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Gonda, Caroline, and Chris Roulston (eds.). *Decoding Anne Lister: From the Archives to 'Gentleman Jack'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 302pp.

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<1>In Caroline Gonda and Chris Roulston's collection of essays, *Decoding Anne Lister: From the Archives to 'Gentleman Jack'*, the editors bring scholars who worked to establish the field of Anne Lister studies together with new voices and perspectives to readdress previous works and propose exciting, original directions for future analysis. Invigorated by the significantly increased access to Lister's writings through the West Yorkshire Archive Service Transcription Project and the dedication of independent researchers, the collection seeks to reflect the complexity and contradictions of Lister, and the interdisciplinary appeal of her journals' contents.

<2>In her foreword for the book, Emma Donoghue astutely describes the collection of essays as 'long-overdue' (xv), and as the first of its kind, *Decoding Anne Lister* provides the foundations for critical discussion of Anne Lister's life and writings. Centring the diarist in its discourse, the collection builds upon previous works which have tended to utilise Lister as a case-study for a larger conversation. Here, she is the primary source from which the contributors construct their analyses, and a consequential development between this and previous work on Lister is the ability for researchers to delve further into her journals and papers through their digitisation.

<3>Methodologies range from Stephen Turton's meticulous discourse and linguistic analysis of Lister's erotic dictionary to Susan Lanser's examination of three forms of politics to better articulate Lister's own, and Angela Clare's interrogation of Shibden Hall's history to interpret Lister's impact and vice versa. In collating these

seemingly disparate foci, Gonda and Roulston evidence the utility of Lister's surviving archive across disciplines. Each chapter presents a distinct facet of Lister's life producing a well-rounded critical reader of the diarist, and the scope of the collection effectively reflects Lister's reputation as a dedicated polymath.

<4>Introducing the volume, Chris Roulston reflects on Lister's relevance to academic study and the disruption her journals cause to established distinctions between the historiographic approaches to queer/lesbian histories and trans/non-binary histories. The reflexivity of the editors' inspection of Lister's gendered and sexual expressions is refreshing. Consequently, this aligns the collection with other salient publications which discuss conceptions of sexuality and gender in the 19th century, including *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* by C. Riley Snorton (2017) and Jen Manion's *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020).

<5>Structured into five parts, the collection navigates its titular trajectory by framing the essays through conversations with key figures in the dissemination of Lister's life. Beginning in the archives, Caroline Gonda interviews Helena Whitbread, the first transcriber of Lister to publish the coded parts of her journals and explains the process of drawing Lister out of the obscurity her code ensured in her lifetime. To conclude, Emma Donoghue converses with Sally Wainwright, who funded the digitisation of Lister's journals, and who raised Lister's profile internationally through the television adaptation of her life, *Gentleman Jack* (BBC and HBO, 2019-2022). In this, they navigate the route from journal page to shooting script and the 'virtuous feedback loop' between the adaptation and the archive (268). What features between these two discussions are eleven intriguing examinations.

<6>Chapters 2 and 3 by Laurie Shannon and Anna Clark consider Lister's self-taught knowledge of the natural world. Whilst Shannon convincingly correlates Lister's 'queerly traditional' (30) method of interpreting natural history and theology to her 'oddity' with the queer temporalities of both her and 'we moderns' (44), Clark considers Lister's 'queer reading' (50) to locate the clitoris. Locating Lister in the context of contemporary medical thought and available erotic literature (or certainly erotic to Lister), Clark examines Lister's linguistic and literal search for the sexual organ, and questions 'how it took so long for her, a well-educated and sexually experienced woman, to figure it out.' (63).

<7>Stephen Turton and Caro Baylis-Green discuss the language and form of Lister's journals whilst the following section, 'Born at Halifax' engages with Lister's home, her politics and association with the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society. The

chapters by Kirsty McHugh and Angela Stiedele focus on Lister as a travel writer and adventurer, and expand on points raised in their previous works – McHugh on the gendering of home tour travel behaviours (of which Lister inconsistently conformed to and negated), and Stiedele, Lister’s final journey to Kutaisi with Ann Walker.

<8>Caroline Gonda and Chris Roulston conclude the essays in the volume with individual chapters regarding Lister’s enduring legacy and the figure she cuts in popular culture today. Gonda expands upon existing conversations regarding the complexity of identity history and the politics of defining Anne Lister in the present. Drawing from Joyce (2019) and Heyam (2022), she contemplates the ‘necessary fictions’ (233) identity categories supply and the fictional interpretations which inform these categorisations for communities. Roulston however questions ‘what gains and losses are involved in terms of our relationship to the queer past by translating the Lister archive into the sphere of popular culture.’ (240). In this, she compares previous critical work on *Gentleman Jack*, genre and affect to the testimonies of Janet Lea’s interviewees in *The Gentleman Jack Effect* (2021) and proffers that Wainwright’s Lister is ‘graspable only through a kind of ‘melancholic excess’ (258) on the part of the engaged viewer. Though she concludes by imagining ‘a more elastic and capacious relationship between...queer pasts and the queer presents’ (Ibid.), Roulston, and indeed Gonda both finish on unspoken questions of the future. In each of their chapters, binary oppositions between fact and fiction, history and the present, gender and sexuality are disrupted and persuasively reinterpreted, and the possibilities of future Anne Lister research are left reassuringly broad.

<9>Both academic and public interest in Lister exploded in 2019 with the premiere of Wainwright’s *Gentleman Jack* and there is an evident awareness of the cross-over appeal the collection would have within its pages. Subsequently, this is not solely a textbook for use in the classroom or for the confines of the ivory tower of academia, but rather any reader with an interest in Lister or the conversations ignited by discussions of her life and writings. This is reflected in the consistent utilisation and citation of independent research by the collections’ contributors, and the online edition has recently become openly accessible through the Flip It Open programme at Cambridge University Press. In its accessibility, the volume does not diminish in scholarly vigour but additionally extends its reach to a broader readership through its engagement with Whitbread and Wainwright, both of whom have produced recognisable works which introduced many to Lister in the first place. Indeed, as Roulston remarks, ‘many fans will have experienced the adaptation [*Gentleman Jack*] as *the original*’ (1) (244).

<10>Each rigorously researched chapter in this collection could be comfortably expanded into individual monographs, but the editors have achieved a cohesive body of work which enriches existing debates and is a dynamic, erudite contribution to Anne Lister studies. In her chapter, Laurie Shannon remarks that Lister's journals can be approached through any discipline, and that in fact 'it will take all of them' to fully comprehend the diarist (35). *Decoding Anne Lister* not only makes visible the relevance of Lister studies both within and beyond literary studies, but also produces the solid foundation which provokes the future interdisciplinary research required to meaningfully understand Miss Anne Lister.

Notes

(1)Original emphasis.(^)