitions” (*Female Fortune*, 62), Lister sought to secure herself a rich wife. Motivated to settle down, she would find exactly the type of person she was looking for very close to home, in neighboring heiress Ann Walker.

Although the two families had lived near each other for a while, Anne Lister and Ann Walker had only interacted briefly in their youth. But by 1832, Walker had inherited a massive fortune, and Lister would begin the process of courting her. While Lister and Walker’s relationship lacked the role of a ‘public eye’ as would have been the case with heterosexual courting couples, their relationship nonetheless developed with many of the same customs of any other upper-class courtship. Regular visits were made as Lister first courted Walker at her family’s estate, with Lister soon constructing a “moss house” (27 September 1832) on her own grounds in order for the couple to have more privacy. Between these visits, the pair regularly exchanged gifts and letters, a key

element of any budding gentry relationship. In her study of English courtships between 1730-1830, Historian Sally Holloway notes that “Material objects determined how people related to one another by providing a key means of conceptualising and processing their emotions” (53). Lister reflects this in a letter to Walker, writing “*Words are powerless to express my thanks, suffice that it is your gift*” (3 November 1832) in a long and fairly romantic letter. Lister’s diaries often include reference to romantic notes passed between the two women during their courtship, such as an exchange where Walker writes “*how little did I imagine when we parted last night that I should so soon have had the pleasure of addressing you, my dear friend*” and Lister, a little more explicitly, responds “*your note, my love, surprises me but surprise is not the only, or uppermost, feeling which engrosses me (...) I owe this present unexpected pleasure of assuring you how much I am affectionately and very faithfully yours*” (9 October 1832). In examples such as these, Lister’s notes tended to be more noticeably romantic, whereas Walker’s come across as affectionate yet restrained. Lister, as the more masculine of the two partners, often fashioned herself as the more active pursuer, and her letters reflect her comfort in actively expressing desire for her partner. Holloway notes love letters such as these as a key way affection was expressed between courting couples in the early nineteenth century, wherein “marriage was not a single moment but a lengthy process, becoming more assured as greater numbers of letters were exchanged” (121). While the necessarily more covert nature of their relationship meant that these exchanges had to exist in private, Lister certainly felt that they had “*already beg[a]n to feel at home together – and very much (however little she may understand it) like engaged lovers*” (29 September 1832).

Just as any heterosexual courtship would have been guided by strictly gendered social codes, Lister and Walker’s early relationship fell along similarly binary lines wherein Lister acted as the masculine partner and Walker the feminine. With men traditionally serving as the instigators

of any courtship, Holloway notes that men “were keen to emphasise the honesty, sincerity and openness of their suit” whereas women were “defined by their modesty and the exhibition of self-doubt” (112). The beginning of their courtship is reflected along this dichotomy in Lister’s diaries, wherein Walker expresses uncertainty over their future, and Lister woos and reassures her. In a moment where Walker expressed doubts over Lister’s proposal to live together, Lister writes that “*on the plea of feeling her pulse, I took her hand and held it for some time, to which she shewed no objection*” (1 October 1832), then reassuring Walker of her affection for her. Lister portrays Walker as a sweet yet fairly shy woman, and writes hoping that “*I can gently mold Miss W— to my wishes, & may we not be happy?*” (27 September 1832). Chris Roulston notes Lister’s use of masculine heterosexual seduction tactics with her female partners (120) in ways that mimic the gendered divisions of gentry relationships. These divisions also created the possibility for power imbalances to emerge, particularly within Lister’s hopes to control and “mold” Walker to her liking, even within her genuine desire that if “*I shall succeed with her – if I do, I will really try to make her happy*” (27 September 1832). With no pre-existing structures for how romantic relationships between two women were to be structured, it seems only natural for Lister to base her strategies on what the norms were for her masculine contemporaries. Early romantic elite relationships almost always tended to be based in factors of rank and wealth more so than love, and her diary entries indicate Lister saw this relationship as no different, prioritizing that they “*shall have money enough, and I don’t fancy she will either be close or stingy or cold to me*” (28 September 1832).

As would have been the case for most other couples, considerations of social mobility were central to the formation of their relationship. Scholars Gonda and Roulston in *Decoding Anne Lister* argue that because Lister was well aware that heterosexual marriage would be the

mechanism that would propel her most socially and financially, the fact she refused to marry a man means that rank and status cannot be thought of as her sole goal (“Born at Halifax”, 115). Evidently, if Lister’s only desire was to achieve the highest rank possible in her society, she would have easier ways of doing it. When questioning whether it would be worth it to marry an old nobleman for rank, she asks herself “*And yet, would all this rank make me really happier?*”, although she notes “*I have no name, nor rank, now. I should like to have both*” (12 February 1830). As women had limited autonomy in the early nineteenth century, Lister refused to sacrifice any of her independence in the name of increasing her status. While Walker’s family had less rank than Lister, Walker’s inheritance would provide Lister with more than enough financial means to expand her business ventures and remodel her estate of Shibden Hall, effectively also helping to consolidate her rank. As Walker also stood to benefit from their pairing, Lister’s diaries reflect the fear that Walker was only using her to increase her rank, without any intention of allowing her access to her fortune. Even as the two were about to cement their union, Lister writes impatiently that Walker “*hesitates to take me for better or worse, but wants to make me a stepping stone into society*” (10 February 1834). Evidently, Lister was afraid her lover was attempting to take advantage of her family's rank without providing enough of her own resources into their relationship, although Walker would ultimately cede control over much of her estate to Lister.

While there undeniably was a great deal of affection between the two women, many aspects of their relationship fell more into the notion of a ‘marriage of convenience’ than a ‘marriage of love’. If Walker was interested in increasing her social status, Lister was certainly focused on increasing her fortune, with the women discussing how much they were to have per year and Lister noting “*she has money and this might make up for rank*” (17 August 1832). However, as their courtship progressed and Lister began her coal business, discussions of finances between the two

women became increasingly complicated. As Walker expressed hesitancy towards living together and Lister worked on arranging an expensive coal deal, an exasperated Lister wrote that Walker “*wanted my services & time and friendship, & to keep her money to herself*” (22 December 1832). Lister had already started taking on responsibilities for Walker’s property “as any conventional suitor might” (Liddington, *Female Fortune*, 69) and had clearly begun to imagine the opportunities that access to Walker’s fortune would offer her, increasing her impatience with Walker’s uncertainty as to whenever their courtship would result in a permanent union. Lister’s desire to expand her financial opportunities doesn’t appear to stem from a place of pure greed, but ambition and a desire to have enough means to live her life above the criticisms of those who would attack her for her differences. While her diaries indicate that rank and status were undeniably always of high importance to her, what was also important was her ability to live her life authentically and in the way she wanted to, a possibility that her growing relationship with Walker embodied.

While their courtship was by necessity clandestine, Lister regularly discussed her growing connection to Walker with those closest to her, although it is difficult to discern to what extent they would have been aware of the explicit nature of the relationship. Her diaries make regular mentions of conversations regarding her courtship with her aunt (Anne Lister Sr.), with whom she had a very close relationship. Her aunt was in favor of the relationship and Lister writes she was “*very well pleased at [Lister’s] choice and prospects*” (28 September 1832), especially in regard to Walker’s inheritance, noting that she thought Lister’s uncle would have also been very pleased with the union had he still been alive. While her aunt understood their relationship was involved enough as to allow Lister financial access to Walker’s fortune, it is unclear whether or not she would have known about the sexual aspect of the relationship between the two women. While she may have approved of a relationship falling under the notion of close ‘romantic friendship’, an

explicitly sexual relationship between two women had to be kept much further under wraps. Catherine Euler argues that “Anne Lister consciously used the assumption of asexual female friendship as a cover for her sexual practice. Her culture did not assume either that masculinity in a woman or deep intra-sexual emotional attachments automatically indicated a certain type of sexual practice” (289). Sexual desire and friendship were not necessarily seen as interchangeable in the early nineteenth-century image of romantic relationships, particularly not in same sex relationships. As a result, Lister was able to keep the more explicitly sexual details of her relationship concealed and maintain the appearance of a deeply close but platonic female friendship. However, some of the people Lister discussed her courtship with would have undeniably been aware of the full extent of her relationship with Walker—for example, former lovers. She writes about discussing her courtship with Walker amongst her friends Charlotte and Isabella Norcliffe, the latter of whom was a former lover of Lister’s, although she had not deemed Isabella suitable as a life partner. While the Norcliffes advised Lister to let her relationship develop gradually, she disagreed and “*said it had already been amalgamating [for] the last eighteen months, and I thought that was long enough and thought I had made up my mind—but begged Charlotte not to name it*” (3 April 1834). As someone already very familiar with Lister’s sexuality, Isabella presumably would have been aware of the full extent of Walker and Lister’s relationship to one another. However, Lister’s begging Charlotte Norcliffe “not to name it”, likely has less to do about worrying about her same-sex relationship being revealed, and more so about not having word of the seriousness of her relationship spread before it was fully settled. These conversations around developing matches with family and friends were an expected and common part of any courtship, and despite the covert nature of their full relationship, Lister shared much of the

development of her courtship with those in her inner circles, including the “*fifteen hundred a year*” that Walker had to her name (3 April 1834).

The lack of terminology for or social understanding of romantic relationships between women in the early nineteenth century provided an enormous benefit to Anne Lister in her ability to court Ann Walker. After Walker’s inheritance of her large estate, her family was highly wary of the male suitors who were bound to come calling, in hopes of accessing the family fortune. These strictly heterosexual expectations meant that Anne Lister, as a woman, could slip under the Walker family’s guard with little suspicion. Jill Liddington discusses this point in *Female Fortune*, arguing her as aided “by the absence of patriarchal scrutiny and formal precautions: since she was not a male suitor and since this was not a heterosexual relationship. Anne retained almost untrammelled social and financial access to Ann Walker” (63). While traditional gentry norms may have viewed heavy interaction between an unmarried young woman and an unmarried young man with a level of suspicion, close friendships between two women were common and expected. There were few words to refer to the relationship that Lister was pursuing with Walker— “Polite society had no language with which to allude directly to lesbian sexuality” (*Female Fortune*, 60), and as such, her social peers were not fully able to respond to it, nor particularly aware of the extent of it. While with time the Walker family’s criticism of Lister grew as her true intentions with Ann Walker became more evidently tied to her fortune, these suspicions had to do more with money and manipulation than with a concern for any possible sexual element in their relationship.

Although not purely a ‘marriage’ of love, the women’s genuine connection with and desire for one another is important not to be understated when discussing their courtship. Lister wrote that while “[*talking to my aunt*] about Miss W-; said the more I saw of her the more I felt satisfied with her etc.” (17 October 1832), and a day later wrote that “*She [Ann Walker] was now convinced*

I loved her – thought at first liked, but not loved – and mere liking was not enough – something more required for living together – she owned she loved me. I made strong love – and really felt it” (18 October 1832). Lister was very hopeful that Walker would finally be the life partner she had always sought for, after a lifetime of failed romances. While records do not currently exist of Walker’s diaries during their courtship, Liddington argues that “to Ann Walker the courtship spelt excitement and independence” (*Female Fortune*, 64), and this is reflected implicitly in Lister’s diaries. For Walker who had lived her entire life under her family's influence, this relationship with an boldly independent and attentive older woman was certainly a positive change of pace. She writes about how “*Miss W- came to me and stayed about an hour [in her room]– evidently courting me more as I court her less”* (11 December 1832). Though Lister preferred to assume a more dominant role and did not see this as a positive thing, it is clear Walker was certainly an active participant in their courtship. Although Walker expressed fears that it was “*wrong to have this connection”* (6 December 1832), stemming from a sense of religious guilt Lister lacked, she nonetheless initiated both romantic and sexual interactions with Lister and desire was certainly in no short supply between them—although it would take a while for their relationship to be fully settled.

While both women expressed excitement for the possible future of the relationship, Walker and Lister’s eighteen-month courtship was not idyllic or smooth. Walker suffered from mental health issues, and her anxiety around the seriousness of her connection to Lister (as well as perceived feelings of religious guilt about the nature of their relationship) drew her to become frequently anxious and self-deprecating. While Lister comforts Walker during these moments, she also writes of uncertainty if they would make a compatible pair in the end; writing she may have better choose someone with “*with less money and more mind”* (5 January 1834). Lister writes often

of Walker's poor mood and almost calls the arrangement off at several points during their courtship, writing at one point "*I am better without her and, talked as I may, will have no serious thought of her again*" (22 December 1832). Although evidently this would turn out not to be the case as Lister died while still with Ann Walker eight years later, their courtship was not an automatic match. A notable difference between a heterosexual courtship and the same-sex one the two women were pursuing was that the lack of a public eye on their relationship made it far easier to end a possible courtship, without familial influence or opinions pressuring either woman in either direction. Either woman could have easily left the relationship behind with little mark on their social reputation as there were no pre-established social codes for their type of relationship, whereas an engaged heterosexual couple could have faced scandal if they were to suddenly break apart.

Looking at Lister's criticisms of Walker and her focus on her future partner's wealth, it is easy to form a very critical perception of their courtship as one not entirely filled with good intentions. While their later 'marriage' and domestic life would attract more attention from their community, their courtship was kept concealed from all but a very close few, and as such passed without much social commentary. Their greatest critics were members of Walker's family, who were at first in favor of Walker's new promising friendship, but several of whom became increasingly suspicious of the relationship as it grew more serious, although they could not express these concerns openly (*Female Fortune*, 246-7). As a persona, Lister can come across as manipulative in her relationship, clearly holding an influence over Walker as she writes that she "*seems to take all I say for gospel*" (27 September 1832) in trying to convince her partner's desires to align more clearly with her own. While I don't align with this perspective, her intentional courting of Walker can come across as a seductress wooing an innocent young woman in order to

steal her fortune, a trope that falls into the genre of the eighteenth and nineteenth century seduction novel. The seduction narrative was marked by this distinction of roles, wherein a manipulative masculine figure seduced an innocent younger woman only to bring her to ruin, or death⁶. Although clearly real people and not fictionalized personas, Lister and Walker fell into these clearly gendered roles throughout their courtship; Lister maintained a dominant, seductive, and masculine role, in addition to being twelve years older than her partner and far more experienced in relationships.

Scholars have generally avoided this manipulative assumption of Lister, and for good reason, as it risks reinforcing homophobic assumptions about masculine women as predatory and doesn't do justice to the complex and longstanding desire Lister expresses in her diaries for companionship. However, considering their courtship alongside the idea of the seduction narrative offers a chance for historical contextualization within literary representations of desire in the couple's time period, placing the roles of desire, seduction, and manipulation in traditional gentry relationships. Toni Bowers argues that seduction stories "offer hints that undermine their own assumptions" where relationships "are based not in a false choice between all-powerful force and helpless capitulation, but in the deconstruction of that grim and somewhat pretentious formula" (158). In combining this with the theory of New Historicism, which posits that literary works both reflect and contribute to the beliefs of the times in which they are written, the seduction narrative presents us with a nuanced perspective of how power and seduction were envisioned in the early nineteenth century, opposed to the more complicated and nuanced reality they often occupied. In this sense, while it is both important to acknowledge the less than idealized reality present within their courtship, their relationship should not be viewed as a dichotomy between an all-powerful

⁶ A notable example of the genre being that of Samuel Richardson's 1748 novel *Clarissa*.

Lister and helpless Walker, but as a real and complex relationship that subverted simplistic assumptions of empowerment that existed within nineteenth-century relationships.

Although the role of gendered power dynamics was more complex in their relationship than it would have been for heterosexual couples, as both Lister and Walker were socially disadvantaged as women, Lister's assumption of masculinity often imparted certain privileges onto her in her relationships. In regard to Lister's masculine presentation, Anna Clark argues that "Lister turned her masculine persona from a stigma into a way of appropriating masculine sexual privilege for herself, pursuing mistresses as well as potential 'wives'" (68). Chapter Three will go more in depth into how Lister's appropriation of masculine social scripts enabled her ability to access masculine social privileges (to an extent), as well as how gender roles affected the power dynamics between the couple. For the moment, I will focus on Clark's idea of "masculine sexual privilege" regarding Lister's seduction and courtship of Walker. As Clark noted, Ann Walker was not the only woman that Lister had considered as a potential 'wife'⁷, as she had several "former flames" (28 September 1832) who either married men or who she felt were not compatible with her. Her masculinity was reflected in her preference for feminine partners, in her youth rejecting a masculine partner who although considered by Lister to be "*pretty*" (27 February 1823) was too educated and unfeminine and "*not the sweet, interesting creatures I should love*" (28 February 1823). Lister's masculine sexual privilege laid in her ability to pursue a multitude of partners as a woman with no social pushback; there were no social expectations placing morals of chastity onto a woman who had sex exclusively with other women. She used her masculine persona to inhabit the role of the 'pursuer' in her relationships with women and allowed her partners (such as Walker) to occupy the role of the feminine 'pursued'.

⁷ Other candidates included Isabella Norcliffe and Lady Vere Cameron (Liddington, *Nature's Domain*, 11).

While Lister used her masculinity to access further freedoms in her sexual expression, she applied none of these privileges onto Walker during their courtship. Lister expected Walker to assume a passive, feminine role in the establishment of their relationship, and expressed less interest in Walker the more she actively ‘courted’ her back. Similarly, Lister assumed Walker to have had little or no experience with previous partners prior to her, and a break in their courtship came when Walker tearfully admitted she had been engaged to a man just three months before the two had gotten together, her fiancé having died tragically (4 October 1832, *Female Fortune* 65). With Walker clearly still emotionally raw, Lister apologized repeatedly “*to have intruded on her feelings etc on such circumstances of such recent grief*”---while her diaries also write of a growing coldness towards the “*man-keen*” nature of Walker, writing “*how changed my mind – respect so staggered yesterday is gone today*”(5 October 1832). Roulston notes that “Lister was distressed by the possibility that Walker was not as innocent and virginal as she initially appeared “ (133); I additionally feel that Lister may have felt threatened by her partner’s expressed desire for men, in contrast to her own explicitly exclusive desire for women⁸. This incident damaged Lister’s respect for Walker; although the two were still sexually involved, Lister’s loss of respect for her partner had her hope of a permanent union between them plunge, considering instead having her only “*as my mistress*” (7 October 1832).

Lister's harnessing of a masculine sexual role meant that she presented herself as above the normative standards of morality applied to women. However, she certainly enforced those roles with her partners, whom she hoped to have embody the appropriate social norms of purity and passivity as was expected for upper-class women. While it is unclear if Lister would have maintained more respect for Walker if her previous relationships had been with other women

⁸ Famously stated in the quote “*I love, & only love, the fairer sex & thus beloved by them in turn, my heart revolts from any other love than theirs*”, from Lister’s diaries (29 January 1821).

instead of men, the conflicts in their courtship clearly still followed a double standard of privilege and desire. With desire in the nineteenth century often coded as masculine, Walker expressing her own independent desire for Lister in addition to holding desires for others (particularly men) hurt her embodiment of traditional gentry and gender norms. Lister enjoyed a nuanced range of privileges, able to access her lovers with less social scrutiny, but reinforced many of the gendered standards of behavior onto her courtship with Walker despite the lack of an external social system working to apply these standards on their same-sex relationship. Although her boldness expanded what could be thought of as possible for unmarried women in her time, Lister enforced traditional feminine roles for other women if not always for herself.

Anne Lister was certainly a fairly skilled and successful seducer; her diaries detailing many short as well as long-lasting flings prior to the beginning of her relationship with Walker. That is not to say, however, that she unambiguously held power over Walker in their courtship, or that she was able to embody this role of a dominant masculine pursuer perfectly. In her excellent dissertation on the more mundane aspects of Lister's life, Anna Hawthorn argues that while at times Lister comes across as fitting into the trope of a womanizing "rake", a more nuanced reality reflects that she:

had limited agency within her relationships with other women and, as such, was often filled with doubts, confusion, and inconsistencies (...) though she may have sometimes acted in libertine ways, her ability to maintain such a role was frequently challenged, both by her own desire for a long-term partnership and the behaviour and actions of her sexual partners (198).

Although she considered reducing Walker to her "*mistress*", she would ultimately decide to settle down with her as a life partner and remain fairly faithful to her throughout their relationship. Additionally, Walker did not always just submit wordlessly to Lister's plans for their relationship. She expressed active desire both romantically and sexually, and Lister always writes that Walker may "[say] no" (17 December 1832) to any of her proposals for shared finances or

their domestic life, which consistently acknowledges her partner's autonomy (even if she grew frustrated with Walker's indecision). While Lister absolutely was the more dominant and headstrong of the two partners, and at times treated Walker in a way that was not entirely kind, that should not guide the perspective of their relationship to be one where Walker is fully removed as a conscious actor with her own autonomy.

In a courtship filled with perpetually fluctuating emotions, explicit expressions of desire and nuanced dynamics of power, the courtship of Ann Walker and Anne Lister was eventually concluded. After Walker agreed that “*it should be the same as a marriage*” and that they shall “*declar[e] it on the Bible & tak[e] the sacrament (...) at Shidben or Lightcliffe church*” (14 December 1832), the two would later privately exchange rings “*in token of our union*” (27 February 1834)⁹ and formally cement their union at the Holy Trinity Church on 30 May 1834. While unconventional in the sense that it was undertaken by two women, the courtship between Lister and Walker conformed to most of the normative structures and practices of gentry courtships in their time. Even in the necessarily more private sphere their initial relationship had to occupy, the practice of regular visits at each other's estates, exchanging of material items such as gifts and letters, and defined establishment of masculine and feminine gender roles allowed their relationship to develop with many the same social script as their heterosexual peers. Focus was made on forming an advantageous match, with property, finances, and rank being just as important as compatibility and desire in determining the outcome of the courtship. The path of their relationship was not linear, with Walker traveling out of the country during most of 1833 for her health and Lister embarking on solo travel around Europe (*Female Fortune*, 72-74), leaving a lengthy gap in their courtship that was only resolved on both women's return to Halifax in 1834.

⁹She specifically mentions placing the ring on her “*left third finger*”, further indicating the rings as matrimonial in nature.

The dynamics of power were varied: while both women expressed affection and desire for each other, Walker struggled with significant mental health issues and Lister's diaries reflected frequent impatience with her partner, setting the scene for a similarly emotionally volatile domestic life together. Lister pursued the relationship out of a desire for companionship, but also a significant desire for wealth and the ability to feed her business ambitions. While both women at times reflected doubts if they would end up together, the resulting union between them provides historical evidence of successful same-sex courtships in the early nineteenth century— as well as a relationship that, for all intents and purposes, reinforced many of the conventional upper-class norms of how relationships were thought to function in their time. The courtship ultimately functioned to set the stones for Anne Lister to expand and consolidate her class identity, living as if married while retaining independence, and obtaining the fortune she needed to gain the rank she had long sought after.

Chapter Two: Legal Strategy and the Construction of Social Validity

Once their union had been sealed, Anne Lister wasted no time in addressing the considerations of property, wills, and the legal union between the two women. While they may have considered their relationship “*as good as marriage (...) or better*” (27 September 1832), the couple would not have been viewed as such in terms of the law or their social community. In order to access some of the same privileges and securities held by married women, the couple would have to embark upon a complex process of establishing both legal and social validity for their relationship together within the existing norms of early nineteenth-century Halifax. Over the course of several years, the Lister and Walker estates would become increasingly merged, beyond the control of either of their families. As Lister used Walker’s fortune to help restore her estate and pursue her business ventures, the women also wrote and drafted wills that ensured them a life estate to the others property and that their property rights would be protected after death, legally securing themselves in a relationship that was in some ways more equal than a heterosexual marriage. As the couple became increasingly involved in politics within their community, they also became increasingly the target of homophobic attacks by political rivals seeking to undermine their social influence. However, through a conscious manipulation of class status in the form of estate renovations, business expansion, and carefully thought-out social appearances, Ann Walker and Anne Lister managed to create a sense of social authority for themselves in their community that not only maintained but strengthened the women’s presentation of rank and class status.

Having used the terms “legal strategy” and “social validity” within the title, it is important now to address exactly what I am referring to with these terms. Starting with legal strategy, I am using this term to refer to how the pair established a legitimate and long-lasting bond between themselves through the law regarding the access to and inheritance of wealth and property, as

comparative to the rights a legally married couple would have had. In defining social validity, I will be focusing on the role both women held as business owners and socially active members of their community, and how they built positive public perceptions of themselves as a joined pair through a focus on reinforcing rank and gentry class expectations as well as strategic philanthropic work. Due to limitations of scale in this dissertation, I will not be including a discussion on how Lister managed her relationships with Walker's extended family and instead am focusing on their relationship with their external community: upper class social circles, political organizations, and critics of their relationship.

Of all the barriers the couple faced existing in a legally unofficial partnership, one of the most significant ones was the inability to inherit wealth or property, one they largely circumvented through the forming of joint wills. Euler argues "It was through marriage that landed property was passed on. The entire survival of the class depended upon it" (165). Two women living together would not produce legitimate children that would inherit their family's wealth, and as such were missing a key component of how nineteenth-century families continued their legacies. Negotiating a way for the two landowners to access each other's wealth, both in life (for Lister's ambitious business plans), and in death (so that both women could have guaranteed financial security) became paramount. With women not having the right to study or practice law, Lister and Walker navigated the legal process through male lawyers who acted on their behalf. In arranging their wills, Lister writes that she "gave Mr. Gray instructions for giving A-[Ann] a life estate in all my property real and personal - appointing her a trustee" while Walker agreed to make Lister "a sole trustee" with the power to sell and invest some of Walker's estates, along with "a life estate in all her property real and personal" (18 March 1836). The joint wills allowed both women to be legally protected in the event of the other's death, circumventing one of the major drawbacks of a legally

unrecognized relationship. A clause was included in the wills stating that if either woman were to marry (that is to say, a man), they would “*forfeit all claim over the property of the other - the trust and life estate are both in this case done away with entirely*” (18 March 1836), which was fairly common practice to ensure their estates would be protected from third parties. The wills were a major step in ensuring the security of their relationship, constructing a legal knot that allowed them protection within the limited property rights for women and joining their family estates as was a key function of gentry marriages¹⁰.

The process of joining their wills was one they undertook together, although their increasing intertwinement of finances would cause friction in their relationship. While the tendency of their relationship was for Lister to be the one assuming masculine and empowered roles, Walker appears to have a strong input on the outcome of their joint wills, a topic that provided a recurring source of conflict throughout their relationship, even following the signing of the wills in May 1836. Lister records Walker agreeing that “*she was to consider herself as having nobody to please and being under no authority but mine to make her will right directly*” (10 February 1834), although Walker still appeared to find herself under familial pressure as her family feared she would leave everything she had to her partner¹¹. Later discussions of re-publishing and editing the wills would cause more conflict between the couple, with Walker expressing annoyance when Lister reminds her to sign the will (24 December 1836), and at another point expressing fears the wills would leave her “*bound to life [at Shibden]*” (29 April 1837). Walker also seems to have worried about losing her financial autonomy. Lister records these fears with impatience, writing “*A- [Anne] queer about money – this will not do*” (11 August 1835) and that Walker was “*afraid*

¹⁰ Although the will stated that their estates would revert back to their respective families after both women’s death.

¹¹ Lister’s Diaries (13 March 1835). Walker’s Aunt had cut her out of her will under this false assumption, although they managed to resolve this miscommunication.

I will ruin her” (13 August 1835), with Lister later noting that “*I believe she is not only afraid of all my jobs, that is, the money to be spent – but she would be glad to be at liberty again*” (23 November 1836). Lister’s vexation in her diaries towards Walker reflects her sense of entitlement towards her partner’s money, as well as that Walker may have been second-guessing their relationship now that it had become so legally serious. Despite her privately recorded complaints, Lister also assuaged Walker’s fears and reassured her she had “*no time specified*” (29 April 1837) to stay with her Shibden and that could separate from her if she pleased—although money would continue to be a point of stress throughout their relationship.

Alongside the drafting of the wills would come another major act officializing their union: Ann Walker would move into Shibden Hall. After a long and apparently enjoyable voyage together in the summer (which could be seen as analogous to a honeymoon), the move would be completed in September of 1834. Although a somewhat controversial act for an unmarried woman to leave home, Walker responds to questions on whenever she will return to her family's estate with “No – going to Shibden Hall – & Let Lidgate surprise & sorrow expressed” (*Journal of Ann Walker*, 10 June 1834)¹², representing in her diaries a spirit that was firmly made up in her decision. Despite Walker’s initial reluctance to leave home during their courtship, Lister felt that she succeeded in “*advocat[ing] skillfully (...) the advantages of Shibden*” (1 October 1832), arguing that Walker would have more independence and “*how much change the climate would do her*” (27 September 1832). Both women’s diaries include no major discussions of the change during the first several months they lived together, aside from expected mentions of “unpacking china” (4 September 1834) and other household items and neighbors questioning of how long Walker would be staying with Lister. Their life quickly seems to have fallen into a fairly calm domestic routine, and Lister

¹² Lidgate was one of the properties within the Walker family’s estate, where Walker lived prior to moving in with Lister.

starts every page with a coded entry either with the inscription “*no kiss*”¹³ or an entry detailing any sexual activity between the pair. This lack of commentary on their newfound domestic life suggests that Lister’s emotions were perhaps geared more towards the future rather than excitement towards finally achieving her long-held goal of obtaining a female partner life partner, particularly as renovations of Shibden were to begin. If not exciting, Lister reflects the early domestic life between them as calm, and the strength of their connection would become increasingly evident to their community once the move had been settled.

Lister used the financial capital she gained through her access to Walker to consolidate and increase her own presentation of her class identity, most notably in her extensive renovations of her estate.¹⁴ Anna Clark argues that the joint fortunes of the two women “enabled them to renovate Shibden Hall in a way that presented Lister’s image of herself as a learned lady of historical heritage but also as an elite person literally above the common folk” (73). Whether or not others in her community were aware that Lister’s extensive renovations were relying on her younger companion, it certainly gave the impression that she was not willing to let her family’s name fall away into obscurity, as maintaining outward appearances of wealth and elite status were essential to Lister’s social climbing ambitions. Lister took care of both her and Walker’s estate businesses as would have been expected for a husband at the time (Euler, 175) , with her diaries making mentions of spending evenings “calculat[ing] interest for Adney till near 10” (3 February 1835)¹⁵. Walker instead spent her time undertaking philanthropic ventures in their community, which

¹³ “Kiss” is thought to be Lister’s word for orgasm.

¹⁴ Which included later major expansions to the property that began in 1837 (Lister’s Diaries, June 3-5). Lister’s process of improving Shibden was one that continued throughout their entire relationship.

¹⁵ ‘Adney’ was an affectionate nickname Lister used for Walker in her diaries, primarily within their first years together.

included charity work and founding her own Sunday school in 1834¹⁶. With philanthropy as an expected part of respectable gentlewoman's behavior, Walker maintained a dedication to charity alongside her political allegiance to the Tory party, both women reflecting a conservative insistence on the maintenance of their class status and position within society. Lister also occasionally engaged in philanthropy (although less so than her partner), which Cassandra Ulph argues may have been a "means of cementing her social status along appropriately feminine lines" (467). Lister's renovations of Shibden and Walker's charity work therefore combined to create an image of an ideal social pair, with Lister walking the line between female and male worlds, while Walker remained fully aligned to the female expectations of respectability. This is not to say that Walker did not care about philanthropy or helping those in need; merely that doing so also served the purpose of reinforcing her class identity.

While both women present this interest in maintaining a good external appearance of class, the difference in status between them posed a barrier towards their foray into the gentry social circles of Halifax together. Walker did not inherit Lister's higher rank or family status as she would have in a traditional marriage, and as a result was at times excluded from social spaces that her partner was welcomed into. The pair was well aware of this as a potential source of conflict with Lister's high social ambitions, and Lister writes that "*she thought she might not be fit for the society I should wish*" (31 October 1832). Despite this, Susan Lanser writes that "Lister was apparently insistent that her relationship with Ann Walker be accepted in even the highest of her social spheres. In 1836, when Lady Stuart neglected to invite Walker to accompany Lister on a

¹⁶ The research project 'In Search of Ann Walker' has documented her extensive charity and philanthropic work throughout her will and written provisions, which they have followed up with a yearly fundraiser in her honor (See: 2025 Fundraising for Local Foodbank).

visit to Richmond, Lister wrote insisting that she would not visit without Ann” (126). Her efforts to include Walker into the same social spheres as her demonstrated respect for Walker as a partner, but also arguably the notion that their partnership deserved to be treated with the same level of respect as a heterosexual marriage. Despite this, Walker would continue to be resigned to a lower social position well into their relationship, with Lister reflecting that “*she feels that her society is no pride above mine and here is and will always be the sort. Well, I must make the best I can of it but I think we cannot get on together forever*” (20 November 1837). Although Lister did advocate for Walker’s social inclusion, she seems to have understood this divide in rank between them was not possible to fully overcome and saw it as something that could eventually lead to the end of the relationship. Lister’s diaries reflect Walker’s anxiety towards this fact, and the knowledge she would never be a social equal to her partner, and this fact appears to bother Walker more so than it does Lister— after all, Walker was not dragging down Lister’s rank, she was merely not inheriting hers. Despite this difference in rank, Lister and Walker would make regular social appearances together, navigating the complex web of the gentry social world as best they could within its systems and rules.

However, their difference in rank was not the only factor that faced external opposition in their relationship. As the pair became more politically active within Tory circles in Halifax¹⁷, there were two major instances in which their sexuality was directly attacked by Anti-Tory political rivals. The first was a notice published in a local paper, which congratulated the marriage between “Captain Tom Lister of Shibden Hall to Miss Ann Walker”¹⁸. The note was evidently satirical, seeking to mock Lister both for her outwardly masculine appearance and her relationship with

¹⁷ Catherine Euler notes that Lister and Ann Walker “worked together to convince tenants to vote Tory (234)”, exerting their minimal political and voting power as women through the advantages they had as landowners.

¹⁸ Lister’s Diaries, 10 January 1835. She notes this was published in the Leeds Mercury journal (a liberal paper).

Walker. Anira Rowanchild argues that while Lister's own social community was aware of and had no issues with her sexuality, her "detractors picked out her sexuality as her vulnerable point", with the hopes that it would "emphasize the unnaturalness of her relationship with Anne Walker, whose friends and relations already regarded it as questionable and were likely to be provoked to open opposition to it, and thus, perhaps, to Lister" (248). Despite the attack on her identity, Lister presents herself as wholly unbothered, writing that "*I smiled and said it was very good*" and seems pleased to give no reaction to what was "*probably meant to annoy*", although she notes that "*A- did not like the joke*" (10 January 1835). Her attempts to represent herself as unbothered by any attacks on her sexuality were demonstrative of her confidence, but also arguably a necessary form of self-defense. Allowing these attacks to bother her would give power to her attackers while behaving as if her rank and status already put her above these attacks helped make this her reality. While Walker's diaries include no mention of the notice, Lister's indicate that she was more affected by the attack-- perhaps due to the fact they were seeking to target her social community more so than Lister's. Even if the attacks hoped to undermine their relationship, Lister's lack of response to the notice worked, and life continued as normal; although the next instance would be more severe.

March of 1836 marked a heavily political time for the couple, as both women campaigned aggressively for the Tory party. Anne Lister had begun new coal mining ventures with the increased financial means now available to her through her partner, which stirred up a series of conflicts between her and wealthy neighbors, the Rawsons, who sought to attack the couple socially as much as politically (*Female Fortune*, 222). Tensions with the working-class population in Halifax culminated after the Rawson's accused Lister of poisoning a well available on Ann Walker's property (*Female Fortune*, 208-10) and ended with the burning of twin effigies of Anne

Lister and Ann Walker. Rowanchild notes that “The fact that it was a double burning emphasized the 'marriage' or 'connection' between Lister and Walker that had already been pilloried in the newspaper announcement” (249). While the attacks association with the couple's sexuality was less explicit than in the initial marriage announcement, the focus on including an effigy of Walker to protest Lister's coal mining ventures explicitly presents them as a couple, perhaps also seeking to highlight the women's differences in order to also attack them politically.

Similar to the first attack, Lister diaries don't significantly comment on the effigies. It is possible she may have been so overly occupied with her business affairs that she lacked the capacity to fully address the incident, or that she simply continued to be unbothered, as towards other criticisms of her. Certainly, Lister sought to maintain a headstrong and unbothered self-constructed image of herself in her diaries and chose to focus on continuing her advancement into business and politics unperturbed. Walker, again, was more openly disturbed—Lister recording her as “*very low all today & begins to look wretchedly & will hardly take wine fearing to take too much*” (27 March 1836). While Lister could shrug off the incident, Walker seems to struggle much more deeply with the threat, perhaps unprepared for the attacks their relationship would face. Despite her best endeavors to social climb and present herself as untouchable, Lister's efforts to build a sense of legitimacy in her community as a business owner and political figure was at times undercut. What made Lister threatening to her community possibly related far more to her financial and political intrusion into male dominated spaces as an independent woman than it did her unconventional relationship; yet her differences were exploited by her rivals, who sought to attack any perceived weakness in order to get ahead of her. While a timider woman may have distanced from her relationship with Walker in order to maintain her own status, Lister instead brazenly

refused to distance from her partner, and used calculated social appearances between her and Walker in order to build more social respect for them as a pairing.

These appearances helped the couple to gain agency over their public perception, serving to help build the image of a pair that contributed to the prosperity of their community as well as consolidate their place within upper-class society. Most notably, the stone laying ceremony at the Halifax Casino would mark a major public moment for the two where they would find resounding success imbedding themselves in publicly as a couple. Related to Lister's expanding business empire, the casino was remodeled out of a hotel on Lister's property and opened to the general public. On the day of the ceremony (27 September 1835), the pair arranged to have Walker lay the first stone of the casino on behalf of Lister, which contained an inscription stating the stone as laid "by Miss Ann Walker the younger, (of Cliff Hill, Yorkshire) in the name and at the request of her particular friend Miss Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Yorkshire, owner of the property". As 'particular friends', Walker gave a speech stating "we hope and trust that the undertaking will prove an accommodation to the Inhabitants of this town and neighbourhood, in whose prosperity we feel interested", with Lister similarly expressing a desire that the casino "should be an accommodation to the public at large, but more especially to 'this my native town in whose prosperity I ever have felt, and ever shall feel, deeply 'interested' " (27 September 1835), with Lister recording the speeches as being well received and a great success.

The language of their speeches was carefully constructed with the aim of highlighting their charitable contribution to the Halifax community¹⁹. While Walker's speech uses 'we', Lister presents herself as an 'I', reflecting both Lister's status as property owner as well as the more dominant and 'husband-like' role she played in their relationship. Cassandra Ulph argues that

¹⁹ References to working on the speeches the day before, "*A- [Anne] getting off her speech for the first stone laying and I writing out mine*" (26 September 1835).

“Lister’s speech here is intended to cement her status as part of the civic elite” (474), inserting herself into the history of Halifax as well as demonstrating her wealth, philanthropy, and landowning prowess. Similarly, Walker’s speech constructed feminine virtues of humility, supporting Lister as a good gentry wife would have been expected regarding her husband’s business ventures. In permanently cementing a record of their relationship through a building dedicated to their community, Lister and Walker used the stone laying to build a social image of themselves as respectable and charitable, undercutting the power of political rivals’ future attacks against them. Similarly, it allowed the women to further consolidate their position as elite members of their community, benevolent and unthreatening despite their differences.

Once their partnership had been fully established, the process of legally combining their estates and socially defining their place within their community would continue throughout their relationship. Though their relationship often followed ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ norms socially, legally the couple were arguably more equal in their rights to each other’s inheritances and properties than would have been the case in a conventional marriage. They were each able to maintain their independent legal identities and ensure their estates would remain within their own families while still offering financial security to the other throughout their respective lifetimes. Additionally, the couple gained more flexibility in their relationship due to the lack of social scripts around same-sex relationships, allowing them to separate without the social stigma of divorce; although their joint wills still ensured that separation would involve some legal dispute. Though their unconventional relationship at times placed the couple in the sphere of social attacks—particularly at the hands of political or business rivals of the brash Lister, who were looking for any perceived weakness they could use to get ahead of her—these attacks never succeeding in socially ostracizing Lister and Walker. In aligning themselves publicly with the normative, traditional social scripts

for married couples and strategically making philanthropic appearances together as a couple, they constructed a sense of validity for themselves as unconventional but active members of the elite gentry circles they inhabited; as close as possible to equal as that of their heterosexual peers.

Chapter Three: Gender Roles, Domestic Performance, and the Representation of the Self

Having already covered the performance of gender roles in the courtship, legal structure, and social strategies present in Anne Lister and Ann Walker's relationship, I will now be moving to looking at the role of gender more broadly within Lister's relationship to masculine, femininity, and the more day-to-day manifestations of gender roles in their settled relationship. Primarily focusing on the early years of their 'marriage' from 1834-1837, this chapter looks at the public and private rituals and routines of their domestic life and the ways in which these routines served to both embody traditional gentry gender norms as well as reinforce the class position of the couple. I argue that since the assumption of these gendered roles was present in both public and private spheres during their relationship, it can be thought of as a manifestation of each woman's individual identity more so than a mechanism of external presentation. Approaching this subject from the vantage point of New Historicism, which "emphasize[s] the notion that historical values change over time" (Hickling, 56) and fundamentally "engage[s] in the emphasis on power relations operating within the society of its time" (Hickling, 54), I consider the ways in which their presentations of gender related to early nineteenth-century norms, as well as the question of whenever or not this use of male/female dynamics imparted any misogynistic bias onto their relationship. I will further my exploration of Ann Walker and Anne Lister's relationship by looking at the role of self-representation and self-construction in the process of diary writing, in which I argue Lister often constructs a dominant and masculine image of herself that contrasts with Walker's traditionally feminine persona. Finally, I consider the role of how Lister's conservatism and sexual/gender differences intersect, considering the modern idea of homonormativity in thinking of how class influences which minorities are able to access certain privileges of expression.

Lister was well aware of her differences as a masculine woman and saw her sexuality and gender expression as both unique to her, and as completely natural. By the time she had begun her relationship with Walker, these aspects of her identity had long been settled in her mind. In a conversation between the two women during their courtship, while Walker “*had doubted however [that] it was right to engage herself to me if this sort of thing was so bad between two men*”, Lister asserts that she “*answered this in my usual way: it was my natural & undeviating feeling*” (27 November 1832). While her partner at times struggled with feelings that their same-sex relationship could be acceptable, expressing the sentiment towards their intimate life “*not that she disliked it or that she did not like me, but she thought it wrong*” (7 June 1836), Lister never reflects any of these concerns about her own presentation of gender or sexuality. Jack Halberstam argues that Lister “feels no desire to change her own masculinity. She does wish (...) that she could access the wealth and social status necessary to ignore social slanders (69). Aspects of Lister’s ambitions reflect themselves in this long-held belief: that with the consolidation of enough rank and money, she will become untouchable towards attacks against her differences. Clark adds to this point, arguing that masculinity “connoted economic and political power” (72) and functioned as a means by which Lister gained access to not just male sexual privilege (as discussed in Chapter one), but also further financial and political independence as a woman whose expression of gender and sexuality did not fit into the expected nineteenth-century norms. By focusing on increasing her status, Lister was able to move further and further above social criticisms for her differences and doing so inherently required playing into the conservative social and class norms of her era.

In the chapter “The Androgyne, the Tribade, the Female Husband, and Other Pre-Twentieth Century Genders” within his 1998 book *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam considers the ways in which non-conforming gender positions like Anne Lister’s fit into the conservative boundaries

of nineteenth-century relationships and social norms. He argues that while there were many terms a masculine woman attracted to other women may have been called, “none of these labels quite adds up to, or feeds directly into, what we now understand as a lesbian sexual orientation” (50), a point that has been the subject of debate frequently among scholars of Lister. My omission of using this word to refer to either Lister or Walker comes as a result of aligning myself with the perspective of Halberstam as well as other scholars, such as Annamarie Jagose, who argue Lister can be read as a richly diverse sexual figure without attributing the use of the word lesbian (Jagose, 16). I feel that it is ultimately more productive to consider Anne Lister (as well as Ann Walker) through the lens of the period in which they inhabited, and as such feel that directly applying the terms ‘lesbian’ may impart certain biases or beliefs that would not have been accurate to the early nineteenth century. As a potential alternative term, Halberstam applies the term “female husband” in regards to Lister, arguing that her seduction of women took place “in the spaces left by men unwilling or unable to fulfill their wives” (68) and seeing Lister not as someone whose masculinity reflects a desire to be male, but instead someone who desired to create her own form of masculinity that was at times more powerful than male masculinity (72).

This approach towards Lister’s presentation of gender as more than just an imitation of heterosexual masculinity, but a unique expansion and replacement for it, allows for a deeper look at how her masculinity influenced her relationships, although Halberstam notably only ever focused on Lister’s earlier relationships with women and not her relationship with Ann Walker. While Lister was not literally replacing a male partner of Walkers, as she was yet unmarried when their courtship began, Lister did fulfill the role of a husband within Walker’s life by most gentry norms. She helped guide Walker’s financial decisions, writing “*till nine- and three-quarter writing for A- [Anne] copy of what she should write to her sister about the coal account – wrote for her*

this morning what she should write about Patterson's bond" (25 February 1835) and managed the affairs of both of their estates. Lister's assumptions of these tasks for Walker is never presented as a chore she is pained to do, but a natural responsibility that she assumes as the masculine (and more legally educated) partner. All of these factors may have influenced Walker's choice to live with Lister instead of pursuing marriage to a man, as Lister was well aware that "her property gave her enough masculinized power to arrange a favourable marriage with a young woman" (Euler, 295), with Lister promising her all of the advantages of a heterosexual marriage with relatively more equality in their relationship than she would have had with a man.

Of all traditional gentry norms entailed in their 'marriage', the division of gendered social spheres would often be one of them, although both women necessarily also inhabited female circles. Upper-class early nineteenth-century spaces were highly homo-social, and both women wrote frequently about their connections and visits with female family members, peers, and friends. However, while Walker stuck to these female spaces, Lister's social and business ambitions often lead her outside of them. A direct example of this follows the pair splitting during the day's activities, with "Adney being with Miss Dyson of Willow Hall who had just called on her" as Lister "went down the old bank to Mr. Parker's office – both he and Mr. Adam there the latter gave me his opinion of the Brow house and Knowle top coal lease" (19 February 1835). While Lister always reaffirmed she "preferred ladies to gentleman" (2 February 1819) in terms of her social company as well as lovers, she expresses no issues venturing into male dominated social zones. While she only engaged in spaces that did not bar women, she still was often the only woman within the room. As an example, she was the first female member to join the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society (Ulph, 464)²⁰, a group she "thought [about] repeatedly since

²⁰ She would also remain the only woman within the society within her lifetime.

hearing of it” and which she mused on “*building castles in the air about the part I myself may take in furthering it*”, thinking of what rules or contributions she could make towards the Society (27 February 1831). In Lister’s stated desire to further the advancement of the new Society, her involvement appears far less out of a desire to access male-centric spaces than it does a desire to make something of herself and to contribute actively and intellectually to the community in which she lived. Lister’s ambition led her to push beyond female social circles more so than any other stated factor, although she was perhaps emboldened to do so through her expression of masculinity.

Even when the women inhabited the same social spaces, their presentations often notably fell into feminine and masculine gender roles, especially regarding their religious practices. Euler notes that the weekly meetings between the two to read prayers and attend church as a pair “simultaneously reinforced both their respectability and their respective gender roles” (307). Socially presenting as a good Protestants was an expected performance tied to elite rank in the early nineteenth century and the regular social appearances of the two women together in religious spaces cemented their status as morally upstanding women, but also as a pair who performed the same social rituals as any other married couple of their class. The following of these religious rituals were not strictly limited to the public sphere, with some occasional mentions of the two joining together to pray (30 March 1834) or Lister’s reading of the Lord’s prayer to the highly religious Walker to comfort her (16 March 1836).

The women’s respective alignment towards differing gender norms was not a hidden dichotomy, with Lister having no qualms about presenting herself in a more masculine way in public spaces. At 26 she “entered upon [her] plan of only wearing black” (2 September 1817) which she would stick to throughout her life, and she rejected most of the trends of female fashion

in her time (Whitbread, 14). Clark argues that “Lister had the power of her class to help her surmount any social difficulties which a lesbian marriage might entail. Because of this, if she was hidden and reticent about her sexual practice, she was particularly bold about her relationship and its gendered aspects” (311). While she could not be open about the full extent of her intimate relationship with Walker, her rank certainly allowed her the ability to go outside of gender norms with limited threatening social pushback. Building on Halberstam’s conception of Lister’s masculinity as not intending to mimic men, young Lister writes of herself regarding a former lover as having manners that “*are certainly peculiar*” but “*not all masculine but rather softly gentlemanlie*” (4 October 1820), projecting her self-image as less as someone who aspired to fully embody masculinity and more as her own sort of ‘female gentleman’; rejecting the force of heterosexual masculinity with her own refined, upper class replacement.

While Gonda and Roulston correctly argue that Lister “effectively claim[ed] the rights of rank against the disabilities of gender” (“Born at Halifax”, 115) as is evident in her freedom of self-expression, there were ultimately still many social limitations placed on her as a woman that she could not avoid. Although she wore black and at times referenced experimenting with wearing “gentlemen’s braces” (2 April 1817), she would have never dared to wear pants in a social setting. Liddington approaches the limitations of gender in her third book on Lister *As Good as Marriage*, discussing a note that Lister received from the Halifax Philosophical Society in 1837 regarding a talk to be read in public in which she could not participate. Liddington states “The Listers were one of the few local families who could effortlessly trace their ancestry back to the seventeenth century. Yet Anne would not attend; and it was unthinkable for a woman, however well qualified, to read a paper in public” (37). Her diaries surrounding this invitation don’t reflect any frustration on her part at being unable to participate; although Lister is unafraid to engage in male spaces and

with male pursuits where she is able, she ultimately exists within the cultural norms she was raised in and does not seek to fully dismantle them. Cassandra Ulph points out that while most attention placed on Lister tends to focus on her sexuality, “it is important to remember that Lister was doubly marginalized, through her sex and her sexuality, and that the discourse of gender necessarily inflected those of politics, power, and social status” (471). No amount of boldness could fully free Lister from the fact that she existed as a woman with limited social and legal rights, including in her presentation of her gender.

As the majority of these norms related to how she was to present herself in public, Lister would have arguably been able to be a little more freely masculine in private, although in practice her domestic life with Walker walked between feminine and masculine habits. Many routines of the couple did not fall into strict gender norms, such as the two going on shopping trips together (3 February 1837), playing backgammon (10 January 1833), or Lister regularly setting “off with Adney [] to Cliff hill” (10 February 1835) to visit her family. Similarly, both women enjoyed reading, with Lister noting one day that “A~ [Anne] read to me (Russell’s Jerusalem, very interesting), & sat with me reading or seeing the whole morning” (17 April 1837). However, their domestic routines also at times found themselves lying along the same gendered lines that they occupied in public. In practice, this looked like Lister reading the newspaper during the morning, while Walker practiced her French²¹, or Lister spending hours away from home while on business affairs that Walker normally did not get involved in. Similarly, while Ann Walker engaged with all of the pastimes expected of women of her class, Lister did not. Euler notes this distinction, stating that while “Walker often drew and knitted, Lister did not, despite it being a skill a gentlewoman was supposed to possess” (313, although Lister encouraged Walker “*to take up her*

²¹ Examples of Walker practicing French in the mornings (6 June 1836) and Lister reading the newspaper (8 January 1835, 2 March 1837) .

French and sketching again” (29 September 1832) early in their relationship. If she encouraged her partner to engage with traditional feminine pastimes, Lister herself certainly deviated from them. Although the restrictions of a misogynistic society imparted onto both of them, the diaries indicate an attempt to recreate many gendered practices of traditional marriages, which naturally imparted more authority in the relationship onto Lister. As the one responsible for their estates, lawyers, as well as managing her own businesses, Lister stands out the dominant figure in their pairing, despite Walker having her own highly active life of (more femininely aligned) charity work and political campaigning

With Walker struggling with various mental health issues throughout their partnership, Lister often took care of Walker, reflecting a caring side of their domestic relationship outside of Lister’s dominant personality. When Walker suffered from indigestion, Lister “carried her to bed - gave her a glass of hot very weak Madeira & water, & got her feet into warm water”, ensuring she was “nicely asleep” afterward (19 April 1837), or when Walker’s depression caused her to lose her desire for food, Lister persuaded her to eat and did her best to cheer her up (10 March 1836). Walker also regularly “*complained of her back*” (28 October 1834) which Lister regularly attended to through “*rubbing her back with spirit of wine and camphor for quarter hour*” (25 November 1834) or with brandy (16 November 1834). Although Walker was at times victim to a misogynistic disregard towards her mental health by doctors or subject to allegations of insanity, Lister defended her partner and argued that “[Walker] had simply been low and nervous but never insane” (26 April 1836). Although Lister writes negatively of her relationship at times, her diaries also reflect an effort to care for her partner, such as any other affectionate married couple may have. These moments where Lister acts as a caretaker and defender of Walker also arguably reflect Lister’s role as the ‘husband’ in their relationship, but in a way rather more “*softly gentlemanlie*”

than aggressively masculine, reflecting a relationship that although imperfect was maintained through more than pure economic necessity.

With these dynamics of gender established, it is worth asking to what extent patriarchal power imbalances that were present in heterosexual marriages also presented themselves in their same-sex relationship. While both women had the equal right to inherit each other's estate after death and Lister fought for Walker to be considered her equal in society, traditional gentry relationships were full of misogyny. Some researchers have argued Lister as enforcing misogynistic ideals in her relationships with other women, with Euler arguing that "Lister devalued women because she aligned her identity with masculinity, and the masculinity of this time and class was dependent for its very existence upon a material and discursive devaluation of women" (393), and Chris Roulston noting how Lister uses her extensive knowledge of the classics as a way of asserting her intellectual superiority over other women (126). Lister's courtship with Walker reflected this notion, particularly in her devaluing of her partner for her perceived lack of sexual purity, despite not holding those moral standards for herself. She also at times devalues other women's intelligence, including Walker, who Lister during an argument once noted as "*Poor soul — her mind is not very large*" (27 May 1836). In order to propel herself socially and access as much of gentry male privilege as her masculinity could allow her, it is possible (as Euler argued) she necessarily built her identity on the devaluation of other women. Lister often reflects herself as fully in control of her emotions, such as noting "*I say little but am perfectly civil – take no particular notice of A-[Anne]*" (13 June 1837) during a fight, contrasting with her representation of Walker as emotional, who she writes as having such "*a temper*" (7 June 1837). In the chapter "Nature was in an Odd Freak When She Made Me" by Roulston and Gonda, they argue that "she saw herself as different from them [other women], as masculine and usually not wanting to be touched, but also as similar,

in sharing the same anatomy” (70). While they apply this sentiment primarily to Lister’s sexual experiences with women, it can also arguably apply to her social relationships, and her partnership with Walker. She saw them as sharing the same anatomy, but as fundamentally different in some regards. Lister’s alignment with nineteenth-century masculinity inevitably involved viewing other, particularly more feminine, women as in some respects ‘lesser’ than herself. Although she cared for Walker, their relationship at times reflects an imbalanced dichotomy where Lister devalues Walker in ways holding true to masculine-centric ideals of power prevalent in their culture.

While her commitment to upholding traditional class standards ultimately involved upholding traditional gender dynamics, Lister was however in favor of the expansion of rights for women in some specific areas—or at the very least, ones that benefited her. She advocated for women to be included in the Literary and Philosophical Society at Halifax and allowed to act as voting members, arguing “why should the latter [voting rights] be withheld from any person of sufficient property (interest in the state) and education to be fairly presumed to know how to make good use of them?” (27 February 1831). This passage reflects that what is most important to Lister is not necessarily gender, but rank, the ownership of property, and an elite education; the latter of which were typically reserved for men in her society, but which could be accessed by some privileged and determined women (like her). This suggests that if Lister at times degrades other women, this may in part come out of an association between rank, power and masculinity in which masculinity entitles one to respect, but wherein she does not assume masculinity as synonymous with maleness. Lister elaborates further regarding her thoughts on the Literary and Philosophical Society by reflecting that “*All this leads to my old thought and wish for ladies under certain restrictions to be restored to certain political rights*” (27 February 1831). These long-held beliefs reflect that Lister does not see women as inferior or less deserving of rights than men, but rather

perhaps that she feels her elite education (and within it, masculinity) entitles her to status in a way it does not for women who align themselves with traditional domestic femininity.

In further analyzing the dynamics present in Lister and Walker's relationship, it is pertinent to discuss that we perceive their relationship through the self-constructed and subjective lens of diary writing. Caroline Baylis-Green argues that "we cannot, of course, know the level of censorship that Lister imposed upon herself and her writing, and the extent to which topics and extremities of feeling were omitted or considered to be off-limits" (105). This fact of course remains true for what diaries of Walker we have access to as well. While there do exist some other accounts of their relationship from contemporaries, the vast majority of what we know about Lister and Walker's relationship comes from Lister's diaries, in which she often "represents herself in swaggering mode as pro-active, manipulative, mercenary and sexually predatory" (Rowanchild, 244). In comparison, while Walker's diaries refer affectionately to Lister as "dearest"²², she otherwise writes about their relationship in a far more matter-of-fact way. A diary entry of Walker's writes how "dearest came for me & we walked together in Trough o bolland wood" (on their way to a funeral), additionally mentioning briefly what Lister was reading, writing, or having tailored for her throughout the day (Journal of Ann Walker, 29 January 1835). Although this provides great insight towards what their domestic life looked like, as well as the fact Walker clearly cared about and paid attention to the ongoings of her partner, it gives no explicit depictions of the more intimate aspects of their relationship, nor does it reflect the same level of emotional intensity often felt in Lister's diaries. Comparatively, Lister's diary entry for the same day includes nearly quadruple the number of words as Walker's²³, beginning with her usual "*no kiss*" and

²² The term 'dearest' is used consistently throughout Ann Walker's diaries to refer to Lister. Some examples include references on 6 June 1834, 20 November 1834, and 29 January 1835.

²³ Lister's entry containing 823 words vs. Walker's containing 219.

detailing future plans for expansion of Shibden, conversations with business associates, while also mentioning her day with Walker (29 January 1835). In considering another cross-comparison of diary entries (24 August 1834), Caroline Baylis-Green argues:

The omission of sexual details from Walker's diary entries provides an intriguing contrast to Lister's focus on sexual satisfaction and a poignant commentary on the differences between the two women's approaches to recording their activities and their sense of identity. In Walker's diary, the notion of platonic, romantic friendship is inscribed by the omission of any sexual reference, while Lister's diary persona of the same period seems increasingly frustrated (96).

While Lister's diaries always include an encoded line indicating an increasingly unhappy sexual life, Walker's diaries completely omit references to the sexual aspect of their relationship. As Baylis-Green points out, Walker's self-representation ascribes to the ideal of platonic romantic friendship, whereas Lister's strongly discusses and embodies sexuality; in doing so also touching upon the inadequacies of their relationship in a way that Walker cannot. Whenever or not Walker feels the same degree of frustration is represented entirely through Lister's perception. Although the construction of their relationship around economic strategy and intimate desire meant it certainly did not align with notions of a platonic romantic friendship, Walker perhaps negotiated her sense of guilt surrounding her relationship by placing her self-representation within this category. Additionally, while Lister invented a code to conceal the most intimate details of their relationship in her diaries, Walker did not— the lack of intimate sexual details in her diaries therefore also a form of protectionism against anyone who may read her writing.

The diary's subjective representation of identity presents both in Walker's self-censorship of the more intimate details of their relationship as well as Lister's continuously constructed persona of herself as socially elite and secure in her identity. Laurie Shannon argues "that authorising one's own life – necessarily, paradoxically – entails queer traditionality" (33), a notion

evident in considering Lister's conservatism and allegiance to class values despite her sexual differences. Susan Lanser's 2010 essay "Tory Lesbians" approached this topic under the idea of "compensatory conservatism", arguing that Lister's assertion of conservatism was a mechanism in which she negotiated the conflict between her upper-class social status and her desire for women (176-7). Lanser complicated this idea further in her 2023 essay on Anne Lister's politics, considering whether or not her conservative identity was in fact a part of her "self-fashioning" as a lesbian, rather than a form of self-protectionism (114). Considering these perspectives, I argue that Lister's allegiance to conservative tradition helped enable her freedom in expressing her non-normative identity, but that her conservatism did not result solely from her differences. Rather, I perceive Lister's conservatism as relating to her self-fashioning of herself as socially elite, in which Lister's personification of gentry masculinity allowed her to internally reconcile her sexuality as fitting into these conservative standards that she lived by.

Class has always helped to allocate access to freedom of expression within marginalized communities. It was Lister and Walker's continuous assertion and consolidation of their rank that allowed them the freedom to live outside the norms for female relationships within the early nineteenth century. Halberstam expands on this point, stating that while "so many working-class masculine women would have had to go undercover and pass as men. Anne, in a sense, can live out the contradiction of female masculinity because she is upper-class" (69). Liddington also argues that the couple was benefited by their political activity, with the necessity for political unity between the Tories against the Whigs meaning that those who may have had more of an issue with Lister's unconventionality in private had to ally with her in public (*Female Fortune*, 248). This is not to undermine the courage and determination it took to choose to defy social and sexual expectations, especially when considering the very real social attacks that Lister and Walker faced

against their identities. Instead, it acknowledges the ways in which class status framed the structure of their relationship as well as each woman's expression of gender, and how it allowed them to consolidate rank within the existing norms of their period. In Sara Lennox's essay on aligning Feminism with New Historicism, she argues that by understanding "texts through their contexts, and contexts through their texts, we become a little more able to hear women who are not like ourselves speak, to recognize women's differences and their infinite variety" (169). In applying this idea to the diaries of Anne Lister and Ann Walker, our understanding of their relationship must be based in the historical context of early nineteenth-century gentry norms, and the viewing of them as figures who both helped to define and were defined by the period in which they lived. Rather than seeing Lister or Walker as radically transformative figures or as ahead of the time in which they lived, I stress the importance of understanding their relationship as necessarily constructed by the norms under which they lived and existing in order to consolidate their social position within society, while still expanding possibilities for female same-sex relationships in their era in doing so.

There will always be imperfections when it comes to analyzing a relationship nearly two centuries later through the lens of its respective period while seeking to avoid falsely applying the beliefs and standards of one's own period. Instead of engaging in the impossible task of fully eliminating this tendency, I instead will take the approach of directly considering certain ways in which my own era has structured my understanding of Lister and Walker's relationship, while maintaining the separation between our two periods as distinct. Within my scholarly approach towards Lister, this has related significantly to Lisa Duggan's 2002 essay on the concept of "The New Homonormativity" as applied to the twenty-first-century idea of neoliberalism. Homonormativity refers to the idea of a modern and increasingly prevalent gay culture that "does

not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (Duggan, 179). This theory offers the idea of a homosexual culture that does not challenge structural inequalities or demand unilateral acceptance, but that instead seeks to conform as much as possible to the modern cultural ideals of the time, and to embody heterosexual values such as domesticity and the assumption of traditional gender roles. As homonormativity also finds itself highly based in consumerism, late-twentieth-century neoliberal politics, and relies upon a post-stonewall conception of what it means to be publicly ‘gay’, it would be historically inaccurate for a number of reasons to refer to Lister and Walker’s relationship as homonormative. Despite this, aspects of homonormativity highlight how the dynamics of power in their nineteenth-century relationship have continued to reflect in the presentations of same-sex relationships in our modern era, wherein those benefited most are those who are willing to reinforce traditional institutions of power rather than align themselves with members of their own community. Homonormativity is often seen as ‘leaving people behind’; that is, disregarding queer people who are socially disadvantaged as a result of factors such as race or class, and exclusively benefiting the lifestyles of white, middle- to upper-class queer people who are willing to conform. Although stemming from a radically different political discourse, the theory’s core reflects a pattern that has always been prevalent within same-sex relationships—that even before terminology existed to refer to people with expansive gender or sexual identities, there have always been certain structures (class, and a willingness to uphold tradition) that has allowed some people to pursue socially unconventional relationships more freely than others.

As such, my aim in introducing this critical theory is not to argue that homonormativity can be applied to the nineteenth century or disregard the complex political and social developments that have changed how we view same-sex relationships in our current era. Instead, I intend to look

at how the contemporary political sphere in 2026 has influenced my understanding of Lister and Walker's relationship with the 1830s and trace the mechanisms of power that allowed Lister and Walker's relationship to exist as relatively well as it did in their period. As I have argued, I posit that this was based on the privileges offered by Lister and Walker's class status, and their commitment to upholding most gentry social scripts in their community. While a clandestine relationship that could not exist beyond a semi-open secret, nor be accepted as a legitimate marriage, many of the factors that benefited Lister and Walker's ability to live as if a married couple then are the same that have allowed some same-sex couples today to be increasing increasing acceptance into the status-quo now, demonstrating a historically fluid occurrence in which access to free expression of identity is enabled by a complex web of class and privilege only offered to some, and not to others.

The active construction of identity involved in the process of diary writing and the formation of a partnership shaped the way Lister and Walker's relationship is able to be understood; particularly in the realm of gender, and the adherence or deviation towards gender roles. Although both members of the relationship were bound by the same limited rights provided to women, both their public and private lives mirrored many of the same divisions of responsibility and routines as that of heterosexual couples. Walker occupied an unambiguously feminine role while Lister typically occupied a masculine one, although she by necessity often walked between masculinity and femininity in her presentation. Rank gave Lister the ability to embrace her own form of masculinity, her class status giving her the freedom to be bold about the gendered dynamics of her relationship, even if not the full intimate extent it contained. Rowanchild argues that "Lister's writings demonstrate how important it was for her to establish a narrative that encompassed the self in relation to society, (...) supporting their values, observing their

conventions, even while seeking subtly to redefine them” (250). This fact is evident in the diaries of both Lister and Walker, their process of writing reflecting their effort to construct gendered images of themselves that aligned with their elite social status. While an extraordinary example of a same-sex relationship within the Romantic period, it is important to recognize that the remarkable nature of this relationship was structured, enabled, and only possible as a result of women’s upper-class identities. The alignment to traditional gender norms within Lister and Walker’s relationship imparted a dynamic of power where masculinity was privileged over femininity, ultimately reinforcing standards that aligned with conventional gentry relationships.

Conclusion:

Anne Lister has become an increasingly popular figure of study²⁴ with Ann Walker similarly garnering increased academic interest (Oliveira 2022, Halford 2020), although the lack of available resources on Walker continues to limit study on her as an individual separate from her partner. Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to add to this expanding body of research surrounding the women's partnership. My research question asked what influence the role of rank, nineteenth-century social scripts, and gender roles imparted onto the construction of their non-normative partnership. I have taken the approach of looking at Lister and Walker's relationship through the lens of class status and my thesis statement argued that their relationship was both remarkable and ordinary, their conformance to many nineteenth-century gentry social scripts enabling them to consolidate their class identities despite existing outside dominant norms of gender and sexuality. My approach has been structured through the lens of New Historicism in considering Anne Lister and Ann Walker as products and reflections of their time rather than individuals who defied it, as well as acknowledging the limitations in doing so while coming from an era with different conceptions of what it means to be 'queer' or sexually different.

I began this dissertation by considering the role of courtship and seduction, and the ways in which Lister and Walker's relationship fit into traditional gentry relationship structures which focused on establishing matches based on social and financial strategy as much (or more) as love. I looked at their relationship as a 'marriage of convenience', but not one devoid of affection, and considered the role of seduction in Lister's perusal of Walker and her fortune. In beginning to consider the role of gender, I analyzed the ways in which Lister and Walker's presentation of

²⁴ General awareness of Lister by the public notably increased after the release of the 2019-2022 HBO Television show based on her diaries, *Gentleman Jack*, although this may not be the primary reason for the rise in academic interest in Anne Lister.

masculine and feminine norms respectively influenced their dynamic during their courtship, arguing their early relationship as one filled with desire, occasionally volatile emotions, and ultimately functioning to exchange rank for wealth in a family ordinary nineteenth-century fashion. I continued my analysis in my second chapter, where I looked at how a ‘marriage’ that would not have been recognized as legally valid managed to secure legal protections against women’s limited property rights through the construction of joint wills. This thread was continued in considering the role of social validity, or how Lister and Walker reaffirmed positions as an influential, elite partnership within their community, despite social attacks by political rivals seeking to undermine their perceived weaknesses. I argued that their success in remaining within the socially dominant groups in Halifax relied on factors such as political Tory alliances and strategic philanthropy, and that presenting themselves as elite ladies above the lower classes enabled them to access further freedoms within their non-normative relationship. Finally, I looked at their relationship under the role of gender and Lister’s relationship to her masculinity and considered to what extent their day-to-day life enforced dominant gentry gender norms in both their public facing and private life. I considered how Lister’s conservatism related to her expression of non-normative identity and looked at the role of diary writing by both Lister and Walker under the perspective of self-construction and how the versions of themselves they constructed in their diaries reflected their respective gendered positions in their relationship. I discussed how I have applied New Historicism into my understanding of their relationship and looked at the idea of homonormativity in thinking of how our modern era has continued to enable a homosexual subculture that seeks to reinforce dominant class norms in order to access a position of relative social privilege. In the end, I argued that the gendered aspects of Lister and Walker’s relationship imparted occasionally uneven

dynamics of power but aligned with the norms and traditions for upper-class relationships in a way that served to reinforce their class identities.

There continues to be a considerable amount of research yet to do on Anne Lister and Ann Walker's relationship. There has been relatively little academic research on the final years of their relationship from 1838-1840 as compared to research on their courtship or Lister's earlier life, and further research on this period would contribute to our understanding of their often-volatile relationship. Research into Ann Walker outside of Lister remains an archival challenge, but an increasingly feasible one with the recovery of her diaries in 2020. Were I to continue with this branch of research, I would be interested in looking at the written representation of the working class in both Lister and Walker's diaries throughout the entirety of their domestic life together. This would include their relationships to their tenants as landowners, as well as Lister's relationship with those she hired to help with renovations to Shibden Hall or those who worked for her in her coal mills or other business ventures. This further research would also include significant inquiry into both women's relationship to their servants—how each of their respective diaries mention them, when they mention them (and when they don't), and how the representations of the working class in the women's day to day life reflects or helps to construct their written constructions of identity. Catherine Euler's PhD dissertation has a section focused on Lister's relationship to her servants and tenants (211-27) and does an excellent job analyzing the hierarchical relationships present within them, but only briefly mentions servants or tenants in relation to Walker and doesn't look at Lister's diary entries past 1827, leaving a wealth of space for more developed and extensive research in this area.

Anne Lister and Ann Walker's relationship enabled them to access many of the same social privileges as conventional married couples in their time, a remarkable achievement that should not

be understated in considering that they were two single, legally unmarried women living in a highly gender-traditionalist society. However, their relationship was also in many ways incredibly typical. From the beginning of their courtship until their religious sealing of their union and subsequent domestic life together, both women consistently upheld the social norms and traditions of their time, aligning their identities with practices of the upper-class society in which they inhabited. Though requiring strategy, collaboration, and bravery on their parts, the success of their same-sex relationship was also highly dependent on the privileges that they received as members of the gentry. Lister and Walker chose to pursue a same-sex partnership that in many ways existed as if any other marriage, enabling both women to consolidate their upper-class identities while rejecting the traditional expectations of heterosexual marriage in a way that was both extraordinary and fully aligned with the normative traditions of their times.

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