QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES, CLOSETING AND NON-NORMATIVE DESIRE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S POETRY AND LIFE WRITING

CAROLINE BAYLIS-GREEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

Manchester Metropolitan University

December 2015

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the wonderful folk of the Granite City and Aberdeenshire. As Dorothy clicking her ruby baffies might have said, 'Aire nae placie like hame!'

Table of Contents

4

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to elucidate previously obscured aspects of nineteenth-century women's writing, through the development of original approaches to the reading of gender ambiguity, queer subjectivities and non-normative desire. It challenges the removal of the closet from feminist, historicist scholarship and constructions of female sexuality based on an adherence to romantic friendship and lesbian continuum models. This research proposes original work, which breaks the links between Michel Foucault's dating of the disciplinary coding of homosexuality and the assumed relationship with the closet. New readings are proposed which acknowledge, define and foreground multi-functional closets, inside and outside of texts. In refusing this removal this study also aims to open up a space for the consideration of closets as protective and supportive spaces as well as symptoms of oppression. Underexplored links between literary form, the repelling of social restriction and the relationship between literary conventions and non-binary positions are also highlighted to emphasise the radical potential of performative subjects in women's writing. This project proposes the recovery of queer selves and subjective forms of identification in the work of seven/eight women writers Anne Lister, Emily Brontë, Anne Brontë, Christina Rossetti, Adelaide Anne Procter, Michael Field and Amy Levy, spanning the long nineteenth century. It also offers new approaches by combining cross-genre analysis of poetry and life writing. Using activist language largely in advance of academic discourse, it asks questions about the changing significance of queerness as language and metaphor. This thesis uses diverse social, religious and literary bodies to illustrate the strength of same-sex communities and their role in providing safe spaces for queer, desiring interactions in the nineteenth century.

Introduction

Queerness, Closeting and the Performative Subject

> But sometimes the very term that would annihilate us becomes the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political signification. I think we have seen this in the astounding transvaluation undergone by 'queer.'[1]

Queer activism and queer theory have had a major impact on the field of literary and cultural studies in the last thirty years and on the social and political uses of 'queer' as Judith Butler suggests. While the applications of queer are myriad and diverse, in the context of this thesis 'queer' is defined as odd, singular, perverse, peculiar, awkward, split, deviant, both avowed and disavowed, subject to overcompensation and accompanied by ambiguous gender and desire. Queer reading, or queering, is often used in conjunction with psychoanalytic, materialist, feminist and increasingly post-colonial readings of literary texts and narratives in a contemporary context. The links between nineteenth-century theories and ideologies of gender and sexuality and early queer theory are obvious and explicit, most notably articulated in the work of Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and their responses to the development of homosexual identity. Their analyses of the history of sexuality and the cultural construction of homosexuality arguably form the cornerstones of contemporary queer theory. Foucault states in Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*:

> This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of *perversions* and a *new specification of individuals*. […] The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history[…][2]

---

[1] Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer' in Donald E.Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter, eds., *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 18-31 (p.23).
[2] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *Volume 1: An Introduction,* 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1998) p.42.

Foucault argues that the history of sexuality is inevitably bound up with, and controlled by, evolving discourses of power in the nineteenth century. What is less clear, in Foucault's analysis is the relationship between sexuality, literary discourse and the functions of power. Literary discourse is rarely mentioned in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* although it features significantly in other works. This is, perhaps, one of the main reasons that theories and discourses of non-normative desire have found a home within literary studies. This project explores the production of queerness in nineteenth-century women's writing, combining an analysis of resistance within and without closeted spaces, and the negotiation of voluntary and involuntary labelling or stigmata. In doing so, it breaks the link between Foucault's analysis of identity construction in the nineteenth century, (into heterosexual and homosexual) and the existence of coding and closeting. It argues that the closet within literature pre-dates the 1870 paradigm and that it exists independently, and prior to, identity politics. Indeed, there are numerous examples of how the closet and closeting actually function away from strict identity links in contemporary twenty-first century discourse, to the point where the term 'outing' has been applied to all sorts of acts, dispositions and guilty pleasures. The retention of embarrassment and shame at lower levels operates even outside the field of sexual identity.

The bulk of theoretical texts exploring literary closets start from the 1870 date set by Foucault and taken from Westphal:

> We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized - Westphal's famous article of 1870 on 'contrary sexual sensations' can stand as its date of birth. — less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of

sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself.[3]

Recent scholarship has started to challenge the links between identity fixing and closeting. Dominic Janes' study *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain,* investigates the ways in which closeting existed within male communities in an earlier eighteenth century context.   Janes writes: 'I want to explore the issue of the closet and its visibility not a merely as a visual metaphor within textual culture, but also as an aspect of visual culture, and of cultural history in general.'[4] Queer historians like David Halperin have also argued that Foucault's paradigm does not, and should not, inhibit discussion about earlier forms of recognition:

> Nothing Foucault says about the differences between those two historically distant, and operationally distinct, discursive strategies for regulating and delegitimating forms of male same-sex sexual contacts prohibits us from inquiring into the connections that pre-modern people may have made between specific sexual acts and the particular ethos, or sexual style, or sexual subjectivity, of those who performed them.[5]

The exclusion of female sexuality apart, Halperin's stance is one which this thesis supports and develops alongside theories of textual and social closeting and explorations of queer sexual subjectivity in chosen texts and contexts. This position is supported by an analysis of how forms of subjectivity are constructed away from, and outside of, sexological taxonomy and classification.

Sedgwick's work builds on Foucault's, most obviously in *Epistemology of the Closet*, which sets out to deconstruct 'assumptions and conclusions from a long-term

---

[3] Ibid.
[4] Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015), pp.12-13.
[5] David. M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) p.32.

project of anti-homophobic analysis.'[6] Curiously, one of the most interesting things about the study is the way in which the term closet is pervasive but elusive, everywhere and nowhere. Sedgwick famously includes a whole page of historical dictionary definitions of the word closet, but pointedly and appropriately, those which relate to sexuality are notable by their absence. Intriguingly, the word 'closet' does exist explicitly in works by a small number of nineteenth-century artists and writers, as a potential label for seclusion, interiority and secrecy. Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris produced works entitled 'The Blue Closet' (a painting and a poem respectively) which explore the term in peculiar or 'queer' ways.[7] It is not obvious in either work why the word closet is chosen as a potential label for restriction.   The poem has been read as a text that reinscribes heteronormative values because of its construction of mournful, barren, passive women awaiting the return of a medieval hero. It is also a work which plays with notions of public and private, as Valerie Hsiung notes: 'In his poem ''The Blue Closet,'' William Morris complexly blends dialogue with separate narrative-songs to confront the divides between interior worlds and exterior worlds.'[8]   However, the potential resonances of this same-sex, enclosed poetic space and the use of a subversive all-female chorus have largely been overlooked:

> They float on in a happy stream;
> Float from the gold strings, float from the keys,
> Float from the open'd lips of Louise:
> But, alas! the sea salt oozes through

---

[6] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.22.
[7] William Morris, 'The Blue Closet', within Edmund Clarence Stedman, eds., *A Victorian Anthology*, <http://www.bartleby.com/246/743.html>[accessed 30 November 2015]. Dante Gabriel, Rossetti, (1857) *The Blue Closet,* [watercolour] Tate (Britain) Gallery, London via http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/N/N03/N03057_10.jpg.
[8] Valerie Hsiung, 'Dramatization within Symbolic Soundscapes: William Morris' 'The Blue Closet' in *English and History of Art*, 151, 2008, (Brown University) via <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/morris/hsiung.html>[accessed 3 December 2015].

The chinks of the tiles of the Closet Blue; (29-33) [9]

This floating replicates a sensation of euphoria, protection and safety and ironically this stanza suggests that the public, masculine world of the sea (in an interesting inversion of gendered characteristics, water usually assumed to be female or feminine), is corrosive and destructive to female creativity, lyricism and vibration.   This flipping between superficial heteronormative tropes and subversive, subtextual, closeted tropes is also a pronounced feature of Christina Rossetti's oeuvre although the word closet is never used explicitly. The term also appears in the work of another nineteenth-century poet, Emily Dickinson. Dickinson uses the term closet in two of her poems:

> They shut me up in Prose –
> As when a little Girl
> They put me in the Closet –
> Because they liked me still (1-4) (445) 1862

And 'That sacred Closet when you sweep - /Entitled 'Memory' (1-2) (1385) 1875.[10]

In *Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick asserts the potential risks present in studies that focus on the robust nature of social closets which this thesis addresses directly:

> There are risks in making in making salient the continuity and centrality of the closet, in a historical narrative that does have as a fulcrum a saving vision – whether located in past of future – of its apocalyptic rupture. A meditation that lacks that particular utopian organization will risk glamorizing the closet itself, if only by default; will risk presenting as inevitable or somehow valuable its exactions, its deformations, its disempowerment and sheer pain.[11]

---

[9] Rosie Miles, conference paper, 'Was William Morris Queer? Or, What's in the Blue Closet?' Victorian Sexualities Conference, University College Worcester, April 2003 is an exception.
[10] Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. R.W. Franklin. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 206, poem number 530.
[11] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p.68.

In this thesis I make a distinction between socially imposed closets and creatively managed closets owned by those who recognise their own queerness. Although I stress aspects of empowerment in the act of writing, I do not underestimate the force of externally circulating oppression and pathology. Ultimately, this research focuses on ways in which the notion of the closet is stretched and subverted by creativity as precursor to its potential dismantling. Sedgwick's argument does not preclude work on the spectacle of the closet focused on earlier periods, nor does it necessarily exclude the possibility of closets being managed from the inside as sources of protection, as the recent shift in focus back to the closet in the work of Janes and Gero Bauer suggests.[12] It is important to bear in mind that Sedgwick's argument was also proposed as a response to a period of extreme anxiety and threat, as Janes notes:

> As the preface to the second edition of 2008 made clear, Sedgwick was not merely exploring the category of the homosexual *as* a homophobic creation but was doing so at a time when the experience of AIDS had led to a massive political backlash against gay liberation in the United States and around the world. Something that was particularly dangerous about the closet at this time was that its operations could be held to imply that only a small proportion of the population possessed problematic forms of sexual desire.[13]

The potential threat found its most provocative expression in the Queer Nation slogan silence=death. It is also important to stress the contradictions contained in *Epistemology of the Closet* concerning ideas of danger, risk and the closet. While Sedgwick warns against the glamorising of the closet, she also stresses the importance of understanding its workings. As Jennifer Rich notes:

> However, it is only through the opening up of the closet – and the revelations of the underlying epistemology of secretiveness that makes possible the closet –

---

[12] See Janes, *Picturing the Closet* and Gero Baeur, *Houses, Secrets and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
[13] Janes, p.3.

that will lead to a more responsible critical inquiry into both gender and sexuality.[14]

It is also important to note that Sedgwick's position frequently shifts and diversifies depending on the context of her work. She is able to write about queer as a permissive, non-binary and potentially radical space in *Tendencies,* in a text that overlapped with the writing of *Epistemology of the Closet,* 'Queer is a continuing movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant* [...] Keenly it is relational and strange.'[15] This does not mean that she has abandoned her project of anti-homophobic analysis but that she begins to explore broader conceptualisations of queer as an evolving term and movement. Intriguingly the word queer does not appear in the index to *Epistemology of the Closet*. In other words, Sedgwick is engaging with multiple strands of activism and theory in a similar way to Butler whilst continuing to highlight the tragedy of AIDS and homophobic oppression.

One of the distinctive features of this research is its emphasis on conscious closets, inside and outside of texts and the act of the writing. There are very few instances of conscious closets in the literary and social examples which Sedgwick uses in her work, where an individual voice or persona is aware of its own obscured, or partly obscured, queerness. This is largely because the speech acts which Sedgwick characterises as specifying sexuality and sexual identity are external not internal. This suggests that the closet is only identified retrospectively, when a form of 'coming out' or declarative moment has occurred. Sedgwick's statements on queer have been hugely influential on the work of subsequent theorists, particularly Judith Butler:

---

[14] Jennifer Rich, *Modern Feminist Theory: An Introduction* (Penrith: Humanities E-Books, 2014), p.83.
[15] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.xii.

> That's one of the things that 'queer' can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically.[16]

> The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender, correspondingly anti-homophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different.[17]

Butler's *Gender Trouble* takes the breaking of fixed categories in Sedgwick's work and extends this into a highly complex theory of enacted, performed, and performative gender, which only exists as a social construction:

> As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an 'act', as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of the 'natural' that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.[18]

Arguably, the study of literature offers a way to decentre gender even further, through the analysis of personae that exhibit and double these effects or characteristics through textual and bodily reading and whose gender cannot be clearly identified as belonging to a particular side of a potential gender binary. Alternatively, and just as radically, personae that attempt to 'act' or enact stereotypical gender performance but who fail to convince within a patriarchal and heteronormative social context, are most obviously displayed in the diary personae of Anne Lister and Emily Brontë's aesthetics of misfitting. Each chapter in this thesis offers examples of the ways of which diverse literary conventions and forms are used to deconstruct naturalised categories of gender and

---

[16] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.8.
[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Ep. Of the Closet*, p.27.
[18] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, new edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.187.

sexuality. As Butler notes, context is vital in the articulation of gender, within or without texts:

> One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through the citation. They can also be exposed as non-natural and non-necessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation. What this means is that through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced *and* altered in the course of that reproduction.[19]

Butler's work is increasingly utilised in queer literary studies, however, the difference between social and literary performance and performativity is arguably still ripe for further analysis. I suggest new critical praxis here, based on the differences between embodied and disembodied performance and performative states, comparing and contrasting differences in queer performative citation between poetic and life-writing personae and the reading and reception of social and literary production. As Jill Ehnenn argues, the strength of queer lies in its flexibility although this flexibility is open to criticism:

> Queer is ironic, self-reflexive, performative, anti-heteronormative, not a category in and of itself, but a fluid and self-revisionary mode of reading and theorizing that breaks up identity categories. Queer is not gender specific but has everything to do with sexuality, while it simultaneously calls into question the ways in which identity and power operate within the existing sex/gender system.[20]

This thesis also deconstructs the relationship between coding and closeting, usually assumed to be the same thing, and argues that coding within writing can be used to move, stretch, and on occasions, dismantle, a social and psychological closet, as well

---

[19] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.218.
[20] Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p.16.

as reinforcing hidden or non-disclosed positions. Queering may well be firmly on the agenda but this research argues that the analysis of closeting and its link to coding in nineteenth-century texts is still a potential area for new work. If, as Virginia Blain has argued 'the queering of Victorian poetry is probably long overdue',[21] then the poetics of closeting must find a place within that process.   The debate about what queering is also receives attention here, as well as analysis of queer retrospection, and historicist approaches to language and literary form. This research considers the reclamation of queerness as a counter-intuitive project, how to identify the unidentifiable, or that which is supposedly beyond the categories of sexual identity, or what is often understood as desire itself.   Queer can include desire without another person, asexuality and fetishized projection.   These areas have generally been viewed as outside the scope of orthodox literary poetics, usually based on conventional subject/object relations.   Queer can also include split subjectivity and perverse muses as in the case of much of Brontë's work, and a deconstruction of poetic form itself.   This project generally proposes a model of embodied, gender performativity.   However, it sits within a queer theoretical framework because it is concerned with identification rather than identity.

Richard Dellamora notes the explicit connection between nineteenth-century models of sexuality and Sedgwick's work in *Epistemology of the Closet:* 'Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's main contribution to the history of sexuality has been the concept...of the regulative function of homophobia within what Sedgwick refers to as the male homosocial continuum.'[22]   However, famously, both Foucault and Sedgwick largely exclude women's sexuality from their work in different ways. Foucault does this through

---

[21] Virginia Blain, 'Period Pains: The Changing Body of Victorian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 42.1 (2004), 71-79, (pp. 71-2).
[22] Richard Dellamora, Review of *Epistemology of the Closet* in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2, 4 (April 1992), 667-670, (p.667).

his continual use of male pronoun subjects, default masculinity, and the exclusion of same-sex desire and relationships between women, and Sedgwick through her application of models of female intimacy based within a continuum model, inherited most notably from the work of Adrienne Rich:

> I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman.[23]

This research asks where queer, performative acts of experimental self-perception (and desire) sit within nineteenth-century women's writing, and how literary and social closeting works in conjunction with these written selves or subjects. I use Butler's theories of the (deconstructed) performative to elucidate the sophisticated construction and awareness of gender fluidity and gender role-play in chosen texts and genres. In general, I make a distinction between performative aspects of gender that are non-fixed, fluid, non-binary, multiple and genderqueer and characterised, queer performance or non-normative role-play. I also explore how these lines are blurred within queer reading and identification. As Butler notes, the term 'queer' has the power to turn meaning on its head:

> The term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity. The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subjects it names or rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation.[24]

---

[23] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' *Signs*, 'Women: Sex *and Sexuality*,' 5.4 (Summer 1980), 631-660, (p. 638).
[24] Butler, 'Critically Queer,' p.19.

This thesis does not focus on the relative merits and competing demands of lesbian feminist and queer feminist approaches, but rather it attempts to deconstruct and elucidate the links between diverse forms of feminine, and on occasions masculine, intimacy and desire within psychological and literary processing. It looks at alternative ways to work with these intimacies within models of performative gender and desire, and how queerness is constructed and identified within nineteenth-century texts. It does however support a move away from conceptual frameworks which reinforce the notion of a lesbian continuum. What this research offers is a focus on the retention of empowered queerness, as well as the appropriation of heteronormative frameworks. It is not, therefore, an exercise in outing authors, or texts, but an epistemological approach to understanding the function of closeting, and the way in which it limits particular elements or personae. Some historians like Sharon Marcus have been engaging enthusiastically with queer theory and attempting to theorize nineteenth-century desire between women, but the closet remains a point of difference that disappears in these 'queer' readings, which emphasise the overlap between normative and alternative discourses of desire:

> *Between Women* makes a historical point about the particular indifference of Victorians to the homo/hetero divide for women; there is also a theoretical claim that can reorient gender and sexuality studies in general. Queer theory often accentuates the subversive dimension of lesbian, gay, and transgender acts and identities. The focus on secrecy, shame, oppression and digression in queer studies has led theorists, historians, and literary critics alike to downplay or refuse the equally powerful ways that same-sex bonds have been acknowledged by the bourgeois liberal public sphere.[25]

---

[25] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.13.

There is no reference to the closet, or closeting, in the index to *Between Women*. In order to emphasise the layering and intermeshing of homosexual and heterosexual analysis the closet is excluded. I aim to reinstate this missing link in the psychological and linguistic construction of alterity and recover closets, if not always the binary oppositions of homo/hetero, or queer/non-queer. I am also interested in self or subjective identification as other, and the ways in which this is naturalised within personal discourse. Queer theory is not about putting people, subjects, or personae back in the closet, but neither is it about removing the ability to analyse the ways in which closets exist. If the direction of current historiography is to remove or deny the closet, what implications does this have for scholars working on the management and processing of pathology, inside and outside, codifying disciplines and discourses such as psychology, sexology, religion and the law? Richard Dellamora's controversial challenge to Sedgwick arguably still remains valid:

> A gay man may notice that the specificity of Sedgwick's position, which lends it strength, also entails certain omissions in her work. In *Between Men*, for instance there is little attention to relations between self-aware male homosexuals, who are relegated for the most part to the 'Coda' of the book. Moreover, when she does address homosexual material, Sedgwick is more likely to notice traces of homophobia in a writer's texts and behaviour than strategies of resistance…she stresses the conformity of the texts to a pattern in which desire between men remains inscribed within the heterosexual paradigm sketched above. [26]

There is a difference between self-processed shame and externally perceived latency, uncomfortable as this may be for an inclusive social and theoretical practice. Very little

---

[26] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 8-9.

academic work exists on the positive uses of queerness and closeted spaces, as a source of protection, and their relationship to writing.

This project asks questions about what queer subjects or personae look and feel like in nineteenth-century women's writing, and where these subjects sit in relation to the closet, often in texts which precede Foucault's dating of the discursive paradigm shift. It also considers how the closet exists before codified identities and identity politics. This thesis asks a fundamental and important question about how it is possible to bring the closet forward to the forefront of analysis and give the closet back to women's writing in order to reconceptualise it. If the focus of feminist scholarship is increasingly on appropriations of naturalised heterosexual positions within same-sex or gender relationships and institutions then the closet disappears regardless of debates about the anachronistic use of labels such as lesbian. The largest irony is that Sedgwick suggests that the most effective form of closet is that which does not choose to declare its own power or existence, within invisible heteronormativity or the construction of heterosexuality itself:

> To the degree that heterosexuality does not function as a sexuality, however, there are stubborn barriers to making it accountable, to making it so much as visible in the frameworks of projects of historicizing and hence denaturalizing sexuality. The making historically visible of heterosexuality is difficult because it is hidden under its institutional pseudonyms. Heterosexuality has been permitted to masquerade so fully as history itself.[27]

The last twenty years have seen a huge growth of interest in conceptualisations of subjectivity, queerness and same-sex desire within literary research and historiography on women's writing. However, the bulk of this work has focussed on the

---

[27] Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* p.10.

analysis of texts produced in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (usually under the heading of *fin-de-siècle* and modernist movements.)[28]   In this thesis I have chosen to look at the poetry and life writing of seven/eight authors across the nineteenth century: Emily Brontë (1818-1848), Anne Brontë (1820-1849), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), Adelaide Anne Procter (1825-1864), Anne Lister (1791-1840), Michael Field, Edith Emma Cooper (1862-1913), and Katharine Harris Bradley (1846-1914) and Amy Levy (1861-1889).   I consider what happens to nineteenth-century women's writing when readers in both the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries read it through a queer lens. This project identifies distinctive features of queer poetics and practice within women's writing produced by, and within, a range of obscured contexts. It also explores the highly complex relationship between gender ambiguity and sexuality within chosen works, to investigate how this dynamic constructs different forms of closeting, or conversely opens up a space for queer or lesbian expression, within a protected or non-closeted area. It employs a distinctive approach to the reading of subjectivity, closeting and desire, by juxtaposing genres, writers and periods, and utilises Regency life writing, lyric poetry, dramatic monologue, narrative verse, a singular novel, *Wuthering* Heights, religious and devotional texts, and *fin-de-siècle* poetry and life writing. It maps the emergence of women's writing across the nineteenth century and its complex relationship with ideological orthodoxies of gender and sexuality through the tropes of scholarly, fallen, new and odd women.

Before continuing, a reflection on the uses of subjectivity included here and in contemporary critical theory is needed. Discussions on who, how and what is the I and

---

[28] See Mary.E. Galvin, *Queer Poetics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999).
Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity 1889-1930* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2014).

the relationships between author, subject and persona continue to fascinate theorists in a post 'death of the author era,' but the understanding, interpretation and application of these can be highly challenging. For example, there are significant tensions within queer theoretical practice between deconstructive and reconstructive approaches to subjectivity, and the way in which these concepts work with, or against, the idea of voice, self and interiority in poetics and life writing.

The link between speech, poetic subjects and political acts is arguably ripe for further exploration as is the fragmentation of the link between politically undisclosed post-structuralist positions and oppositional discourses such as queer theory as Sedgwick suggests:

> Queer seems to hinge much more radically on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only when *attached to the first person.* One possible corollary: that what it takes – all it takes – to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulse *to* use it in the first person.[29]

As Roland Barthes argued, the subject is lost in writing: 'The destruction of every voice, every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite oblique space where our subject is, the negative where all identity is lost.'[30] If the link between queer and speech acts is vital, as Sedgwick has argued, what happens in this poststructuralist context? Perhaps this loss of subjectivity does not imply the loss of a textual position to read from but rather a non-existence of essential subjectivity beyond or outside of interpellation. It is the correspondence between this loss and literary ambiguity, that allows the negotiation

---

[29] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.9.
[30] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.142-149 (p.142).

of prohibited or obscured spaces, and the reversal of power dynamics in favour of the consciously interpellated reader.

The study of gender and gender ambiguity in nineteenth-century poetry has long been the focus of feminist discourse, and is often explored within analyses of lyric poetry. However, the 'queer' potential of ambiguously gendered and psychologically complex figuring has received less consideration; for example, readings of split subjectivity and fetishism in nineteenth-century poetry written by women are less common than those that explore subject/object relations and the reclaiming and eroticising of a female muse (which sit adjacent to more orthodox feminist critiques). Declarative speech and disclosure have also received less attention than might be expected in readings of narrative poetic forms, particularly the dramatic monologue. This thesis reflects on poetry which can be variously categorised as Romantic, devotional, religious, Gothic, Hellenist, lyric and narrative. Ambiguity frequently supports non-binary perspectives and as such is a fertile ground for queer readings. As Sara Ahmed has noted, to construct subjectivity simultaneously outside and inside normative ideologies is to engage in an act of wilfulness and a splitting of the subject (consciously or unconsciously):

> We might develop a different angle on this theme by considering how 'willing' is involved in the scene of splitting: the split between the willer and the willed is a split within the subject. If in willing I am willing myself, then willing creates a distinction in self. The will appears on both sides of an address, on the side of the subject and the object: *who is willing, what it willed*. [31]

---

[31] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 23.

This will and I is only created in discourse and language. In my research I propose a clear link between split subjectivity and queerness, and frequently read this splitting as a symptom or sign of the closet.

This work focusses on the articulation and construction of willed subjectivities and desires which occupy complex 'against the grain' spaces within nineteenth-century women's writing. It also indirectly focusses on the right to the political act of queer reading. The connection between dissidence, will and queerness is long standing. Early scholarship on queer sexuality in literary studies looked at dissidence. Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence* introduced the concept of dissidence as*, 'One kind of *resistance*, operating in terms of gender which repeatedly unsettles the very opposition between the dominant and the subordinate.'[32] (my italics). Dellamora's edited collection of essays *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* is influenced by Dollimore's early work, as Andrew Elfenbein notes, 'The concept of sexual dissidence comes from Jonathan Dollimore against the unified subject of bourgeois ideology.'[33] Elfenbein also goes on to suggest that what Dellamora's study actually foregrounds is questions about whether dissidence is a useful or appropriate term for the 1890s. Continuing this pattern, current dynamics between marginal, dissident, reclamative and mainstreamed positions continue to be a productive, but potentially fraught area for queer studies. My research maps this dynamic, to trace changing attitudes and strategies for the avoidance of social censure and pathology, but does so from an earlier historical point in nineteenth-century literature. It is possible to argue that the two are ultimately intertwined radically, paradoxically and powerfully so in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

---

[32] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.21.
[33] Andrew Elfenbein, Review of *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, in *Victorian Studies*, 43. 3 (Spring 2001), 509-511 (p.2).

Similarly, historical synonyms for queerness can and have been reconfigured as a site of resistance, a source of pride, and a form of failed silencing. The refusal to be 'annihilated' as Butler notes occurs frequently in much earlier discourse.

Language and Historicism

Debates about the evolution of queer studies, queer theory and queer moments, inevitably impact on academics working cross-historically. Queer theory and activism arose out of a particular situation and period at the end of the twentieth century, largely as a response to the AIDS crisis, and they are still subject to negotiation. This specificity has led some academics to ask about what happens to queer retrospection, if queer theory is superseded by another movement. Elements of recent scholarship have focussed on ways to combine historicist approaches with theories of queerness.[34] Much recent scholarship analyses queer, or queerness, through an engagement with semiotics and the use of language in nineteenth-century literary texts, for example Denis Flannery's work on queer sibling attachments in American literature looks at explicit instances and usage of the word queer, to explore ideas of gender, desire and the queer familial.[35] Several chapters in the recently published *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* also offer detailed analysis of 'queer' usage. [36]

I explore the benefits of tracking and marking historical language and shifting resonances for queer through the word itself, and through its synonyms with oddity, strangeness and alienation. I also look at the correlation between queer odd

---

[34] See Marcus *Between Women* and Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[35] Dennis Flannery, *On Sibling Love, Queer Subjectivity and American Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

[36] See Alec Magnet, 'The Queer, Statistical Kinship of Tennyson and Melville and Laura White, 'The "Queer-Looking Party" Challenge to Family in *Alice*, pp. 176-195, pp. 19-36 in *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature*, eds., Duc Dau and Shale Preston (London: Routledge, 2015).

(singular/single) and queer (same-sex) which has featured in recent scholarship.[37]

However, the relationship between historicism and queer reading is not unproblematic.

This is seen in the splitting of historicist and alternative notions of temporality, based

within ideas of queer time, and its deconstruction of ordering, periodization and

chronology. I employ a historicist approach, but also touch on notions of queerness and

its alignment with cross-historical referencing in nineteenth-century women's writing.

Both aspects are used in combination, to capture particular moments of evolving

language and tropes which allow a different relationship to the closet, and which elide

the restrictions of nineteenth-century gendering and pathology. This research takes its

lead from literary texts that can be situated simultaneously, both inside and outside of

their own periods, most obviously in the case of Michael Field's oeuvre. It also

acknowledges the contribution of new scholarship in this area, for example, Kate

Thomas's insightful work on queer temporality and Michael Field.[38] Reading through the

notion of being 'out of time' can offer significant insights for scholars working in and

through discourses of queer theory or temporality, as Hall and Jagose have argued:

> At its best, this work loops through those deconstructive, psychoanalytic, and
> postcolonial intellectual traditions in which time had been influentially outside a
> model of linearity, using notions of time as cyclical, interrupted, multi-layered,
> reversible or stalled to articulate sexuality as a temporal field.[39]

This 'work' includes studies by Nishant Shahani, Elizabeth Freeman and Lee Edelman.[40]

However, out of time is often mistakenly interpreted as being beyond time, a position

---

[37] See Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

[38] Kate Thomas, '"What Time We Kiss:" Michael Field's Queer Temporalities,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12 2-3, (2007) 327-35.

[39] Hall and Jagose, p. Xvii.

[40] Lee Edelman, 'The Future is Kids Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive,' Elizabeth Freeman, 'Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality, History,' pp. 287-289, pp. 236-262, and

which this thesis considers as part of an aspirational queer project based on extending

creative and cultural influence.   In Michael Field's case particularly, issues of legacy are

bound up with a search for a utopian immortality; as Thomas suggests, 'They regarded

their life and poetry as an immortal art and the age in which they wrote and loved as

conversely prosaic and artless.'[41] Undoubtedly, Field's legacy has been significantly

extended by queer and feminist scholarship although it is impossible to know how far

this extension would represent a step towards the accomplishment of Fieldian

immortality. Field's immortal art is also a reaction to critical hostility and neglect in their

own biographical time period, as much as it is a broader statement of ambition. If a kind

of immortality can be claimed then a lack of contemporary recognition can be

considered an irrelevant, temporary blip on the road to posterity.   This temporal

positioning is utilised within the works in this thesis in diverse ways.   The use of

alternative historical, cultural referencing and semiotics is significantly foregrounded in

works which experiment with mortality, memory, and the control of libraries/archives,

or which create parallel versions, or reactions, to contemporary aesthetics, for example,

Emily Brontë's deconstruction of Romanticism or Amy Levy's intersectional use of

classical figuring.

Broader issues concerning structure and chronology are not the main focus of

this research although they are referenced, particularly Jagose's theories of sexual

sequencing. In her study of lesbian representation Jagose argues that the key cultural

binary between heterosexual and homosexual that Sedgwick elaborates in *Epistemology*

Nishant Shahani, *Queer Retrosexualities: The Politics of Reparative Return* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2011).
[41] Thomas, p.327.

of the Closet is further complicated by the construction of homosexuality as secondary, and female homosexuality as a less visible aspect of this state:

> I demonstrate that strategic flexibility of the logic of sexual sequence, the way in which even an apparent reversal of its terms confirms rather than contradicts its representation of sexual hierarchies. I argue that female homosexuality is by its definition articulated through tropes of derivation, secondariness and belatedness and analyse the regulatory capacity of sequence, particularly the ways in which its organisation of first and second naturalizes chronology as hierarchy.[42]

In articulating this sequencing Jagose also produces a suggestive correlation with Irigaray and Sedgwick's ideas of subsumption, that is, the sexuality which is not one but which presents itself as such, in normative, or heteronormative guises which disavow or disown hints of queerness and homosexuality. These loaded binary oppositions become naturalised as norm and perversion. Jagose develops this conceptual framework through close readings of nineteenth-century texts including Lister's *Diaries* and Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and the theories of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. Jagose foregrounds the subversive potential of sequencing and its lack of control over secondary pathology. Radically, Jagose suggests that within this sequentially based model homosexuality becomes part of heterosexuality in the form of a strange and distant relative which nobody wants to visit, claim, or acknowledge. This is most obviously demonstrated by Arthur Clennam and Mr Meagles' inability to acknowledge or remove the imposed closeting from Miss Wade's home address (presumably living on queer street) in *Little Dorrit*:

> There is one of those odd impressions in my house, which do mysteriously get into houses sometimes, which nobody seems to have picked up in distinct form from anybody, and yet which everybody seems to be have got hold of loosely from somebody and let go again, that she lives, or was living thereabouts. [...]The

---

[42] Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.xii.

very name of the street may have been floating in the air, for as I tell you, none of my people can say where they got it from.[...] Miss Wade's address like her same-sex desires circulates within an economy of suspicion.[43]

If, as Jagose has suggested, 'queer is less an identity than a critique of identity' in her more recent work how does this challenge its retrospective application?[44] Part of this challenge results from the distinction between identity and identification and arguably from a misreading of the work of key theorists such as Butler. Butler herself notes that the language of identity is still necessarily a part of reclamation, even if its construction needs to be continually challenged:

> In this sense it remains politically necessary to lay claim to 'women', 'queer', 'gay' and 'lesbian' precisely because of the way these terms…lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing. Laying claim to such terms in reverse will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments of the term in law, public policy, on the street, in 'private' life. The political deconstruction of queer ought not to paralyze the use of such terms.[45]

This research rarely uses the word lesbian, not because of this paralysis, but because of the potential for historical anachronism, and secondly because it focusses on queer identification rather than identity. The textual personae contained in this thesis often exhibit a refusal of terms which would clarify their queerness,les for example, Lister's diary persona's refusal to use the term Sapphist. It does not therefore employ queer as an unproblematic shorthand for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender identity.

As Valerie Traub has suggested, radical models of queer temporality can actually make it harder to elucidate queerness cross-historically, by proposing a fixed link

---

[43] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, (London: Penguin, 1986), p.363.
[44] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p.131.
[45] Butler, in Hall and Jagose, p. 21.

between heteronormativity and orthodox chronology.[46] Queer temporality and more established historical categories are not inherently oppositional; rather, queer temporality sits as a response to the perceived limitations of orthodox historicism, not beyond history itself. Queer temporality cannot sit outside time, in the same way as the subject cannot be outside linguistic and conceptual construction, even if it affects time differently through a kind of layered haunting which requires different reading practices and positions. As Carla Frecerro notes, queer analyses often involve reading at odds with conventional paradigms:

> In a sense, then, I am also reading 'against' history, for the reading I do here at times works counter to the imperative appearing in many discourses called literary as well as those called historical – to respect the directional flow of temporality, the notion that time is composed of contiguous and interrelated joined segments that are also sequential. [47]

Therefore, a dual approach is necessary in any historical context, an approach that acknowledges a particular dating and period, at the same time that it acknowledges queer temporality and its subversive and potentially disruptive presence. Current scholarship is often traumatically split between historicist and queer temporal camps. The resulting discourse either privileges conventional historicism, as proper (heteronormative) history, or queer temporality as authentic 'homo-history,' to use Goldberg and Menon's definition, as a history that, 'Would be invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the non-hetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism.'[48] Unfortunately, these extremes rely on notions of truth and purity from

---

[46] Valerie Traub, 'The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies', *PMLA*, 128.1, (2013) 21-39 (p.36).
[47] Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, eds., Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Kososfsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p.13.
[48] Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon. 'Queering History,' *PMLA*, 120.5 (2005), 1608-1617 (p. 1608).

ideological influence which cannot rightly be applied to either school, and which dictate allegiances based on supposedly homophobic and non-homophobic positions, along the lines of 'if you're not with us you're against us.'

This thesis uses a variety of approaches to elucidate key concepts and epistemologies. The initial method is derived from an engagement with contemporary queer and feminist theory, intersectionality, historicism and historical context. It explores issues of reading and the challenges involved in working with sub-textual queerness and its closeted functionality. It proposes new ways to work with the complex dynamic between autobiographical and textual performativity. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to redefine classifications through and within literary discourse and to offer new work on queer poetics and life writing which are rarely considered in combination. This thesis offers an analysis of genres which develops and elucidates new ways of representing textual and subtextual queerness and its myriad signs and meanings. As Sedgwick notes 'queer' can give access to neglected and hidden areas:

> That's one of the things that 'queer' can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.[49]

By using an unusual juxtaposition of texts and genres, it attempts to replicate a broader queerness in both its rationale and methodology. I compare texts that have not been paired together before, for instance, Anne Lister's *Diary* and Michael Field's *Works and Days*. This research uses a cross-genre and cross-historical approach and in doing so it suggests new avenues for future development, such as the connections between Lister and Field's life writing. It also contrasts and analyses texts which employ implicit

---

[49] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.8.

and explicit coding, to produce new theories on the function of coding, covers and closets in nineteenth-century writing and the links between pathology, psychological processing and writing. With the exception of early diary entries in the chapter on Anne Lister's life writing, and a single poem from Levy's oeuvre, this thesis does not use unpublished or non-transcribed work. It is not focussed on the recovery of texts but the repositioning of published works that have been neglected, overshadowed, or isolated.

Non-normative Desire in Life Writing and Nineteenth-Century Poetics

The tropes and figures of non-normative desire in this work are diverse and multi-layered. They cross periods, genres, genders and different states of materiality. From Lister's erotically charged clothing to Michael Field's quirky futurity the texts featured in this thesis cover a huge range of desiring positions and practices, both creative and sexual. Whilst it is possible to separate different types of non-normative desire into categories and taxonomies, what becomes clear in the process is the extent of overlap and interdependency across these categories, and how the application of social judgement is often contradictory and flexible.

This thesis aims to provide new models and concepts of the queer and non-normative through its use of unusual, or unconventional textual combinations. While key concepts and texts are organised within discrete chapters many find unusual counterparts in other parts of this thesis. For example, Lister's diaries and Michael Field's *Works and Days* act as life writing bookends for the nineteenth century, but they have rarely been considered as part of a potential queer canon, offering remarkable insights into the construction of biographical personae, daily intimacies and relational dynamics. Links between tropes and concepts start to appear when texts are subject to unorthodox pairings. Emily Brontë's poetics of singularity, misfitting and autoeroticism can be set

alongside Lister's textual and linguistic oddity and singularity to produce new readings of early-mid nineteenth-century textual personae. While many figures are transient, others (for instance Sappho) evolve and develop into multi-functional figures of female creativity and desire. Sappho is uniquely positioned in nineteenth-century women's writing to offer a model of normative/non-normative, victim/heroine, desiring and desired, muse/writer, erotic muse/erotic writer, within a multitude of closeted and uncloseted texts. Chapter Two of this thesis focusses on the following questions: When does Sappho become Sapphic, or when does Sapphic become a by-word or semi-code for same-sex desire in literary terms?   What is the extent of coding in references to Sappho in the writing of nineteenth-century women poets?   When does Sappho move from role model to eroticised muse, or at least a role model with eroticised elements? My research on this topic has unearthed some surprising instances of 'Sapphic' referencing in English literature. However, under this heading the chapter also explores the connections between the secular classical, and Christian high Anglican and Catholic ideologies in the work of Christina Rossetti and Adelaide Procter.

Another thread running through this thesis focusses on connections between body and blood in both religious and gothic poetics.   In locating religious poetry more closely with alternative supernatural practices and cultural forms, this research looks at links between transubstantiation, Eucharistic exchange, and ecstatic religious manifestations adjacent to the altered states of mesmerism and mediumship (displayed in the poetry of Rossetti and Procter). This strange overlapping between mediumship and poetic prophecy partly reflects the crisis of identity felt by nineteenth-century poets around the issues of faith and doubt.

Following on from liturgically-influenced works the thesis goes on to consider the significance of third-party states, such as Trinitarianism and potential links to forms of queer fetishism in the writing of Lister, Brontë, Rossetti, and Field. It also considers how third- party objects and religious rituals act as containers for desire and indirect erotic touch. As Isobel Armstrong has argued, there is a pervasive connection between religious faith and desire in devotional poetry written by women: 'Religious poems are almost always concurrently poems about a woman's sexuality because the drama of religious devotion calls up adjacent emotions of sexual longing.'[50] The mid-nineteenth century offered a haven for such fetishism in the availability of High Church and Catholic practices, and through the development of the Oxford movement and Tractarianism. The connection between protective literary (poetic) closets, Catholicism and queerness is not accidental and forms a vital aspect of this research; witness the homoerotically charged poetry of the Catholic Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the converts Michael Field, along with the High-Church influence in Procter and Rossetti's sensual works. Frederick Roden's recent work on same-sex desire and Victorian religious culture offers an intriguing analysis of the connections between Victorian Catholicism and closeted spaces, as Mark Jordan notes in his review:

> Roden's rich book shows how Victorian Catholicisms could provide both faces and disguises for same-sex love. From Newman and Wilde and Christina Rossetti to Michael Field, he recovers the power of religion to sustain homoerotic life for women and men who were, and were not homosexual.[51]

---

[50] Isobel Armstrong, 'Introduction' in *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow, and Cath Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Xxiii-Xli (pp. XXViii-XXIX).
[51] Mark Jordan, *Review*, via <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/samesex-desire-in-victorian-religious-culture-frederick-s-roden/?isb=9780333986431> [accessed 24 November 2015].

These faces and disguises, which are so bound up with patterns of secrecy and disclosure, offer an intriguing semiotics which simultaneously supports, and undermines closeted states.   This project looks at ways to deconstruct ideas of queer invisibility, and proposes arguments which highlight the strength of declarative and spoken textual and biographical bodies within sophisticated multi-functional framing devices or aesthetic, theatrical closets.   I also investigate how bodies speak without words, through physical actions, for example, the silent, child angel of death in Procter's poem, 'The Requital.'

Finally, notions of the queer familial are also foregrounded, and the complexity of their use in nineteenth-century culture and literature is analysed together with the idea of prohibited proximity, non-reproductive incest.   As Duc Dau and Shale Preston note in their recently published collection of essays on queer Victorian Families, it is possible to be part of non-normative family models in many different ways:

> The subjects in *Queer Victorian Families* differ in their variety of possibilities and in the manner by which they are alternative to the ideal family. While some appear less non-normative than do others, they all deviate from the family in 'its essential type.' [52]

For instance, terms such as 'mother', 'sister', 'aunt', 'cousin' and 'niece' are often used in nineteenth-century writing, both as biological statements of fact, but also as terms of endearment, spiritual labels, or descriptors for alternative, constructed kinship which is not blood related.   Additionally, queer families are often based on non-nuclear and socially contingent, chosen families which can also include pets, staff and retainers in more prosperous households and the problematizing of shared domestic space.   For

---

[52] Dau and Preston, eds., 'Introduction' in *Queer Victorian Families,* p.6.

example, the section on Michael Field's *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* could just as easily have been entitled My Family and Other Animals!

A number of texts in this thesis consider what it means to be related and desiring: from Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and 'The Convent Threshold,' Procter's 'A Legend of Provence', and inevitably most of Michael Field's oeuvre. As Sharon Marcus has argued, Victorian popular and literary culture clearly embodies a vast range of erotic referencing taking place between women applicable to many areas highlighted in this thesis:

> The fetishism, objectification, scopophilia, exhibitionism, and sadism that we saw at work in mainstream Victorian representation of mothers with their daughters and girls with their dolls are reproduced in more concentrated form in *Great Expectations*, which draws a man into a female world of love and ritual organised around women's aggressive objectification of femininity.[53]

This thesis investigates where the desired body sits in women's writing and what happens when nineteenth-century constructions of femininity are read through a queer feminist lens. Can Luce Irigaray's conceptualisation of the feminine work alongside ideas of non-fixed and plural queerness if no distinction is made between interiority and exteriority? If exclusion is identified as masculine, what happens to feminine and genderqueer subjects who are forced to exclude and disavow their own queerness? Uses of the word genderqueer are still infrequent in the contemporary academy as well as nineteenth-century studies. For example, the recent *Routledge Queer Studies Reader* only contains one reference in its index to gender-queer (spelt with a hyphen) which concerns Judith Halberstam's work on the relationships between transsexual,

---

[53] Marcus, p.170.

transgender and queer communities.[54] For the purposes of this research, genderqueer is used to describe multi-gender and ambiguous gender characteristics, which contribute to the expression and construction of non-normative desire and personae.

If fortresses are metaphorically produced in nineteenth-century women's writing, are they therefore automatically aligned with the imposition of patriarchal and heteronormative discourse, or with consciously protected spaces? Does Hélène Cixous' reclaimed Medusan gaze (which allows women to be actively desiring), apply to desire between feminine/female subjects?[55] This project also explores ways of incorporating notions of *Écriture féminine* and pleasure through the body of nineteenth-century women's writing and by extension the metaphorical representation of social bodies/collaborative spaces and same-sex institutions such as convents, philanthropic institutions and intellectual groupings such as the Langham Place Group. Ultimately, the bodies that are desired in these texts are available through reading, and extended through the sensual properties of language, rhythm, and patterning. In many respects, pleasure and its accessibility feature far more strongly than concerns about gender in chosen works. Michael Field's Tiresian poetics are a particular example, which can be read more as a quest for pleasure than an interest in fixed gendering.

Selection of Texts

This thesis largely employs works by writers who occupy positions in established canons, works by lesser-known historically popular writers such as Procter, and writers in the process of recovery by feminist and queer theorists, Michael Field and Amy Levy. These writers occupy diverse positions in relation to desire and status. For example, Roden

---

[54] See Hall, Jagose, p.467.
[55] Hélène Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs* 1.4 (1976), 875-893.

uses the term 'queer virginity' for Rossetti, and this label could easily be applied to other

writers in this thesis alongside writing and writers constructing their own relationships

in and through literature.   It is indebted to the work of pioneering scholars engaged in

recovery of neglected and overlooked Victorian and *fin-de-siècle* poetry.[56] These critics

have wrestled with contradictory impulses within feminist scholarship to produce

ground breaking work. Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock, in their

collection *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets,* reference the revival of work by

nineteenth-century women poets as one of the most important initiatives in recent

scholarship : 'This process of rediscovery has been one of the most intellectually exciting

developments within the field of literary history, and its significance cannot

underestimated.'[57] Leighton's study *Victorian Women Poets Writing Against the Heart*

stresses the importance of both aesthetic and political considerations in reforming

feminist canons, and the effect that one has on the other:

> My method of selection, then, has been unashamedly aesthetic. These are not
> historical or feminist curiosities, but poets who, I believe, merit a hearing in their
> own right. Perhaps such a hearing will help to shift the 'long border' (Jehlen, in
> Keohane, 1982: 199) between Victorian women's poetry and Victorian men's
> poetry, to make more room for these voices, who for too long have remained
> unheard on the other side.[58]

Canons are constantly being constructed and reconstructed as neglected or suppressed

works are unearthed from the archives, new collections and editions become available,

---

[56] See Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), Virginia
Blain, ed. *Victorian Women Poets: A New Anthology*, revised edition (Abingdon, Routledge, 2013,
Joseph Bristow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2000), *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem* (Athens: Ohio, Ohio University Press 2005), Naomi Hetherington
and Nadia Valman, eds., *Amy Levy: Critical Essays* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), Angela
Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1992), Anne K.
Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Rosie Miles, *Victorian Poetry in Context*
(London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2009). Frederick Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave
Macmillan, 2002.
[57] Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow, Cath Sharrock, (eds.) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford
Anthology*   2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xxiii.
[58] Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, p.2.

and new groupings become established. The issue of canonicity for women's writing and women writers has a long and fraught history. Early nineteenth-century anthologies of women's poetry explicitly reference recovery from neglect but do so in terms that are damagingly loaded with gender stereotypes. For example, Alexander Dyce's collection *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1827), not only uses terminology associated with pathology, but also emphasises the lack and weakness within femininity:

> Of the selections which have been made from the chaos of our past Poetry, the majority has been confined to the writings of men; and from the great Collections of the English Poets, where so many worthless compositions find a place, the productions of women have been carefully excluded… It is true that the grander inspirations of the Muse have not often breathed into the softer frame…but her sensibility, her tenderness, her grace, have not been lost nor misemployed: her genius has gradually risen with the opportunities which facilitated its ascent.[59]

Given these suffocating stereotypes, it is not hard to understand why so many women writers were anxious to find a way of repositioning their work outside the frameworks of 'poetess' and 'lady author' in the nineteenth century, employing a variety of methods in doing so. Curiously, a survey of primary source materials and anthologies published in the nineteenth century, via the British Library, indicates that far more anthologies of women's poetry were published in the United States of America than Great Britain in the period, which adds a further twist to the equation. The catalogue contains approximately twenty anthologies, of which five were produced by British publishers (searching on the term nineteenth-century women's poetry.)[60] This thesis also considers how elements of these strategies are therefore, based on overcompensated anxiety

---

[59] Rev. Alexander Dyce, *Specimens of British Poetesses; Selected and Chronologically Arranged*, (London: T. Rodd. 1827), pp.III-IV.
[60] British Library, General Reference Collections, DRT Isidyv36c55d7, DRT Isidyv35c328ab, 11602.ee.11, DRT19855.e.13, GRC10854.bbb.19 via <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/search/faqs.html#findmain>.

about the reading of the hidden and potential projections of queerness and gender non-conformity as well as the avoidance of sexism and pejorative labelling.

This research largely works on repositioning rather than full recovery. Across all of the aforementioned scholarship the overriding theme of involved readership, gendered writing and reception, sits alongside analyses of innovative and creative uses of performative personae which play with fixed concepts of gender and subjectivity. As Jo Gill notes, these complex dynamics can lead to significant layering of connotations being projected onto the concept, or definition, of women's poetry (and women's writing more generally):

> The Women's Poetry of the title is not, then, necessarily always a synonym for feminist poetry; instead it encapsulates a whole range of concerns and interests – about women as poets, women as readers, women as speakers and addressees, and women as objects and subjects of the text.[61]

The deconstruction of naturalised gender does not necessarily elide the need for, or importance of, bodies of work based on and within, the notion of women's writing. Feminist recovery is still needed, even if our understanding of how women define themselves, and how they write, is constantly shifting. The study of women's writing continues to play a significant role in subverting ideas of orthodox and socially sanctioned femininity. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, these tensions were projected and concentrated on to the figure of the New Woman and her refusal to accept established constructions of femininity and the shaming of subversive behaviour, and her opposition to being fallen. The connections between shifting gender characterisation, sexuality and shame are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis, specifically in relation to the split and multifunctional figure of Sappho. Adrienne

---

[61] Jo Gill, *Women's Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.6.

Gavin and Carolyn de La Oulton argue that both women's writing and the reframing of male literary influence combine to reshape societal expectations in the Fin de Siècle:

> In the last decades of the nineteenth and into the early 1900s, 'Woman' was obsessively scrutinized and discussed as both subject and author of literature that itself often focused on the subversive nature of feminine authorship – she is repeatedly figured 'watching us watching her watching us watching her.'[62]

There are two exceptions to the titular categorisation in this thesis, 1) the inclusion of a small section on the novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and 2) Michael Field's *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* (1914). *Wuthering Heights* is read as an example of problematized, overdetermined and conflicted queer life writing which contains numerous examples of the word queer and queerness. The question of diary ownership raised in *Wuthering Heights* is compared with Emily and Anne Brontës' linked *Diary Papers,* and their use of domestic settings, collaborative writing and deferred disclosure within the space of Haworth Parsonage. Michael Field's late poetry, specifically, *Whym Chow: Flame of Love,* is included because of its connection to a largely *fin-de-siècle* oeuvre and its curious use and invocation of high Victorian sentimentality.

Chapter Breakdowns

Chapter One looks at Anne Lister's diaries, and how her use of explicit coding inverts established models of the closet, and the implications for future study of queer, coded writing. I also consider the influence of Butler's theories of gender performativity on readings of Lister's writing and her failed performance of femininity. Moving forward, I then explore Lister's highly fetishized relationship to clothing, its link to self-fashioning in the *Diaries* and the relationship between clothing, text and the body. I use Lister's

---

[62] Carolyn. W. de la Oulton, Adrienne E. Gavin, eds., *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.1.

writing as a framing device to explore the notion of charged touch, the extension of erotic space, and its potential for wrapping and unwrapping.

I also cover the issue of editorial access and the potential textual distortion of Lister's *Diaries* and the limited access to transcription tools, as well as broader issues of confidentiality, secrecy and collaborative writing.   Finally, the chapter surveys the use of linguistic synonyms for queer in Lister's writing, her reclamation of language, and patterns of avowal and disavowal.

Chapter Two investigates tropes of misfitting in Emily Brontë's lyric poetry. I also explore the correlation between Romantic poetry, interiority, and gender alongside split, doubled and absent subjectivity, to look at potential undisclosed, queer subtexts. Additionally, I explore the tension between the use of regular poetic form and irregular poetic personae in Brontë's work. The chapter illustrates the ways in which Brontë's poems can be read as a processing of internalised homophobia and introduces the idea of persecutory muses. The small section on *Wuthering Heights* offers new readings of the text applying Sedgwick's theories of homosexual panic and work on queer and genderqueer life writing. In doing so, it sets out to understand the ways in which the text subverts heteronormative models of sexual development and identification. I propose an analysis of the novel that identifies Heathcliff as a disavowed and disowned embodiment of queer. Finally, Chapter Two explores Emily and Anne Brontë's *Diary Papers* and their role in the construction of both intimate and withheld spaces, within the closet of Haworth Parsonage.

Chapter Three considers the poetry of Christina Rossetti and Adelaide Anne Procter and the ways in which it uses Tractarian theories of reserve to support protective closets, and as a cover for illicit desire. It also looks at the modelling of the fallen woman

in mid-Victorian poetry and visual art, and the links between the queer salvific and Sappho as dual normative/non-normative muse. I ask questions about why Rossetti and Procter chose to revisit tropes of enclosure, confinement and privacy in their work, when robust forms of escape are available to post-Romantic poets.   I propose an argument that their poetics offer an alternative, highly complex elaboration of the potential of these spaces for queer subversion and transgression, and that they find ways to turn confinement, domesticity and privacy subtextually against themselves whilst nominally adhering to them.   These paradoxical limitations enable both poets to shed light on supposedly taboo areas of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Three revisits Sappho and her pervasive influence on nineteenth-century poetry.   However, under this heading Chapter Three also explores the connections between the secular classical, and Anglican and Catholic liturgies in the work of Rossetti and Procter. I also explore ideas of social and spiritual philanthropy, the role of poets and the healing incorporation of the feminine social body, particularly in Procter's 'A Legend of Provence'. Constructions of bodily substitution and erotic, mercantile exchange are also proposed through a comparative analysis of Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and Procter's 'A Legend of Provence'.   The chapter considers the gendering of sonnet form, performativity and the reclamation of queer desire.   It also elaborates on partnership within spiritual manifestations of femininity, and the function of queer liminality in religious and devotional poetics.

Chapter Four considers the life writing and poetry of Michael Field, (*Works and Days*, *Long Ago*, *Wild Honey* and *Whym Chow: Flame of Love*) and Amy Levy's poetic oeuvre (*A Minor Poet and other Verse, A London-Plane Tree and other Verse,* 'Xantippe' and 'Medea'). It explores their work in the context of aestheticism, decadence, and New

Woman writing, in combination with religious and Hellenic cultural influences. I consider Field's work and 'Michael Field' the poetic brand, to elucidate the connections between multiple and queer subjectivities, split and doubled positions, and the formation and construction of nominal opposite and same-sex positions. I also explore the use of Michael Field and 'Michael Field' as a social and literary closet.   Chapter Four also considers notions of marginality, perverse demotion and intersectional poetics in Amy Levy's poetics with close readings of poems from *A Minor Poet and other Verse* and *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse*. I also focus on the recent shift in emphasis from Levy's early to late poetics, the use of diverse poetic forms and their effect on queer feminist readings, and changing constructions of the closet.

There is still considerable scope for the investigation of closeting, subjectivity, and queer desire in nineteenth-century women's writing and new and original readings are available to scholars through the adaptation of queer feminist praxis. If closeting returns to the centre of scholarly debate then there is a possibility that ground can be reclaimed or rediscovered. I argue that the exclusion of notions of coding and closeting are counterproductive within both queer/feminist theory, literary studies and historiography, and that connections between shame and closeting need to be reconceptualised and reasserted.   Making the closet 'apparitional', to adapt Terry Castle's trope, involves a flattening of psychological and subjective complexity that produces a loss of insight, and a censoring of homophobia, in an attempt to mainstream queer studies, or queer theoretical approaches.[63] Centring the closet paradoxically allows both queer marginality and visibility to be retained.

---

[63] Terry Castle, The *Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.30.

Chapter One

The Curious Case of Anne Lister's Journals

This chapter will explore recent developments in feminist, lesbian feminist and queer theoretical perspectives, and their treatment of life writing, alongside an analysis of published and non-published sections of Anne Lister's *Diaries*. A large volume of research currently exists which positions Lister and her journals as part of an owned and visibly reclaimed lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender history, and as 'the first modern lesbian.'[64] However, the chapter will primarily consider Lister's journals as texts, concentrating on a detailed analysis of Lister's innovative and revolutionary textual strategies and techniques, in conjunction with a historicist approach. The nuanced complexity of Lister's fluid and liminal *Diary* spaces illustrates the need for conceptual and theoretical models that move beyond competing oppositions, and fixed ideas of public/private, and licit/illicit writing in a nineteenth-century context. I situate the *Diaries* within a current body of work on obscured, coded, encrypted and alternative life-writing/autobiography.[65] I explore the deconstruction of textual closeting, private writing, and the construction of subjectivity, the importance of queer, dual, implied readership and paradoxical notions of audience. The chapter provides readings of Lister's diary writing, and its links to gender performativity, role-play, queerness and sexual writing/ censorship.

---

[64] See Chris Roulston, 'The Revolting Anne Lister: the UK's First Modern Lesbian', *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 17:3-4 (2013), 267-278, p.272.
[65] See Georgia Johnston, *The Formation of 20th-Century Queer Autobiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Nineteenth-century women's life writing features in an increasing number of academic studies.[66] However, the lack of consensus about the status and kinds of writing covered by this umbrella term continues to create problems for those working within a tradition of feminist, or queer recovery.   Additionally, the lack of adherence to pre-existing literary forms, or established genre conventions, further problematizes critical reception and analysis.   Extracts from autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and journals are often included in collections of nineteenth–century women's life writing, but letters, notes/fragments, essays and travel writing are often omitted. Access to private writing is by its very nature problematic for academic study, given that many forms of the genre only exist in private records, family archives and non-published collections. As Valerie Sanders has suggested, the situating of a large volume of women's life writing in the nineteenth century, within the proscribed 'separate spheres' of the domestic, familial and relational, not only precluded interest in publication but also contributed to fears of social judgement, although large numbers of women found ways to circumvent these restrictions. Sanders notes the taboos associated with life writing, quoting Jane Carlisle: 'Oh if I might write my own biography from beginning to end – without reservation or false colouring – it would be an invaluable document for my countrywomen in more than one particular – but *"decency forbids*."'[67] That Carlyle is available to quote, however, suggests that women writers were able to employ sophisticated strategies to subvert or reclaim space for their own writing despite protestations to the contrary; including the paradox of asserting that you are not able to write about something whilst writing about

---

[66] See Helen. R. Deese, ed., *Daughter of Boston: The Extraordinary Diary of a Nineteenth-Century Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), Catherine Dellafield, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).
[67] Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-century England* (London: Harvester, 1989), p.ix.

it, in a kind of meta-form of life writing.   Despite these supposed limitations, there is now a large volume of life writing, memoirs, diaries, notes, letters and travel journals by nineteenth-century women writers available in the public domain.

Anne Lister (1791-1840) was born in Yorkshire into an affluent landed family. Her part-coded *Diaries/Journals* (totalling twenty-seven volumes), detailing her sexual and social life, and same-sex relationships, were discovered by John Lister at Shibden Hall in the 1890s. Lister and his friend Arthur Burrell were able to break the code, but then subsequently suppressed the coded texts for fear of scandal. The *Journals* were then rediscovered by Helena Whitbread in the 1980s, (after further work by Muriel Green, Dr Vivien Ingram and Phyllis Ramsden) who transcribed and edited entries into two published volumes, in 1988 and 1993.[68] Anne Lister's *Journals/Diaries* were recognised by UNESCO as culturally significant to the United Kingdom in 2011.

Whilst women's life writing and queer life writing share a number of exclusionary markers in their vocabulary of hiddenness, privacy, and intimacy, the concept of closeting is usually only applied, or doubly applied, to queer texts written by women. Gender closeting has not existed as a concept that has been theorised in response to patriarchal oppression, and gender characteristics have historically been considered to be visible, or more easily read, and not subject to declarative disclosure. Feminist and lesbian feminist theorists have argued that this doubling creates a form of invisibility under the sign woman, and that they have been unable to offer progressive models in the same way as queer theory.   In the area of genderqueerness the terms of self-identification and assertion become even more problematic in texts which cover

---

[68] Helena Whitbread, ed., *I Know My Own Heart – The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840*, (New York: New York University Press, 1988), *No Priest But Love – The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

transgender/hermaphroditic life writing and sexuality, such as Foucault and Barbin's

Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite.[69] Both Foucault and Sedgwick's theories of homosexual identification

are predicated on an assumption of, or focus on, male sexuality, to the detriment of

queer and lesbian women's experiences, pushing them further back into hidden spaces.

In the case of Foucault this also results in a default gendering, which is non- specified

but inevitably set to male. This issue is addressed by Sedgwick where she provides a

diagnostic explanation but few suggestions other than to leave the theoretical field

available for others to develop:

> That limitation seems a damaging one chiefly in so far as it echoes and prolongs an already scandalously extended eclipse: the extent to which women's sexual, and specifically homosexual, experience and definition tend to be subsumed by men's during the turn-of-the-century period most focussed on in my discussion, and are liable once again to be subsumed *in* such discussion. If one could demarcate the extent of the subsumption precisely, it would be less destructive, but 'subsumption' is not a structure that makes precision easy.[70]

Ironically, this subsumption provides an example of an unchallenged gender closet. The

issues of decency and appropriacy continue to be applied in odd ways where queer lives

are involved. In Daniel Cook and Amy Culley's recent collection of essays on eighteenth

and nineteenth-century women's life writing there are no references to Lister's *Journals*,

or biographical mentions, despite references to previous studies of scandalous memoirs

and marginal texts, which certainly validate Lister's inclusion.[71]   It is

understandable that academic monographs published at the end of the 1980s do not

---

[69] Herculine Barbin and Michel Foucault, *Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite* (New York: Random House, 1980).
[70] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) p.39.
[71] Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, eds., *Women's Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

include analysis of Lister's *Journals,* given that the first volume of extracts was only published in 1988, but for a volume published in 2012 to omit all reference to Lister's writing is curiously intriguing, if not worrying.   Regardless of the reasons for this omission, it does highlight a particular issue with the *Journals* as texts.   What happens to writing or texts that are considered singular or aberrative, which challenge existing scholarship or conceptual frameworks, and which are considered to be the exception that proves the rule?   Even if Lister's writing has been excluded from several feminist studies, it has been integrated within more recent studies of queer texts, and as part of a queer canon within women's life writing.   Lister's writing provides a highly useful example of sophisticated linguistic closeting within an evolved system of private/public signification.

Caroline Eisner's work on Lister's reactionary closet, as a replication of private/public space in diary form is provocative, 'On paper dividing her deviant self from her public self,' [72] but arguably based on a misreading of Lister's relationship to her own subjectivity and her own closet.   Eisner's analysis aligns Lister's use of coded and uncoded writing with unproblematised formal and social conservatism.   For example, Eisner states that: 'The new, less troubled self she wrote co-existed with her the coded shameful self.' [73] Here I deconstruct and challenge Eisner's characterisation of Lister's writing, and its placement of the closet to assert Lister's centrifugal position, pushing against social hostility and limitation in her writing.   I analyse Lister's highly evolved understanding of 'shame' as socially and culturally imposed and the full range of techniques she utilises to work her 'oddity' (queerness). As Helena Whitbread notes:

---

[72] Caroline L. Eisner, 'Shifting the Focus: Anne Lister as Pillar of Conservatism,' *Alb: Autobiography Studies*, 17.1 (Summer 2002), 28-42 (p.29).
[73] Ibid.,p.30.

'By 1817, the date at which the more accessible journals commence, Anne was twenty-six. She had come to terms psychologically and emotionally with her own sexuality, her "oddity" as she called it'.[74]

Private Writing and Reader as Detective

This section explores particular issues with diary writing and its highly complicated relationship with notions of public/private, readership, audience, discovery, publication, and posthumous publication to tackle the following research questions: How is private writing constituted? What happens to a confidential text when it becomes available to readers through publication, and why is this so important in the case of queer, long nineteenth-century life writing? Finally, what is the relationship between obscured texts, and public/private readerships? As with other writing genres diaries often vary in their applications of conventions; ranging from daily entries in strict chronological order, to infrequent, fragmented, and irregularly dated 'entries. In general, however, most diaries share a sense of chronology and time ordering, even if the ordering is subject to revision and reminiscence. However, the way in which the term diary/memoir is applied to a combination of published and non-published texts, or even a combination of published and non-published documents within the same text, further complicates this area of research, splitting the term between public and private diary forms. As Amy Culley notes in her chapter '''Prying into the Recesses of History'': Women Writers and the Court Memoir,' (of Lady Charlotte Bury's Diary):

> The *Diary* is divided into a 'Diary' of journal entries and correspondence […] (apparently not intended for publication) recounting the trial […] 'which may excite matter of consideration for the page of future history.' But despite the distinction, juxtaposing these forms within a single published text demonstrates

---

[74] Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart,* p.xxiv.

the permeable boundaries between personal recollections and 'the page of future history.'[75]

The complexity of private writing and its relationship to potential readership and audience is shown by the following (cipher coded) entry from Lister's *Journal* of 1819:

> Isabel, much to my annoyance, mentioned my keeping a journal, & setting down everyone's conversation in my peculiar handwriting (what I call crypt hand). I mentioned the almost impossibility of its being deciphered & the facility with which I wrote & not at all shewing my vexation at Isabella's folly at naming the thing. Never say before her what she may not tell for, as to what she ought to keep or what she ought to publish, she has the worst judgement in the world.[76]

Although, a humorous commentary on an unfortunate disclosure, this entry articulates the problem of confidentiality, and its control, in private writing. In other words, Lister may own her own text but she cannot totally control its possible sharing and disclosure by those within her inner circle. This incident also provides a useful example of how the Lister of the diaries is able to spin the issue of confidentiality to her own advantage by suggesting that the crypt hand is a way of protecting individuals mentioned in the *Diary,* rather than a way for Lister to free herself from social restriction. In actuality, the Lister of the *Journals* is more concerned about how the code offers a protective filter, which allows greater freedom from censorship and potential censure. Thus the *Diaries* play with notions of privacy and secrecy to such an extent that the uncoded sections of the text construct a public closet in which Lister depersonalises her writing, and the coded, encrypted sections of the text, build a structural literary space, which although coded is paradoxically uncloseted. Lister uses diary form both as a way of recording daily events and accounts of her social milieu and as a way of processing the psychological and

---

[75] Amy Culley, Chapter Nine within Cook and Culley, pp. 133-149 (pp.138-9).
[76] Whitbread, p.96.

emotional impact of her interactions with others. In using these alternating spaces, Lister chooses when and when not, to disclose aspects of her queerness, although she cannot escape judgement based on gendered behaviour and physical appearances and how these are read. The *Diaries* therefore employ a means of negotiating the closet and its impact. Lister is not closeted from herself and is aware of her oddity at the same time as she maintains the naturalness of her position.

Isabella Norcliffe, a close friend and occasional lover of Anne's occupies a pivotal and disruptive place in Lister's biography and writing.   She is shown to represent a danger to Lister in her refusal to conform to implicit rules concerning public displays of desire and affection in same-sex relationships outside of an agreed private space. Entries concerning Norcliffe show increasing anxiety concerning her wild behaviour and privileged access to Lister's inner life. As Lister's confidante, she is able to read Lister's *Diary,* be privy to her secrets but also to threaten Lister's social closet through a form of outing verbal disclosure. However, outing is now used retrospectively in relation to historical texts and the disclosure of sexuality and gender, for example, in Alice. A, Kuzniar's, *Outing Goethe and his Age*. There is still very little work on how the concept may have been applied or understood in a nineteenth-century context.[77] References to being 'smoked' appear frequently in the diaries. Although it is difficult to establish what the early nineteenth-century connotations would be, uses of smoke (out) in lexicography suggest that this is a term with a history pre-dating the nineteenth-century with origins in the sixteenth century. The use of this term also raises the possibility of links between hiddenness, smoking guns in the text and potentially obscured knowledge likely to prove dangerous in the wrong hands.   There are no obvious references to the smoking of

---

[77] See Alice. A, Kuzniar's, *Outing Goethe and his Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

tobacco in the diary texts, other than a single entry concerning the sharing of a hookah pipe: 'After supper Mrs Catherine & I joined at one hookah while Mr Tom smoked another. Remarkably fine tobacco brought by Mr Stansfield Rawson from Turkey last year.'[78]

There is a very little theoretical work existing on the notion of outing in an early nineteenth-century context, partly because of the predominant influence of Foucauldian models which focus on the mid-Victorian and later period, and partly because of assumptions concerning the existence of closets prior to the late nineteenth-century codification of sexuality and sexual identity. Norcliffe also has an added advantage as a queer reader that she is not only able to read Lister's code, but also her shorthand for queer sexual activity and relationships. For Lister, in the text, she is a dangerous figure, having the intellect and education to decode diary entries, and the social connections to threaten Lister's reputation as well as her own. Acute reading in the broader social sense is seen to be dangerous in Lister's diaries. Other diary sections concerning conversations between Lister and Norcliffe often make reference to this doubled reading through short hand and literary allusions. The exchange of classical texts between the two cements their shared understanding of each other's same-sex desire. For example, references to Juvenal's *Satyrs* function as code for non-normative desire between Lister, Norcliffe and Miss Pickford. In a diary entry of Saturday 26 July [Halifax] she remarks that 'Miss Pickford has read the Sixth Satyr [*sic*] of Juvenal. She understands these matters well enough.'[79]

---

[78] Wednesday 27th May 1818. [Halifax], Whitbread, p.43.
[79] Juvenal, *The Satyrs of Decimus Junius Juvenalis and of Aulus Persius Flaccus,* (AMS Press, 1979). Whitbread, p.268.

The second published volume of Lister's *Diaries* also contains interesting textual notes on the multiple connotations of Sappho, Sapphic and Sapphism. Lister gauges possible interest in, and knowledge of, same-sex desire amongst the women in her Parisian social circle, whilst nominally discussing literary texts. Lister's diaries offer the reading of classical texts as a palimpsest, and tool for empathy and implicit acknowledgement of mutual subjectivity.   Her crypt hand also derived from Greek and Latin replicates this classical game playing.   Although this classical referencing assisted Lister in the negotiation of her social closet, it also added to a number of personal characteristics which were deemed inappropriate by wider communities, such as her predisposition to supposedly masculine dress and manner, her refusal to demur to men, and her thirst for knowledge and influence.   In her diary entry of 23 March 1820 [York] Lister writes, 'Someone who did not know me said to Mrs John Raper of me. "One must not speak to her she is a bluestocking." "I don't know," replied Mrs Raper,"but she is very agreeable."'[80]

Recorded in passing, this diary entry encapsulates the issues that Lister faced in retaining her own subjectivity and sense of self. Being judged on appearances is a major theme in Lister's *Diaries,* as are discussions of knowing, labelling and role-play, which will be focused on more specifically in a later part of this chapter. Lister's *Diary* personae provide explicit examples of the nuances between performativity and performance. Lister's writing of both positive and negative remarks suggests a certain level of detachment, but the recording of anecdotal experience flags up concerns relating to trust in life writing. The location of this entry is also important given the variation in reception from Halifax which may suggest that difference is more easily managed in a

---

[80] Whitbread, p.119.

larger, more cosmopolitan social location. The issue of trust is often featured in discussions of life writing and its definitions, including debates about whether writing not intended to be read by a wider audience, is more or less trustworthy. The split between biographical fiction and life writing is often subtle and highly complex, further complicated by a theoretical shift in literary studies from writer to reader, and shifting definitions of what constitutes creativity and performativity in writing. Lister's coded diary entries are also unusual in that they contain examples of third-person writing, as well as first person, which associates them more closely with fiction and multiple narrators and narration. The diaries also contain examples of meta-writing where Lister is writing an entry in her diary at the same time as referring to the *Diary* as a material, extra-textual object. For example, Lister writes on Sunday 25 December 1821 [York]: 'After dinner, all danced and made merry with the children, and I, while they played commerce(?) with them, came upstairs and finished the journal of yesterday & wrote this of today.'[81] This reflexive writing also sets up a clear split in subjectivity between Lister the social participant and Lister the writer, between the I that is writing and the I that is written. Lister's *Diaries* also contain entries that refer to the possibility of writing for publication and a particular audience.

The processes of signification in the text produce a parallel processes where the social reading of Lister's person is situated alongside limited access to uncensored control of self-definition, which directly opposes critical arguments such as Caroline Eisner's (that there is clear and obvious split between private and public sections of a personal diary and between normative and non-normative). When academics foreground deviance in Lister's writing, they are often purely relying on external social

---

[81] Ibid., p.175.

definitions of what this might consist of in an early-nineteenth-century context. A counter argument is proposed here, that the Lister of the diaries does the exact opposite and that by using explicit coding Lister's writing sets up layers of involved interactions between textual and social closets. It has often been assumed that coded sections of queer texts represent a form of closet. However, the reading of the *Journals* proposed here argues that in the case of the Lister' *Diaries,* this conceptual framework is inverted or reversed and that the self-transcribed, explicitly coded (covered) sections of the *Diaries* are uncloseted, and the non-coded sections offer a form of closet outside the inner sanctum. This structure functions as a kind of T.A.R.D.I.S (bigger on the inside than the outside).

Queer writing produced in an early nineteenth-century context challenges existing conceptual models, largely established by Foucault's 1870 paradigm shift, and further theoretical explorations of this in Sedgwick. Recent studies by Marcus and Jagose, have offered a re-evaluation of previous models, taking a historicist approach to language, definition and reclamation. Both Marcus and Jagose argue against the conceptual stranglehold of oppositional labelling, and propose alternative readings of desire between women, which arebased on complex layering, adaptation and sequencing.[82] Jagose proposes that it is possible to offer a more nuanced reading of Lister's subjectivity without making her queerness invisible:

> I suggest that the rich context of the diaries and the sex/gender system they articulate provide an interpretive frame for reading the indisputable articulations of Lister's sexual subjectivity without pressganging them into the modern category of 'lesbian.'[83]

---

[82] See Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), and Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequencing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
[83] Jagose, ibid., p16.

There are many other reasons why Lister's sexual subjectivity fits uneasily within the idea of a lesbian, feminist continuum, in addition to her historical context chapter. While Marcus offers a helpful theoretical model which emphasises the overlapping discourses and shifting relationships between normative and non-normative concepts of intimacy and sexuality between women, she does not particularly focus on genderqueerness, and situates her work within a framework of feminist scholarship which this research argues is problematic in the reading of Lister's *Diary*. Marcus's analysis of sophisticated subversions and appropriations of feminine rituals does offer a partial insight into Lister's courtship strategies, but it is not able to easily account for her supposed genderqueerness, or the level of hostility projected onto her. Since Marcus's focus is largely on the surprising level of acceptance of female partnerships and successful marriages between women in a nineteenth-century context Lister does not easily fit into this model, with the exception of her relationship with Ann Walker which Marcus uses an example of a very early legal partnership contract. Marcus does reference female husbands, cross-dressing and gender passing by working-class women, but largely only to emphasize that the bulk of same-sex relationships between middle-class women did not follow this model.

Even with recent theoretical developments, the issue of states and behaviour without labels in a long-nineteenth-century context still presents a significant conceptual challenge. For example, there are several instances of what might be considered outing in twentieth and twenty-first century parlance in Lister's *Diaries* for which is there no clear nineteenth-century linguistic equivalent, although the textual references do suggest a psychological correlation. Similarly, the *Diaries* contain examples of what

might now be considered 'gaydar' or queerdar before identity categories were easily available. However, Lister finds ways to articulate these positions. Her diary entry of 16th September 1820 includes the following concerning Tib (Isabella's Norcliffe's pet name):

> Tib was too fond; I know tho' I cannot well appear to know…My aunt seemed still incredulous. I wonder if she smokes Tib? Surely she has not nous enough tho' Tib is indeed, shockingly barefaced. I must manage things better in the future.[84]

The issue of reliable/unreliable narrative subjectivity is also a feature of other queer memoir texts such as Herculine Barbin's *Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite.* Barbin uses fictional techniques in her/his first-person narration and directly addresses the reader (from the inside of an unread, private memoir): 'May you, my readers, never know all the horror that is contained in this remark.'[85] This technique creates a feeling closer to biographical fiction within the text, which paradoxically elaborates the encroachment of pathologising, factual discourses and their devastating impact on individual lives. As Foucault has suggested in his introduction to *Barbin*, a text can offer open/doubled identities that are disallowed by controlling discourses. The ability to write and construct subjectivities, which avoid or transcend these discourses, gives power back to the queer text/writer/reader even in the face of social closure:

> From the medical point of view, this meant that when confronted with a hermaphrodite, the doctor was no longer concerned with recognizing the presence of two sexes, juxtaposed or intermingled, or with knowing which of the two prevailed over the other, but rather with deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath ambiguous appearances. [86]

---

[84] Whitbread, p.134-5.
[85] Barbin and Foucault, p110.
[86] Foucault, *Introduction* within ibid., p.viii.

The fixing of ambiguity, within both pathologising and non-pathologising discourses, is highly problematic for queer memoir texts. Foucault argues that nineteenth-century codifying discourses appear from 1870 onwards. However, this thesis argues that the desire to fix (in both senses, cure and make firm) queer ambiguity exists well before the 1870 paradigm shift. Additionally, Lister's *Diaries* illustrate frequent attempts to fix ambiguity in a much earlier period through encroaching projection and social censure dispensed by local communities. In other words, within Lister's *Diaries* there is a gap between codifying discourse and psychological identity formation. This chapter uses the term identity infrequently, but where it does so it uses it as a synonym for individual psyche and subjectivity, rather than a term which is applied to a social grouping, for example, homosexuals, as a cultural/subcultural group in the later period. Although aspects of social opinion declare Lister to be other and deviant, she refuses to internalise this attempted fixing as pejorative. Manifestations of ambiguous subjectivity feature in many different forms in Lister's writing, together with readings and misreadings of her persona by her local community. The *Diaries* contain some very odd instances of subjective reading, including several occasions where Lister is accosted by anonymous men, who demand that she identify herself by name and declare her status. It would be easy to read these instances as a form of projected identity crisis, or as a stalking metaphor for unresolved self-conflict, if the writing were not in diary form. These entries still read like something out of a gothic or sensation novel with characters dressed in mourning garb:

Sunday 25 July [Halifax] 1819

Not halfway up the Cunnery Lane, a little-ish, mechanic-like, young man, in a black coat, touched his hat, stopped & said he wished to have some conversation with me. Suspecting the subject, 'What about, sir?' said I, sternly. He looked

rather dashed but said he wished to ask if I would like to change my situation. 'Good morning, sir' said I, turned on my heel & walked on.[87]

There are few critical studies of the links between Lister's writing and long nineteenth-century Gothic, with the noted exception of Anira Rowanchilds' '"Everything done for effect" Georgic Gothic and Picturesque in Anne Lister's Self-Production.' [88] This chapter cannot offer an expanded analysis, but the relationship between the Gothic and nineteenth-century queer studies is one which continues to be creative and revelatory. Lister also details instances of mystery letters from anonymous men demanding meetings with her. Lister was frequently accosted and subject to taunting, and even on one occasion the victim of a bizarre practical joke based on a fabricated and phantom advertisement in the *Leeds Mercury*. Her diary entry for Sunday 16th January 1819 [Halifax] notes the following:

> As I returned, met two young women and two boys, walked by their side, one of whom said, just before they came up with me. 'That's her that lives at Shibden Hall & advertised in the paper for a sweetheart.' It immediately occurred to me that somebody must have had some advertisement of this kind inserted in the *Leeds Mercury*…Stood talking to my aunt by the kitchen fire, after my uncle went to bed, ¾ hour, about the people calling after me, being like a man and about people's being insulted.[89]

These attempts to control Lister's sense of self and self-worth are strangely uncanny in their complete misreading of Lister's strength of character.   Lister's *Diary* entries are haunted by marginalised, heterosexual masculinity, in a direct reversal of conventional nineteenth-century gender tropes, and in a highly suggestive counterpoint to Castle's

---

[87] Whitbread, p.92.
[88] Anira Rowanchild, '"Everything done for effect" Georgic Gothic and Picturesque in Anne Lister's Self-Production,' in *Women's Writing; The Elizabethan to Victorian Period*, 7:1, (2000), 89-104.
[89] Whitbread, p.114.

work on the links between the apparitional and the lesbian.[90] These mysterious interactions have the curious side effect of making normative control 'uncanny' and deviant. Lister's refusal to bow to these threats makes her seem significantly more 'normal' than those who would try to fix her.   Lister's *Diaries* also contain very early examples of linguistic reclamation.   Her writing details frequent occasions where language is adapted, or appropriated, as a positive marker of difference. The *Diaries* contain numerous references to 'odd', 'oddity', and 'queer', and the writing elaborates ways in which these appropriations defuse the power of insult. For example, the following diary entry of Thursday 22 April [Halifax] 1819 reads:

> Ellen had asked me not to study so much. She said I should be going mad. She had thought so often, for I was certainly odd. I laughed & said I was sane enough yet, I hoped, & people might be odd without being mad, adding that, if I was mad, I would beg to go to Elvington to show her what I was like...[91]

Diaries as Whole Text – Lister Archives

 Anne Lister's *Diaries* occupy an unusual position in relation to conventional publication and access. The sixth of the *Diaries* originally written in code are now available in decoded, published form, in three volumes edited by Helena Whitbread[92]   Other originally uncoded sections of the *Diary* journals have been published in diverse historical studies of Halifax, Shibden Hall and the Lister family. Although complete access to the original *Diaries* is now available online, they are not fully transcribed, resulting in

---

[90] See Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press 1993).
[91] Whitbread, p.90.
[92] Whitbread, Helena, ed., *I Know My Own Heart – The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), *No Priest But Love – The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) and *The Secret Diaries of Anne Lister* (London: Hachette Digital, 2010).

the odd position of this being available in the public domain but not accessible for full reading. Very few academic studies or articles focus on this anomaly, or even make direct reference to it. In the longer term, this anomaly is likely to challenge researchers as the possibility of further publication becomes available. Alternative interpretations, or readings of the code cipher and coded section of Lister's *Diaries* and letters, are also likely to foreground possible variations from Whitbread and Jill Liddington's code interpretations. The online versions of the *Diaries* also contain notes, which are not included in the published extracts – this is obviously challenging for text-based research.[93] These notes also reference additional uses of the code, its origins and reception in Lister's earlier writing.

Readers and researchers therefore occupy a strange position in relation to the text, in that it is not possible to juxtapose coded and non-coded diary entries alongside each other. This also creates a significant challenge for those working on the relationships between textual closeting, diverse types of writing and levels of intimacy and desire. The first use of code by Lister is recorded in 1806 (available online) in letters to Eliza Raine. As these letters are not easily accessible it is difficult to evaluate their importance in the development of Lister's coding. However, scholars have started to work on these earlier materials, for example, Patricia Hughes.[94] This early use of shared, coded writing also raises the issue of collaborative writing and ownership between correspondents and decoding reader/writers. In the context of Lister's writing, this includes shared code development between Lister, Eliza Raine, Marianne Belcombe, Isabella Norcliffe and Helena Whitbread's translation, writing and interpretation of

---

[93] Via http://www.historytoherstory.org.uk/ About one sixth of the entries are in a letter-by-letter code, other entries are heavily abbreviated. [accessed 2 December 2015].
[94] Patricia Hughes, *The Early Life of Miss Anne Lister and the Curious Tale of Miss Eliza Raine* (self-published 2014).

coded diary extracts.[95] The result of this unique scenario is that researchers will

potentially reference the diaries as the published extracts, without being able to

understand the contexts from which the extracts are taken, and this raises the issue of

textual distortion.   This is not a criticism of existing scholarship, rather that the

implications of the current situation have the unfortunate effect of closeting Lister's non-

coded diary entries. It is also easy to make assumptions about non-coded diary entries,

for example, that they shed no light on Lister's self-construction or non-normative desire

because they are not obviously hidden.   Where these entries have appeared in historical

studies of Lister, they are less obviously identified as parts of the diary.   Conversely, it is

possible to argue that the roots of these problems are based in Lister's own sporadic use

of the code, in combination with a total of twenty-one other diary volumes.

Gender Performativity, Dress and Regency Role-Play

Moving on from textual and social closeting in Lister's *Diaries,* I now investigate

connections between visible difference and invisible otherness in the making of Lister's

body, gender, mannerisms and clothing.   Tensions between voluntary and involuntary

labelling in Lister's diary writing are analysed, together with public perceptions of Lister's

gender encroachment, physical gestures and performance alongside Judith Butler's

definitions of gender performance and performativity:

> It's one thing to say that gender is performed and that is a little different from
> saying gender is performative. When we say gender is performed we usually
> mean that we've taken on a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting
> or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we
> present to the world. To say that gender is performative is a little different
> because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of

effects.   We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman.[96]

While Lister's *Diary* appearance and demeanour has frequently been used as an example of early nineteenth century 'female masculinity,' very few analyses have focussed on the range and subtlety of gender characteristics and their consolidation (to use Butler's term) in Lister's *Diaries.* I evaluate the appropriacy of Judith Halberstam's term here but also suggest more recent conceptual terms and their possible application to Lister's *Diary* personae in the form of genderqueer, transvestism, cross-dressing and drag personae.   Ultimately, the question remains concerning what Lister means when she says she is 'softly gentleman-like.'[97] How can this be interpreted in a vastly different historical context, and how does this relate to ideas of passing and female husbands in the nineteenth century?   For example, a recently produced activist website *Defining genderqueer* gives the following definitions*:*

> *Genderqueer* is a term that may be used to describe those with non-normative[1] gender, either as an umbrella term or a stand-alone identity, typically encompassing those who are in one, or more, of these six categories:
>
> 1. both man and woman (example: *androgyne*)
> 2. neither man nor woman (*agender*, *neutrois, non-gendered*)
> 3. moving between two or more genders (*gender fluid*)
> 4. third gendered or other-gendered (includes those who prefer "genderqueer" or "non-binary" to describe their gender without labeling it otherwise)
> 5. having an overlap or blur of gender and orientation and/or sex [2] (*girlfags* and *guydykes*)
> 6. those who 'queer' gender, in presentation or otherwise, who may or may not see themselves as non-binary or having a gender that is queer; this category

---

[96] Judith Butler, taken from 'Your Behavior Creates Your Gender,' online interview transcript February 11, 2009, p.1 at http://bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender, accessed 1 December 2015.
[97] Whitbread, p.136.

may also include those who are consciously political or radical in their understanding of being genderqueer[98]

I have used activist blogs and websites in the absence of more conventional academic sources. I use the term genderqueer because of its flexibility alongside historical labels, in relation to established historical oppositions. Lister's *Diaries* show her inhabiting a number of differently gendered personae and subjectivities, which fit more comfortably within a genderqueer or non -binary framework.

The reality of Lister's gender positions within the *Diaries* is highly complex, both in terms of her interpretation of, and access to, a variety of early nineteenth-century queer roles, such as: cross dresser, passing woman, and female husband. Lister explores these roles alongside others borrowed from normative, romantic role-play and patterns of seduction, in the form of the romantic hero/heroine (Don Juan) and adapted forms of courtly behaviour. The text details Lister trying on a number of different demeanours and personae for size, none of which seem to be a truly comfortable fit. Within these biographical personae, a split becomes apparent between Lister's queer sexuality and Lister's genderqueerness. The level of conscious identity coherence attributed to Lister is often at odds with her unconscious connection between her gendered appearance and the reading of her othered sexuality. As Marjorie Garber has suggested the relationship between gender performance, dress, and sexuality is highly complex and frequently shifting:

> The history of transvestism and the history of homosexuality constantly intersect and intertwine, both willingly and unwillingly. They cannot simply be

---

[98] *Genderqueer Identities,* Defining Genderqueer, http://genderqueerid.com/what-is-gq 2011 accessed 1 December 2015.

disentangled. But what is also clear is that neither can simply be transhistorically 'decoded' as a sign for the other.[99]

The level of awareness, consciousness and control of the genderqueered subject, has challenged critics trying to elucidate the projection and reading of masculinised female appearance. Diverse studies do exist concerning women's awareness of masculinity and cultural assumptions in later periods, for example, the First World War, but even here there seems to be a confusion between social projection and self-construction, as Jenny Gould notes:

> The mannish or masculine woman in uniform, then, was thought by others to be 'peculiar at least, if not downright immoral', and she herself *presumably*, experienced a keen awareness that her unusual self-presentation was generating particular cultural associations about her sexual identity. (My italics).[100]

This presumption may stand in a post-sexology period but it is much more problematic in an earlier historical context. Nevertheless, the *Diaries* place Lister's genderqueerness alongside these masculine, non-passing women, but her uniform is of her own making.

This part of the chapter will explore the connections between nineteenth-century passing identities, dress and queerness, and their relevance to Lister's *Diary* personae. In her Paris diary entry of Monday, 4th October 1824 Lister writes of her interactions with British 'friends' and subtle social snubs which she connects with her inability to dress appropriately:

---

[99] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 131.
[100] Jenny Gould, 'Women's Military Services in First World War Britain' in *Between the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars,* ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) pp,114-125 (p.121).

> Major and Mrs Norcliffe…had called. Received them in the drawing room…but only for 2 or 3 minutes, for the woman wanted to measure my head [for a new bonnet], & the Norcliffes went away. She (Mrs Norcliffe) held out her hand…not a word said about my breakfasting with them… Would rather be out of the way. I cannot appear as I should wish. I want someone with me that I need not be ashamed of - I feel this every day – to choose my dress, etc. Passed Mlle. de Sans on the boulevard. Was it intentional that she did not know me.[101]

Lister's anxiety is clear from this entry – 'to choose my dress etc.' indicates the level of vulnerability and confusion which she experiences in interpreting dress and clothing. This statement also situates Lister in a rare position of child-like dependence on the expertise of another, appropriately 'feminine' woman/dresser whom she needs to pick suitable outfits for her. This entry also suggests the confusing overlap in Lister's mind concerning the role of prospective partner/companion/ladies maid/ladies companion as if she is not sure if she needs a relationship or staff. This dresser role, which is akin to a maid, also indicates the way in which upper-middle class women were infantilised in the period, needing another women to dress them, pick out their clothes and address their personal toilet such as brushing of their hair. This statement therefore has a dual textual function, touching on dress and gender, but also outlining Lister's aspirational class position. Lister understands self-fashioning but not fashion per se. She does not know what to do about her failed dress and cannot make her own decisions concerning aspects of her own appearance, which is greatly at odds with her assertiveness and strength of character shown in other parts of the text.

The entry is a painful admission of failure, and a clear reminder of the possible links between the reading of her inappropriate appearance, non-consolidated gender performance and social ostracism. Although direct disapproval is not expressed here,

---

[101] Whitbread, *No Priest But Love,* pp.24-25.

this entry records Lister's nagging sense of doubt concerning the links between the reading of her appearance and her social reception. In this section, layers of frustration and insecurity are encapsulated. Lister is at a loss, does not know what to do and is in need of guidance. There is something surprisingly touching in the level of honesty here, and in the feeling of frustration and unfairness. Lister is clearly impacted by this social judgement, which happens in a space of silence in which 'not a word said.' 'I cannot appear as I should wish' is also a highly ambivalent and complex summary of failed performance and distorted authenticity. The reader is left with a feeling that what Lister is trying to articulate is rather 'I cannot appear as others would wish me to' and 'I cannot appear as myself.' Lister is left giving a performance which fails to match her sense of self, and which occupies an area often inhabited by those accused of deceptive transvestism and drag. 'I would rather be out of the way' implies a form of retreat back into a non-closeted space where Lister is free from issues of conformity, permission and approval, a space that fits rather than misfits.

The reference to being measured (for a new bonnet according to Helena Whitbread's commentary) becomes a metaphor for Lister's attempts to try on different guises. These repeat fittings become an obsessive ritual in the *Diary* texts where Lister tries to meet feminine standards, only to be seen as going through the motions and not fully embodying gender characteristics. Lister becomes an actor trying to get her audience to 'buy the lie' but she still fails to convince. The Parisian setting for this particular entry also offers a pointed example of cultural differences between Lister's reception by most local acquaintances and by visiting friends. Yorkshire disapproval follows her across the channel, forcing her to retreat into a place of safety offstage and out of sight of a normative audience gaze. This particular entry is poignantly completed

68

by an allusion to a lack of recognition, but also to a lack of understanding: 'Was it intentional that she did not *know* me?' (My italics). The writing here cleverly, if subconsciously, intimates the connotative possibilities of knowing, (being familiar with) and knowing (recognising a core identity).

Lister's failed gender performance becomes read as a form of transvestism in the *Diaries*, even though her biological sex is unambiguous. Lister's occupation of a third gender space is uneasily held, eighty-ninety years before the role becomes codified and available. As Garber notes the idea of a third space is highly significant in the history of transvestism and cross-dressing:

> The transvestite mocks our reliance on binary oppositions. […]Spectacular and specular at once, this third sex raised the spectre of sexual and social anxiety; pinpointing anxieties that were particularly prevalent in the latter half of the Victorian period.[102]

Garber traces the development of the 'third sex' through Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work in the field of sexology. However, this leaves a nagging question, about what happens to those who try to occupy, or unintentionally occupy, this third space, before codifying language and discourse becomes available? Specific aspects of Lister's persona do clearly align her with von Krafft-Ebing's definition of 'the Mannish lesbian' and his definition of pathological inversion, despite Lister's great skill in avoiding contemporary pathology in her own milieu. As Garber notes:

> It was Havelock Ellis who divided *female* homosexuals into two groups: 'the congenital invert' who belonged to an 'intermediate sex,' and the potentially 'healthy' heterosexual who was prey to the advances of the invert. […] The statistically small group of genetically anomalous 'inverts' could, and did, corrupt

---

[102] Garber, p.131.

the much larger population of female 'homosexuals' who, while not themselves 'homosexual' were genetically predisposed to seduction by women.[103]

Lister's clear attraction to feminine women means that she inhabits a position which von Krafft-Ebing would regard as pathological, predatory and corrupting. Although the *Diary* texts situate Lister firmly, and literally, within her own period and timeline, she is paradoxically out of her time, or before her time because of these associations. She shares these characteristics with other queer writers such as Michael Field.

Historical discussions of clothing and flexible gender identity are often focussed on the notion of 'passing.' 'Passing' is defined as a way of convincing others that you are the opposite gender, undetermined by biology/biological sex characteristics. However, the notion of passing is highly problematic in early and mid-nineteenth-century texts, such as Lister's *Diaries* and Barbin's memoirs because neither fit into a pattern of conscious transgender swapping. If Lister fails to pass or convince, it is in the realm of the faulty link between her biology and poorly performed femininity; admittedly with a minor form of gender swap in her gentlemanly persona. Fictional texts set in the nineteenth century offer an interesting parallel between Lister's identity and that of passing women. For example, George Moore's novella *Albert Nobbs* offers a clear model of a female husband in the form of Hubert Page, and then proceeds to undercut fixed notions of both gender and sexuality. [104] Moore's novella is a fictional representation of a late nineteenth-century female-to-male cross-dresser Albert, who has decided to pass as a man in order to survive poverty caused by the death of his parents. The text is genderqueer but exhibits a much more ambivalent construction of sexuality. It is a

---

[103] Ibid., p.139.
[104] George Moore, *Albert Nobbs: A Novella* (1927) (London: Penguin, 2011).

notable example of how nuanced, subtle and complex the matrices can be in individual constructions of queer/non-normative subjectivity, as Joseph O'Leary argues:

> George Moore's story of cross dressing and sexual confusion, *Albert Nobbs*, approaches these topics not via ideology or psychotherapy, but with a sophisticated empathy learnt from literary tradition. It focusses precisely on the 'palpable' person , the 'suffering individual', that Butler is accused of bypassing, though it also contains behaviourist insights like the artificial and arbitrary nature of gender itself, and its protagonist exhibits plenty of incoherence and fluidity.[105]

Albert Nobbs also features two women who are both nominally heterosexual – one actively, one platonically, who become Hubert and Albert. In Moore's novella the gender is swapped but the sexuality is not, the gender opposition being maintained, both Hubert and Albert are in, or attempt to be in, publicly heterosexual relationships. Hubert's marriage to another woman is therefore not necessarily an expression of lesbianism but the need to maintain a heterosexually passable coupling. Hubert becomes Hubert because as a woman she decides to leave her abusive husband, not because she feels an identity shift per see. Similarly, Albert is forced by circumstances into genderqueerness, having been rejected by a man in straitened circumstances, and then enters half-heartedly into a potential courtship with a woman, whilst tethered to the idea of celibacy and asexuality, rather than same-sex desire.

The unique and positive aspect of Lister's personal performance is that she selects terms such as 'husband' and 'wife' from a normative vocabulary and plays with them. Lister is not trying to be a man, look like one, or pass as one, other than to engender enough confusion to provide a safe space for courtship and seduction, where other women are not challenged but can indulge a fantasy of a masculine suitor within

---

[105] Joseph O'Leary, 'Sex and Gender in *Albert Nobbs*,' *Journal of Irish Studies* 26. 5, (2011), 88-96, (p.88).

the body of a woman. Lister walks a continuous tightrope between, 'softly, gentleman like'[106] and masculine, often tipping over the edge, or pushing at the edge of respectability.   Lister does pass as gentleman-like but not as masculine, she is not masculine enough to pass as a man, or feminine enough to pass as a woman. The lack of intentional passing marks Lister out from other women who cross-dressed in this period for a variety of reasons (not all related to sexual expression). Lister does make a reference in the diaries to being passed off (see analysis below of the Scarborough confrontation), but it is unclear what this means, in the same vein as the ambiguous 'smoking out.' There is a consistent social tension in texts which articulate forms of genderqueerness, between what is natural to the individual, and what is socially approved of as natural. The Lister *Diaries* contain a number of notable assertions of her naturalness and are often queer rather than conventionally normative. Lister associates pathology and disease in the texts with normative, or opposite-sex relationships, she acquires a sexual infection from Marianne which she identifies as being from her sexual contact with her husband. Normative sexuality is therefore, identified as the source of abnormality and disease, rather than health.   Lister feels metaphorically, as well as literally, contaminated by her indirect sexual contact with a man.

One of the key diary entries concerning nature and pathology occurs during Lister's traumatic visit to Scarborough on Wednesday 17th September 1823 [Scarborough].[107]   Marianne enters into a discussion concerning these concepts, which has a devastating effect on Lister.   She voices normative social censure in

---

106 Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart,* p. 136.
107 Ibid., p.296.

excruciatingly direct terms and makes a clear distinction between her behaviour and identity persona in a horribly, uncanny reworking of von Krafft-Ebing's later theories.

She also encapsulates, in one sentence, everything that Lister is fighting against: 'She said I did not know her feeling; the objection the horror she had to anything unnatural'.[108] Marianne wants to sleep with Lister but does not want to deal with the disapproval which their acknowledged relationship would engender. She projects her shame onto Lister, and tries to make her feel ashamed of who she is. Lister tries to accommodate Marianne's shame by using the deceptive term 'pass me off', offering a more closeted version of herself:

> Told M – I would not be with her again in strange places till I had an establishment of my own & that degree of importance that would carry me thro', for that she, & she owned it, had not consequence enough to, as it were, pass me off.[109]

Lister is forced to confront the full scale of Marianne's aversion and attempts to accommodate this phobic reaction to her own detriment. Marianne is clearly able, and keen, to make a distinction between behaviour and personal persona in a way that Lister is not. The whole entry can be summarised with the sentiment, 'you are not acceptable, I am publicly ashamed of you and you are not normal.' Little wonder that this discussion damages the relationship irrevocably. Touchingly Lister tries to understand Marianne's position and acknowledges it, even at the moment of potential self-destruction: 'I shewed her I understood her & then observed upon my conduct & feelings being surely natural to me inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious but instinctive.'[110] In this moment of epiphany, Lister finally realizes that she cannot survive in a relationship where she is being repeatedly shamed and denied. If the *Diaries* show anything, it is

---

[108] Ibid., p.297.
[109] Ibid., p.296.
[110] Ibid., p.297.

that Lister understood that the key to her psychological survival was to keep shame and closeting on the outside, rather than the inside.

In the text, Marianne becomes a symbol of both social disapproval and hypocrisy. Ultimately, and ironically, it is Marianne who is shown to be playing a part. Marianne is the Regency embodiment of keeping up appearances, literally and metaphorically. She tries to police Lister's behaviour and visible persona in their Scarborough discussions: 'Yet, said I, taking me altogether, would you have me changed? Yes said she, 'To give you a feminine figure.'[111] Sadly the last thing Marianne is prepared to do is 'to take Lister altogether'. However, Lister is at pains to point out that social judgements are not always based on her appearance, although her argument is not particularly convincing:

> I have mentioned that Miss Morritt & Miss Goodricke's conduct is so pointed they must have some especial reason for it. It cannot be merely my relative situation in life or my manners or my appearance. There must be something affecting character more than we know.[112]

The fact that Lister has to mention three possible objections before a mysterious dislike appears does significantly undermine her argument! Appearance and its effects become increasingly loaded in the diaries as Marianne's concern with looks is shown to be 'worldly' (never used as a compliment in the text), deceptive and inauthentic. Despite this the diaries clearly outline the extent of Lister's psychological trauma caused by the breakdown of her relationship with Marianne.

The performance aspect of Lister's dress is powerfully encapsulated by her decision to only wear black. The portrait of Lister by Joshua Horner, which usually

---

[111] Ibid., p.296.
[112] Ibid., pp.297-298.

resides at Shibden Hall, shows her wearing an austere, if conventional, Regency dress.[113] Her hands are markedly absent from the portrait. Her black dress is signified, textually and contextually, as a form of mourning dress for a person who is not dead. Regency customs indicate that the initial state of deep mourning for a spouse would usually last for a period of around a year. Lister enters a state of temporary mourning in the text, which becomes permanent when she fails to resurrect her relationship with Marianne. Her black dress is therefore an acknowledgement of grief but also a mark of failure, which is compounded by her social circle who fail to offer an explanation for this austerity other than to suggest that Lister is a bad dresser. Lister does not write of Marianne's reaction to her change of dress or any other mentions of her widowhood from those around her. Lister's deep mourning dress would have caused social confusion: she is mourning for a (publically) unidentified person who hadn't actually died, and is an unmarried woman wearing widow's weeds and mourning jewellery made out of possibly pubic hair. As Sarah Dempster's article in *The Guardian,* on the BBC's dramatised version of *The Secret Diaries of Anne Lister* makes clear*:*

> Cue innumberable shots of Lister striding determinedly across the moors in a series of heroically horrible 'miffed widow' numbers, one of which appears to consist entirely of flattened crows. It was all rather heartening. [114]

The Diary entries clearly show the causative connection between Marianne Belcombe's marriage and Lister's decision to go into mourning. She writes the following for Tuesday 2 September and Saturday 13th September 1817, both in Halifax:

---

[113] See Appendix One.
[114] Sarah Dempster, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 1st June 2010, via http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/jun/01/secret-diary-miss-anne-lister [accessed 1 December 2015].

> Spent the whole of the morning in vamping up a pair of old black chamois shoes and getting my things ready to go and drink tea at Cliff-Hill. As soon as I was dressed, went to drink tea with the Miss Walkers of Cliff-hill. Went in black silk the first time to an evening visit. I have entered upon my plan of always wearing black.[115]

> A thousand reflections and recollections crowded on me last night. The last time I slept in this room & in this bed, it was with Marianne, in 1815, the summer of. Surely no one ever doted on another as I did then on her. I fondly thought my love and happiness would last for ever, Alas, how changed. She has married a blackguard for the sake of his money.[116]

The wider public of Halifax is unable to understand Lister's public mourning of a secret event. Lister entered full mourning dress in 1817 and never came out of it; forever stuck at the point of grief, like a queer Miss Havisham, she was unable to secure Marianne as her permanent partner.[117] Lister's dress as detailed in the *Diaries* conforms to conventional Regency mourning garb and also strangely overlaps with the required mourning dress for Princess Charlotte's period of official mourning which was to start on 6 November 1817, as Stephen Behrendt notes:

> When a four-week period of 'deepest mourning' was declared for Charlotte (a relatively short period for someone so near the crown), the court mourning dress decreed by the Lord Chamberlain required women to wear black bombazine (a particularly dull blend of wool and silk) and muslin adorned with crape accessories.

> While Lister's diary writing offers a clear connection between grief, mourning, and queer widowhood – the reading of Lister's mourning dress is persistently obtuse across a range of geographical and social locations. Her mourning becomes the textual equivalent of a Regency elephant in the room, the reader knows and is aware of it but

---

[115] Whitbread, p.14.

[116] Ibid.,p15.

[117] Stephen C. Behrendt, *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp199-200.

no-one ever mentions it directly. Lister's enactment of widowhood is self-acknowledged but not so by the wider world.   Lister is playing a role that others refuse to recognise. Conversely, Lister's decision to enter and display full mourning ironically allows her the psychological freedom to pursue other relationships with Miss Brown and Mrs Barlow. The role of queer widow allows Lister to express aspects of her psyche even if they cannot be fully read, or read conventionally.   The fate of literal widows in the diary texts is also seriously problematic: replicating a wide nineteenth-century concern about widows and their ambiguous social standing. Witness Mrs Barlow and her precarious identity, fragile socio-economic position and possible gold digging.   Lister writes on several occasions that she cannot trust Mrs Barlow and fears that she may be after her for her position: 'In silence, I thought to myself, somehow I cannot get rid of the idea of her wanting to catch me…Has she ever used Mr Bell's name to spur me on? Surely she had hopes of gaining me?'[118] Lister is torn between her feelings and her reading of Mrs Barlow's potentially subversive widowhood, between dynastic, class considerations and emotional/sexual needs. [119] This tension becomes one which Lister cannot resolve.

Writing offers Lister a form of catharsis, a psychological safety net and a free space, as well as a creative channel.   The *Diaries* also offer intriguing insights into psycho –geography, personae construction and the use of natural space.   Lister associates herself with Shibden and claims it as her cultured and wild domain, and buffer zone from psychological attack.   This spatial issue is also reflected in the diary code.   Lister sometimes leaves highly revealing entries uncoded which are set within the parameters

---

[118] Diary entry, *I Know My Own Heart,* Tuesday, 23 Aug. 1825, Whitbread, p.118.
[119] See Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction 1850-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) for links between oddity, queerness and widowhood.

of Shibden estate and surrounding land, away from social contact, and then shifts back into code, if not role-play in a reversal of her usual patterning.[120]

Other masculine women are largely sidelined in the text on the grounds of their lack of sexual attractiveness and possible competition with Lister, for example, Tib (Isabella) Norcliffe, and Miss Pickford. Interestingly Lister does not record any instances of Isabella Norcliffe, Miss Pickford, or Miss Threlfall receiving abuse on the grounds of their masculinised appearance. Therefore, this suggests that Lister's characterisation as 'Gentleman Jack' in Halifax hides a deeper and more particular level of social anxiety, which is specific to her.   However, the diaries also outline ways in which Lister uses her gentlemanly qualities to court and seduce women (using this label to her own advantage) in a successful performance of suitor, as Anna Clark notes of Lister's sophisticated, romantic repertoire:

> Anne's masculinity signalled to lovers that a woman could sexually desire in a way that was both threatening and alluring. Flirting with Marianne's sisters she wrote, 'My manners are certainly peculiar, not all masculine but rather soft gentleman like. I know how to please girls.'[121]

Unfortunately, for Lister it appears that the wider reading of her persona was more often based on the first category, rather than the second, with viewers unable or unwilling to understand these subtle distinctions. The tension between this performance and unconsolidated gender performativity is threaded throughout the diary volumes and is worked and reworked, but never fully resolved.   Lister's persona is arguably more threatening than Isabella Norcliffe's and Miss Pickford's because she is attracted to

---

[120] Roulston, p.272.

[121] Anna Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1996), 23-50 (pp.42-43).

conventionally feminine women rather than women who are androgynous or masculine in parts.   In other words, the *Diaries* explore the ways in which Lister targets women who may be available for relationships with men, or who have been, or are in, opposite-sex relationships. This may partly explain the increased level of pejorative labelling in Lister's case (bearing in mind the proportion of these entries in relation to the overall volumes). This is not to imply that such feminine women were not queer, but that their superficial femininity made them seem accessible as objects of male desire.   Some queer women have not needed to out themselves as masculine because of their visible characteristics, supported by body language and clothing. Of course, not all masculine women in the nineteenth century were queer, and not all queer women were masculine a point which Lister's life writing illustrates very eloquently. To complicate matters further, genderqueer does not necessarily support queer sexuality, although it often does. That Lister is able to seduce so many women suggests that the connotative relationship between gender and sexuality is highly complex in an early nineteenth-century context. Lister's *Diaries* show that she does not make a connection between the reading of gender characteristics in other women and possible sexual availability, or potential queerness.   The *Diaries* do not show what happens when these feminine women are forced to redefine their own characteristics as a result of their involvement with Lister. Both Eliza Raine, and Ann Walker suffered serious mental health problems within and without their relationship with Lister.

Despite the candour of the *Diary* narration there are certain topics, including mental health and madness, that even for Lister as coded writer are too traumatic to include. Lister places pathology beyond the *Diaries'* reach to maintain a safe space and to avoid encountering that which is too close to home. This, however, has the curious

effect of making Eliza Raine and Anne Walker seem like ghosts haunting the text for those readers who are aware of the broader biographical context. Lister is touched by pathology but not pathologised. Lister is also curiously silent about several close family members who are deceased; her brothers and her mother are barely mentioned in the published *Diary* extracts. There is a single, poignant, but disturbing mention of Lister's mother in the Parisian *Diary* extracts:

> Leaned my head on her breast. Kissed the left one over her habit shirt. Wanted to open that. She would not permit me but closed her shawl. At last, however, she felt this open again. I said my mother has nursed me when my sister was born. She had too much milk. I liked it exceedingly. Asked if she, Mrs Barlow would nurse: Oh no she could not do this.[122]

Lister uses ideas of the eroticised maternal here to appeal to Maria Barlow, the only one of her diary lovers who has a child.

In order to explore the extent of the *Diaries*' treatment of female masculinity, and gender, two entries will be used which elucidate the distinction between performative and performance and which focus on the presence or absence of a phallus. As Judith Halberstam notes, Lister does adopt traditional feminine dress but still fails to convince locals that she is fully female: 'Anne remarks on the stares that she draws from people who think she might be a man (this despite the fact that she always wears women's clothing).'[123] Although both Clark and Halberstam argue that the *Diaries* show how Lister is partially able to offset social judgement because of her elevated social status, there is still a lack of consensus between them; on whether it is gender confusion, which provokes insult, or lack of confusion. Clark uses the term androgyny,[124] whereas

---

[122] Whitbread, *No Priest But* Love, p.53.
[123] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 69.
[124] Clark, p.37.

Halberstam suggests that Lister's feminine dress fails to override her clear masculinity. it is her own inability to perform effectively enough with established terms of femininity that causes her serious problems. Even with Marianne, there are occasions where this role-play fails because of this secondary, visible aspect.

The instances of name calling in the *Diaries* serve to foreground tensions between the reading of internal and external gender characteristics in a conceptual space of impossibility. That Lister is a woman is clear enough to those who threaten her. She is ridiculed because of her inability to produce a conventional version of femininity. She is also ridiculed by men who are clearly threatened by the possibility of her refusal to submit to 'real' masculinity and phallic power. The two entries which concern Lister's potential phallus represent a suggestive contrast in terms of their ownership and attribution.   In Lister's *Diary* entry of Sunday 28th June 1818 [Halifax] she records comments from the local populace about her:

> The people generally remark, as I pass along, how much I am like a man. I think they did it more than usual this evening. At the top of Cunnery Lane, as I went, three men said, as usual, 'That's a man' & one axed [*sic*] 'Does your cock stand?' I know not how it is but I feel low this evening.[125]

This entry gives a microcosm of the confusion, and paradoxical lack of confusion, which Clark and Halberstam have highlighted. Male reactions to Lister clearly assert her masculinity at the same time as denigrating her. In other words, locals only dare to taunt Lister because they know that she is not a man, and therefore she occupies a lower status at the same time as she holds a privileged class position. The stating of Lister's proposed maleness is what actually undermines it (if she really was a man there would be no need

---

[125] Whitbread, *I Know My Own* Heart, pp.48-49.

to say so?) This is reinforced by the references to a possibly functioning penis. This goading of Lister simultaneously insults but also strangely suggests a need to reposition Lister within a male discourse of potency, or its lack.   The fact there are three men involved suggests that they feel empowered by their numbers. Lister is considered fair game for vulgarity because she is not lady-like (lacking in feminine performativity). She also positions herself within a largely same-sex female milieu with her attributed phallus, which puts men under threat. This over-determined maleness is a reaction against Lister's indifference and refusal to defer to patriarchal and sexually normative structures. The assertion 'that's a man' reinforces the paradoxical nature of avowal as disavowal – the need to state sex patently undermines it.

This interaction also produces an odd by-product of (assumed), non-queer men being fascinated by the idea of a woman with a phallus, within a triangulated relationship dynamic (to use Sedgwick's term), for a repressed form of male bonding which fixates on the cock. Lister occupies the central position which allows the possibility of homosocial bonding between men excited at the possibility of finding a phallus. Although this statement suggests the need for phallic control, the attribution to Lister cannot be revoked and therefore, has to be accompanied by potential impotency and lack of virility. Despite Lister using a non-gender specific term, people, at the start of this entry, it soon becomes clear that it is men who are the chief-instigators of direct taunting. This implies that Lister's masculinity provokes a much stronger reaction in men than it does in women.   Lister cleverly re-works this penis attribution, through the use of sexual fantasy in a later diary entry, where she imagines herself with a functioning penis, replacing a missing member with one which supports her sexual desire and ideas of dominance:

Foolish fancying about Caroline Greenwood, meeting her on Skircoat Moor, taking her into a shed there is there & being connected with her. Supposing myself in men's clothing & having a penis, tho' nothing more. All this is very bad. Let me try to make a great exertion & get the better of this lazyness [*sic*] in a morning – the root of all evil […]Now I will try & turn over a new leaf & waste no more time in bed or in any way else that I can help. May God's help attend this resolution.[126]

The later lines, however, suggest that it is laziness and lack of activity that is 'very bad', rather than sex.

Lister's choice of a shed (probably used for animals) as a location for sex may seem a purely practical option but the connotative possibilities are intriguing.   This remote shelter occupies a space between worlds, and an inside space outside. Its location allows Lister to go beyond normal boundaries and indulge her wild nature to the full. The space also seems to be abandoned and belonging to no one. Lister feels free to claim it and indulge her gender role-play to the full, in her diary writing, if not in reality. This no-man's land between Shibden and Halifax allows Lister to produce her own version of selected masculinity. There may also be unintentional humour in the 'shedding' of sexual inhibition!

This note on sexual fantasy also serves to illustrate the complexity of Lister's relationship to her biology and gender, whilst providing a clear assertion of Lister's lack of gender dysphoria. The reference to the use of men's clothing clearly shows that this dress is not normal for Lister and she does not characterise her own clothing as that which is generally considered male. Lister's self-definition does not reflect her external labelling, making a distinction between sexual role-play/fantasy and internalised gender

---

[126] Ibid.,p.151.

confusion. The confusion is in the way Lister's persona is read and received by others, not by herself. She is not a man and she does not want to be one, hence the reference to 'tho nothing more.' What she wants is to claim sexual access to women she courts and desires.   Lister's use of a fantasy penis without reproduction actually gives her an advantage, as Halberstam suggests:

> Indeed, she notes in response to a letter from a female admirer: 'Tis well I have not a penis. I could never have been content.' Anne's lack of a penis, which we might call the privileged gadget of male masculinity – allows her pleasure without danger, almost unlimited access to women she desires and the joys of sex without marriage.[127]

The act of writing allows the sexually desiring Lister to write her own penis as part of her sexual repertoire. The *Diaries* constantly note the tension between Lister's libido and her need to maintain her socio-economic position and dynastic status. Lister is usually attracted to women who occupy a lower class position, in this case the 'vulgar' Caroline Greenwood.   In terms of class, Lister's inability to secure her lineage through marriage and reproduction is diametrically opposed to the advantages that Halberstam outlines. Lister's concern for the survival of her bloodline oddly connects her with the idea of female vampirism, and its links to aristocracy and genetic purity in nineteenth-century culture. She is easily able to ensure consent from her female lovers and possesses the power of a female phallus but is unable to transform them other than through her text.

According to Helena Whitbread, Lister was known as a tuft-hunter (a nineteenth-century term for a social climber) but also acquired the name due to her habit of collecting pubic hair from her lovers. Tuft-hunter neatly collapses sex and class within one term. Whitbread cites the use of the word in a recent tweet, alongside mentions of

---

[127] Halberstam, p.68.

Lady Caroline Lamb and the posting of her pubic hair to Byron. Unfortunately, it is hard to tell whether Whitbread is aware of the double meaning of the term, or whether she is employing it to create semantic confusion for humorous effect. If both meanings are accurate in the case of Lister, then this offers the intriguing possibility of a term which simultaneously connotes sexual trophy hunting alongside social climbing.[128] The idea of sexual tuft-hunting also subverts the idea of human hair being included posthumously in nineteenth-century mourning jewellery, and the ritual of head hair being exchanged as a mark of romantic love. Curiously, in this one term sex, death and class become merged and potentially written on the body.

The relationship between gender, sexuality and class is often overlooked in critical analyses of Lister's writing. Lister needs to access her upper-middle-class credentials partly for their own sake, but also because they afford her protection from social attack. Conversely the combination of class disdain and gender nonconformity leaves Lister open to attack. Her unorthodox manners and demeanour act as a focus for dissent from those who would wish to 'bring her down a peg or two.' Lister is frequently snubbed by locals, including the Rawsons (neighbouring landowners) even outside of Halifax. For example, Lister records the following entry for Thursday 17 April [York] 1823:

> Passed Mr Christopher Rawson, & Mrs Empson near the bridge but their backs were turned & I took no notice. It made me feel a little queerish but I walked quickly. […] The others turned their backs. I took no notice. […] Lucky, thought I, to be near-sighted…[129]

---

[128] Whitbread, Helena, @HelenaWhitbread: @conversiontales @historyworkstv Anne Lister collected locks of pubic hair from her lovers. She gained the reputation of 'tuft-hunter.'4:33 AM – 11 Oct 13.
[129] Whitbread, *I Know My Own* Heart, p.249.

(The irony of course, is that Lister does notice, and does see the behaviour, even if she discounts its impact.) It is of course highly suggestive that the experience makes her feel queerish. Lister's inability or refusal to hide her dislike for the vulgar Halifax populace creates a hostility, which is easily redirected at her masculine Achilles heel. As Lister writes:

> Speaking of the Staveleys (Mrs Staveley too), said no talent could make up for such bad manners. Bold, boisterous, vulgar and Mrs Staveley slatternly, strangely singular…Met her walking one day in the town with her hands under her petticoat & she pulled out 2 great muffins.[130]

Note the irony of her pejorative labelling, calling others 'strangely singular' and the horror of a woman being eating food with her hands, whilst touching herself, which is oddly reminiscent of Arthur Munby's fascination with the hands of working-class women. Lister is appalled but there is a sense of her protesting a little too much, indicating a potential erotic frisson. There is an obvious and enduring link between appetite and fetishized desire, which is surely present here. Lister also devotes extensive parts of her diary to detailed discussions of food, diet and the pleasure of eating.

Lister's use of vulgarity in the diary texts also offers another example of projected shame, labelling others as embarrassing, or shameful, who fail to observe class distinctions. In the *Diaries*, the terms are applied to show variously; an aversion to new money and trade, lack of culture and education, and those who are not insufficiently deferential. However, Lister also uses the terms as generally dismissive of anything that

---

[130] Ibid.,p. 226.

she dislikes or considers superficial or inappropriate, or in combination with the above

elements, for example:

> Stood for a moment or two viewing the country from the lane above the Cunnery field, & then met Mrs and Miss Greenwood at Benjamin's Gate. Was sorry they had left Shibden. Mrs Greenwood said they had made a long visit and seemed to be in dudgeon. I am glad of it. She is passing vulgar and disagreeable. [131]

The function of vulgarity in nineteenth-century culture and nineteenth-century texts has

recently received greater attention, as have the links between money, gender, and

sexuality.[132]   Lister's use of the terms 'vulgar' and 'vulgarity' does share some

characteristics with the cultural and literary readings contained within Elsie Michie's

recent study of vulgarity, but as usual, Lister fails to fit neatly into cultural orthodoxies.

Lister's diaries do provide a unique insight into the life of an aspirational heiress, in a

socially anomalous position.   The texts offer an alternative, queer version of the

marriage plot found in the texts that Michie selects, as Jill Rappaport summarises in her

review of Michie's monograph:

> *The Vulgar Question of Money* demonstrates the cultural value of 'the characters we love to hate' while also showing the ways in which novels' constructions of virtue depended upon England's ambivalence towards money…Novels offered heroes a choice between materially vulgar, self-interested women of wealth and the (relatively) poor, disembodied, altruistic, heroines they must learn to desire. [133]

Lister's diary writing also illustrates how intertwined these feminine role models are in

reality. For example, Marianne is a genteelly impoverished female, who becomes a rich

woman through her marriage to Charles Lawton. Marianne's position is switched

---

[131] Ibid.,p.131.

[132] See Elsie. B Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry James* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), Matthew Rowlinson, *Real Money and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[133] Rappaport, Jill, 'Review of *The Vulgar Question of* Money', Ibid., *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Spring 2013, 1-2, (pp. 1-2).

immediately from innocent to worldly, a synonym for materialistic which is deeply uncomfortable for Lister. For example, in the diary entry of Wednesday, 20th August, [Halifax]: 'She is too tamely worldly and worldliness is her strength and weakness, her foible and her virtue. She loves me, I do believe her, as well as she is capable of loving yet her marriage was worldly; her whole conduct is worldly….'[134] Lister cannot ultimately reclaim Marianne's virtue after she switches roles. The *Diaries* then situate Ann Walker in the role of virtuous heiress, combining, and breaking down the barriers between these oppositions in the process. Lister inhabits the male role but is forced to trade on her lineage in order to secure a good match, and has to choose between sentiment and pragmatism. The encroachment and influence of nineteenth-century mercantile capitalism is clearly shown in this categorical collapse. The *Diary* texts frequently highlight Lister's precarious class position where she is part of a dynastic lineage of Listers, but not herself property owning for a large proportion of the *Diary* period, and thus reliant on her aunt and uncle for money. Without the ownership of Shibden, Lister lacks funds to back her class status and social aspiration. Although not poor, frequent diary entries concerning accounts and the bookkeeping of personal funds offer a picture of Lister's genteel frugality.   Subtextually, therefore, Lister's continual assertions of vulgarity in others are perhaps indicative of the level of anxiety felt by a woman who has less wealth than those she labels 'vulgar', and who only has her name. To return to the vampiric trope, Lister is on the side of blood, rather than money, although she understands how to use the resources and potential resources that she has. Ultimately, the Listers were unable to deliver a strong enough bloodline to survive as owners of Shibden.

---

[134] Whitbread, p.282.

Lister and Erotically Charged Clothing

Lister's *Diaries* contain a large number of entries which list and dress and clothing in great detail. The lack of critical consensus about Lister's clothing in the diaries, and its reading, makes this a fertile area for further scrutiny.   The *Diary* volumes include numerous entries which focus on the adaptation, care and recycling of Lister's clothing in a fashion which is atypical for an upper-middle-class nineteenth-century woman. The *Diaries* never record any instances of recreational needlework or sewing for decorative purposes, as an exemplar of feminine arts and crafts. This anomaly, though perhaps understandable in gender terms given Lister's avoidance of lady-like interests suggests that Lister's relationship to touch, self-touch and bodily adornment are still surprisingly charged. It is worth quoting Helena Whitbread's commentary on diary entries and clothing in full:

> An interesting aspect of Anne's self-presentation was her secretive attitude towards discussing or writing about her clothes. She obviously felt reticent about her dress and appearance… She always used her cryptic code in her journal when referring to her clothes. Eventually she came to a decision to wear only black, and apart from a few traces of touches of white on the odd occasion, she kept to this rule.[135]

As previously argued, the conflation of secrecy and coding is in many respects a misreading of Lister's use of textual closeting. If Lister's relationship with clothing was extremely problematic, she could have removed the diary entries rather than coding them.   The deeper question here is what function the coding serves in this particular case.   The frequency of her clothing-related diary entries implies that Lister's thoughts

---

[135] Ibid.,p.14.

on clothing are over-determined, over-compensated and unconsciously fetishized. For

example:

> Wednesday 7th January (Halifax) Tried on a pair of drawers Marian sent me and some black raw silk stocking (cotton tops and feet.
> Friday 9th January (Halifax) Mending my stockings and old shift.
> Weds 29th April (Halifax) Mending my gloves, the trimming of my black bombazine petticoat and all in readiness for this afternoon.
> Monday 25th May (Halifax) In the afternoon cut off the feet of a pair of black silk stockings, hemmed the legs and sewed them to a pair of cotton socks I have just got made for the purpose.[136]

Clothing therefore operates as a metaphorical trope for the working and

reworking of creativity, together with that which Lister cannot express directly.   It

occupies a liminal space in the text, which can only be touched by Lister herself.   In

constantly holding and handling her clothes, Lister fetishes touch as a form of self-

construction and self-comforting, and foregrounds it as a container for subliminal desire

and loneliness.   The first published volume of Diary extracts includes far more entries

on indirect touch and clothing than the second.[137] The references to indirect touch and

repetitive holding are largely replaced by references to the touching of others in the

Parisian diary entries.   The higher level of social anonymity in Paris affords Lister greater

opportunities for direct sexual contact with female partners such as Mrs Barlow.

The following diary entries concern explicit sexual touch between Lister and Mrs Barlow:

> Thursday 11th November 1824, I had kissed and pressed Mrs Barlow on my knee till I had a complete fit of passion…I then leaned on her bosom and pretending to sleep, kept pottering about and rubbing the surface of her queer.

> Monday 22 November 1824, I persuaded her to lie down on the bed and lean on my shoulder. Whether [she was] really asleep I know not but she took no notice of my kissing her, making her lips quite wet and putting my tongue a little into her month, she having it rather open.

---

[136] Ibid.,pp. 34, 41, 43.

Curiously, Lister only uses the word queer (an early nineteenth-century term for female genitalia) in her entries involving Maria Barlow and Ann Walker. Helena Whitbread gives a useful note on the term in the second diary volume publication:

> *Queer* - (or 'quere'). Anne uses the word to denote the female pudendum. It is appears to be a distortion of the word 'quim' or queme, a slang word used to describe the same area of the female body. It is derived from the old Celtic word cwm, meaning cleft of valley.[138]

Lister could have used the term pudendum but possibly being aware of the Latin derivation of the word decided to use another.   The word pudendum is derived from the Latin pudet – it shames.

The Lister of the Parisian volumes is happy to write, and enact, direct references to touch and sexual arousal, but Lister does also write about self-pollution which suggests that Lister's attitude to masturbation, or self-touch, is more ambivalent: 'Alluded to self-pollution, how much it was practised. Thought my connection to the ladies more excusable than this. She declares she had never heard of this (I was incredulous at heart.)'[139] Obviously, twenty-first century readers now know that Lister is being highly disingenuous here. The *Diaries* do mention instances of Lister allowing others to touch her clothes (Miss Ralph in particular) but these references are massively outnumbered by the self-touching entries. When Lister touches her clothes she is also touching herself indirectly at the same time. Despite being given new clothes and having a reasonable income, Lister is still fixated on the repair of her existing clothes. Though it is possible to read this as an obsession with economy as much as bodily touch, the level of writing on clothing suggests a much higher level of sub-textual anxiety than that might

---

[138] Whitbread, *No Priest But* Love, pp. 47, 54, 55.
[139] Ibid., p.49.

warrant. Lister's ambiguously framed attitude to indirect touch suggests a fetishized relationship with aspects of the female body, despite sexually active relationships with other women. It would involve a large and detailed project to map the relationship between touch, clothing and levels of sexual activity in the *Diaries*, to understand the link between them, and the varying frequency of diary entries concerning them. A more manageable approach is to look at patterns of overcompensation to achieve a similar understanding.

Although Lister's adaptation of her hosiery may seem amusing at first glance, or purely an expression of eccentricity, it carries a deeper significance in the text. Lister's adaptation becomes a major trope in the diaries as she attempts to recreate, and make fit for purpose, conventional items of clothing. On a psychological level, Lister foregrounds a need to negotiate a space for self-fashioning, originality and creativity. Oddly reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein, Lister is constantly cobbling together disparate clothing and objects to re-fashion them into innovative items. There is a sense of a longing for a new space in the *Diaries* but the only mechanism available is bound up with clothing etiquette and its reception, reading and gaze. Lister sets up a creative paradox by trying to adapt, both to fit in enough to stop hostility, but also simultaneously to reject normative taste by choosing to subvert this. The *Diaries* play with multiple connotations of 'fit' and 'fitting' to try to chisel out an alternative style. Again, Lister takes hostility and reinvents her garb as a positive form of creativity, or creature to extend the Shelleyan metaphor. Some of the less sensational descriptions of everyday activities in Lister's diaries are often overlooked but even in this small paragraph, the mundane becomes subtly powerful. Lister's monstrous stocking-socks act synecdotally for the negotiation of queerness in the text, as in life. Lister may seem monstrous in her appearance to

others who would undermine her, but she is at least a monster of her own making, and only a monster on the outside. This hosiery also symbolically illustrates Lister's sense of not being one thing or the other or conforming to binary gender characteristics. Lister's *Diary* persona, like her clothing is made up of many shifting and changing parts.

Lister shares an interest in adaptation, clothing and self-fashioning with her contemporaries the Ladies of Llangollen. Lister writes of her meeting with Eleanor Ponsonby in great detail in her diary entry of Tuesday 23 July 1822:

> A large woman so as to waddle in walking but, tho', not taller than myself. In a blue, shortish-waisted cloth habit, the jacket unbuttoned shewing a plain plaited frilled habit shirt – a thick white cravat rather loosely put on…Altogether a very odd figure. [140]

Lister expands this diary entry by commenting on Ponsonby's gender characteristics and finds herself in the unusual position of being a queer reader who empathises with her subject. She also astutely recognises the ambiguity of an oddly dressed woman who speaks in a feminine manner: 'Mild and gentle, certainly not masculine, and yet there was a "*je ne sais quoi,*" striking.'[141] The irony of course is that Lister does know what this third space is and how disconcerting this could be for others. Both Lister and the Ladies illustrate the gender limitations of nineteenth-century dress for women, but they also provide examples of how they were negotiated. Ultimately, however, any deviation from normative female dress is perceived as masculine, rather than differently feminine in an early nineteenth-century context.

---

[140] Whitbread, *I Know My Own Heart*, p.202.
[141] Ibid., p.202

Connections between women's writing, materiality and textiles are of increasing interest to nineteenth-century specialists. Lister's diary writing provides an intriguing example of the links between text/textiles and their shared roots. The *Diary* entries offer numerous opportunities to look at the haptic overlap between text and textile motifs, and the editing and amending of text and textiles. This combination of writing and materiality also places Lister's work within a canon of nineteenth-century texts produced by women writers, which incorporate textile metaphors such as spinning, embroidering, knitting and weaving as tropes of female creativity and desire. In the process of fetishizing clothing, Lister also fetishizes her own hands and situates them in a class-confused realm. Lister's hands would not have been pristine, lily-white and without marks. Hands in nineteenth-century culture were often read as a form of class signification and any signs of work would indicate a lower class position. In the case of another nineteenth-century diary writer Arthur Munby, the tension between erotic female touch and working women's hands is also significantly over-determined. Hands and fingers also occupy a highly charged position within historical and contemporary queer female and lesbian relationships, as sexual members which are allowed to be publicly visible because they are not obviously erotic.

The reading of Lister's *Diary* foregrounds the dichotomy between coding and closeting. Lister's writing subverts conventional assumptions about disclosure and latency through the use of a protective linguistic cipher, which positions the closet as an outer layer. Armed with the force of explicit code Lister is able to release her diary persona from many social strictures, although there are obvious moments when her social shield fails to protect her from hostility and prejudice, particularly in her failed performance of femininity to the readers of the Halifax populace and beyond. The

94

epistemology mapped here demonstrates the strategy of self-audience used by Lister as a psychological processing tool for the expression of socially non-normative, but personally normative desire. Despite persistent attempts to label Lister as the 'first modern lesbian,'[142] Lister's writing clearly refutes easy labels and constructs a wide-ranging vocabulary of queerness to aid her self-identification. Lister maintains control of her closet through a complex system of intertextual queer temporal referencing involving classical and Romantic sources as well her more obvious crypt hand. However, the control of metaphorical tropes proves more problematic, as overdetermined textile motifs surface across the course of the journal, fetishizing grief materiality, touch and comfort in the process of gothic self-fashioning.   This fetishizing takes it ultimate odd turn in the physical hiding of the *Diary* volumes within the fabric of Shibden Hall itself.

The writing of Lister and Emily Brontë is connected by a strange coincidence. Lister's code cypher was taken from the word 'hope,' producing a suggestive parallel to Brontë's poetics and the poem of the same name. As Arthur Burrell notes:

> Up to that time we knew nothing of the cipher alphabet. I distinctly remember taking a volume back to Shibden…and telling Mr Lister that I was certain of two letters, *h* and *e*; and I asked him if there was any likelihood that a further clue could be found. We then examined one of the boxes behind the panels and half way down the collection of deeds we found on a scrap of paper these words 'In God is my…' We at once saw that the word must be 'hope'; and the *h* and *e* corresponded with my guess. The word 'hope' was in cipher.[143]

In the next chapter the analysis of Brontë's poetics takes up linked but diametrically opposed states of gender anxiety and fragile subjectivity to elucidate queer panic,

---

[143] Jill Liddington, 'Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791-1840): Her Diaries and the Historians,' *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), 45-77, (p.52), note 25.

restriction and religious transcendence, in work written in an overlapping historical

period and regional space.

Chapter Two

Beyond Binary? – Emily Brontë's Resistant Poetics

'Oh, for the time when I shall sleep/Without identity,' (7-8)[144]

This chapter explores Emily Brontë's poetry, *Wuthering Heights* and Emily and Anne Brontës' *Diary Papers*. It revisits Stevie Davies's assessment that, 'Throughout her [Emily Brontë's] life, she never made a single friend of her own outside her family as though to move past blood kin might be fatal. She was and she knew she was a misfit.'[145] This chapter takes up Davies's label and uses it to ask questions about how the concept of 'misfit' and misfitting' subjectivity might be constructed and deconstructed in Emily Brontë's poetry. It also investigates how eccentric tropes and poetic personae are utilised to explore and challenge naturalised articulations of gender, sexuality, faith and kinship. It analyses the relationship between alterity and queerness in Brontë's writing and how normative fixing has been imposed on both form and content in critical readings enforcing binary positions. This chapter appropriates Annamarie Jagose's conceptualisation of queer discourse to read Brontë's poetry as a site of resistance and a critique of normative discourses, in line with Annamarie Jagose's assertion that: 'queer is less an identity than a critique of identity.'[146]

Brontë's poetry in particular has received less critical attention in the last fifteen years, apart from limited and occasional references in studies of Victorian poetry or

---

[144] Emily Brontë, Janet Gezari, ed., *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1992), 'The Philosopher,' p.7.
[145] Stevie Davies, *The Artist as a Free Woman* (Manchester: Carcanet Press 1983). p.39.
[146] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p.131.

anthologies. Monographs focussing on Brontë's poetics have been notable by their absence, with the exception of Simon Marsden's study of Brontë's religious imagination and Janet Gezari's follow on study from her edition of Brontë's collected poems[147]. This omission hints at a level of discomfort in reading Brontë's poetry, with its tenuous and complex links to established feminist, Romantic and Victorian canons and established poetic practice, a discomfort which I address directly. This absence seems surprising, given the development of queer theoretical perspectives over the same time period working with non-fixed, non-normative positions that would seem to match well with Brontë's writing.

Terms such as 'non-binary', and 'genderqueer' are again utilised, alongside historicist language for alternative and non-normative positions in this section, for example, androgyny and third-sex. This is specified in individual contexts. However, in general, genderqueer is used for gender ambiguous personae that are actively desiring, or that have a link to forms of closeting, as opposed to positions which do not specify a single gender, which swap gender, or which occupy liminal spaces across and between genders. Queer theory and the academy are arguably lagging behind queer activism and its construction of new language that is constantly shifting and evolving. Conversely, it is this resistance to labelling that opens up a space for new interpretations and which is useful in the context of Brontë's awkward aesthetics. Definitions of this new terminology are also invariably problematized, nuanced, and open to individual interpretation as a queer studies website notes:

> To put this complicated issue as simply as possible, non-binary refers to gender that is not binary (not man or woman) and genderqueer refers to gender that is queer (non-normative). Gender that is not binary may be regarded as 'queer'

---

[147] See Simon Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury 2013) and Janet Gezari, *Last Things: Emily Brontë Poems* (not quoted) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007).

because it is not normative. It becomes easy to see why these terms have been used interchangeably.[148]

This situation may be improved by the evolving scholarly response within queer theoretical and queer studies approaches but the terms will always be conditional on text and context. Brontë's work is particularly intriguing in that it combines poetics that support both Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's deconstructions of identity binaries, as well as Judith Butler theories of performativity, and an oscillating dynamic between these queer theoretical aspects or positions. For example, Sedgwick states:

> An assumption underlying the book is that the relations of the closet – the relations of the known and unknown, the explicit and inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition – have the potential for being peculiarly revealing, in fact, about speech acts more generally.[149]

Butler emphasises gender as a process or series of acts which may or may not be binary: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the 'very expressions' that are said to be its results.'[150]

Emily Jane Brontë (Ellis Bell) was born on 30th July 1818 and died on 19th December 1848. Emily's was the daughter of an Irish, Cambridge educated minister, resident in Haworth, West Yorkshire. The bulk of Brontë's published poetry was written between 1838 and 1845, and contained in private, undisclosed, fair copy notebooks. [151]

---

[148] Taken from www. http://genderqueerid.com/post/11617933299/the-non-binary-vs-genderqueer quandary [accessed 1 November 2015].

[149] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet,* 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, edition, 2008), p.3.

[150] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.25.

[151] Gezari's edition contains original manuscript versions of poem, and poems taken from the Brontë's published *Poems* collection (1846) and is used throughout this chapter.

These notebooks were discovered, and read by Charlotte Brontë, and subsequently included in the Brontës' first published volume, *Poems* by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell (after considerable persuasion). The forced disclosure of Emily's poetry was the source of serious argument between Charlotte and Emily as Juliet Barker has suggested:

> Emily's rage was entirely understandable…It was a violation of that secrecy which was an integral part of Gondal to have read the poems herself, but then to demand that they should be published was an unforgiveable offence. [152]

As Lucasta Miller has noted, Brontë's apparent non-conformity has led to vast amounts of biographical and critical work which has attempted to detect, pin down and resolve this 'awkwardness,' 'Wafting across the moors in a cloud of Yorkshire mist, the so-called sphinx of English literature has acquired almost supernatural status.'[153] The use of the term 'misfit' also provides a useful link to wider discussions of women's writing in the early nineteenth century reflecting its confused status and place within established canons and gendered cultural forms. Vast amounts of feminist scholarship have been dedicated to the analysis of women's poetry across the nineteenth-century and divergent arguments concerning the status and reception of work by female poets in the period. Early feminist readings (1980s/1990s) suggest that female poets were forced to shoehorn their work into a Romantic tradition dominated by male authors and masculinised cultural forms, marginalised in a poetess ghetto, or caught between these positions.[154] However, this forcing can be overstated, given the level and complexity of cultural influences in the Romantic period.   Analyses of women's writing in the early-mid nineteenth century have also stressed the flexibility of gendered writing and the

---

[152] Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Phoenix, 1994), p.479.
[153] Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Vintage, 2002), p.171.
[154] See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 1-10.

breaking down of separate spheres and conventional gender attribution. As Anne K. Mellor notes, the gendering of Romanticism is in many cases highly nuanced and malleable, with women writers exhibiting traits in their work held to be masculine and male writers displaying textual femininity. Mellor's work offers a concrete example of this in her comparative, work on Keats and Brontë's writing. Although Mellor's analysis offers new insight, the flipping of binary characteristics arguably still simplifies the range of gender positions in Brontë's poetry, as it does in Keats' work:

> The two Romanticisms that I have been distinguishing as masculine and feminine should not be identified with biological sexuality. Some romantic writers were 'ideological cross-dressers.'[…] I would like to take as representative that male Romantic poet who has most often been characterised as 'effeminate' – John Keats – and that female Romantic writer who has been characterised as; 'crude' and 'virile' – Emily Brontë.[155]

This gender swapping implies a consistency in performative poetic personae that is often at odds with the shifts within and across Brontë's work. Mellor's model provides a useful starting point for discussions on this area but it is unable to clearly identify non-binary characteristics, or texts, where gender attribution is split across and between personae, or where normative models of subject/object positions are combined and genderqueer rather than solely cross-gendered. It also omits the possibility available for the articulation of non-normative desire through these shifting positions.

Charlotte Brontë's comment on the use of pseudonyms shows an explicit awareness of the potential offered through gender ambiguous pseudonyms and a kind of facilitative aspirational androgyny:

---

[155] Anne. K. Mellor *Romanticism & Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 171.

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice. [...] [156]

The line , 'without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine,"' also hints at subsequent criticism of the Brontës' work as not 'feminine' enough and signposting its potential dissidence.

The use of pseudonyms and pseudonymous writing by women writers illustrates a sophisticated understanding of the limitations imposed by constructed and socially sanctioned femininity, not far removed from twenty-first century theories of gender. As Jo Gill has noted, 'Recent theories of performativity and gender, principally the work of Judith Butler, suggest one way of reading the constructed nature of the female role. Work by women poets exaggerates and thus exposes the artifice of femininity.'[157] Such was Emily Brontë's reported level of distress at the possibility of her poetry being published and offered up for public scrutiny ,that it would suggest that something more fundamental was at stake in the reading of her work from which belated, androgynous naming could only offer limited protection. In the case of Brontë's poetry, the theme of androgyny runs much deeper, and clearly precedes her androgynous pseudonym. Her original notebooks also support this feeling of potential closetedness through their use of almost illegible, miniscule handwriting and implicitly coded, private references (for

---

[156] Charlotte Brontë, (Currer Bell), 'Biographical Notice' to the combined edition of *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey* (London: Smith Elder and Co, 1850) p.ix.
[157] Jo Gill, *Women's Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.74.

which no cipher or key exists). These hidden notebooks produced within the safe haven of Haworth Parsonage can arguably be read as part of an extended closet.

Romantic Poetry and the Construction of Subjectivity

It is possible to argue that these seeds of androgyny are actually an innate element of Romantic poetry itself that become exposed when women writers start to work within its framework. Set up within the context of Romantic poetics the gender naturalised subject or I is assumed to be the property of male writers, and therefore inherently masculine and not subject to censure.   This position is contrasted with the experience of women writers actively claiming the right to androgyny and an androgynous I as a way of avoiding the restrictions of their own gender. The act of speaking and writing in the first person is therefore politicised for nineteenth-century women writers, in a way that was naturalised as normal or normative cultural expression for male writers.

Alexis Easley contends that what might seem to be a form of self-denial can paradoxically be re-read as a form of self-assertion, enabling intervention and access to public debates and forums: 'Ironically, it was the suppression of individual identity through anonymous publication that enabled the development of new definitions of women's political subjectivity and liberal individuality.'[158] There is considerable scope for further research on this area, given that there are notable examples of nineteenth-century women writers embracing pseudonyms, and other examples of women writers who refused to publish under a pseudonym. It is hard to determine particular factors for each, outside of highly complex matrices of social and cultural influences, and attitudes to risk and projection.   Despite these challenges, recent work on nineteenth-century

---

[158] Alexis Easley *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media 1830-1870* (Farnham: Ashgate 2004), p.4.

writing has started to address theories about how queer and genderqueer authors have used pseudonyms to negotiate and construct alternative personae to extend closeted and non-closeted space. For example, Geraldine Friedman, writing on the early nineteenth-century journalism of Mary Diana Dods (also known as David Lyndsay and Walter Sholto Douglas), proposes the opportunities available for identity construction through the sophisticated use of literary pseudonyms:

> Dods thus reaped a double benefit from living at a time when the institutions and practices of authorship were in a state of flux. She could use her pseudonym as a tease to arouse a publisher's interest in her authorial persona without, however, attracting undue suspicion to herself or running much risk of discovery.[159]

Interestingly, Dods used her textual Douglas pseudonym as a basis for the creation of a complete life persona, which allowed her to live in another country, cross-dress as a male and marry a woman. Michael Field and Michael/Field is/are another obvious example of a pseudonym or part pseudonym contained in this thesis, which is multi-functional. Michael Field enables the extension of a relationship, a literary partnership and a performative gender dynamic, both inside and outside the act of writing. As with Dods, Michael Field actually exist in both uncloseted and closeted states simultaneously, and Cooper and Bradley foreground their own personal and creative intimacy by using declared private pet names. The use of Michael Field and Michael/ Field deconstructs fixed points offering a version of Tiresian genderqueerness, shifting across masculine and feminine states, while attempting simultaneously to offer a protective shield from unwanted projections and gender restrictions. Conversely, critics also argue that there is no such thing as a full-pseudonym, or a full cover, given that the choice of any pen

---

[159] Geraldine Friedman,'Pseudonymity, Passing and Queer Biography: The Case of Mary Diana Dods,' *Romanticism and Sexuality* 23 (2001), 1-25 (p.5).

name can offer clues to the undisclosed, alternative name of a writer as Gerard Genette

notes:

> As for the pseudonym-effect it assumes that the fact of the pseudonym is known to the reader: this is the effect produced by the very fact that one day Mr. Alexis Leger decided to use a pseudonym, any pseudonym. The pseudonym-effect necessarily blends with the effect of *this* pseudonym. [...][160]

Pseudonyms serve a particularly complex role in the negotiation of alternative space and

dissonant voices; they often encapsulate and support a queer cultural function that

highlights the constructed nature of all identities. In other words, when patriarchal

restrictions force gender closeting they actually undercut the supposed links between

patriarchy and heterosexuality so that what are usually assumed to be two value systems

working in tandem are split open by this gender forcing, allowing a queer poetics to

emerge in the process. Classic feminist texts provide a basis for this reworking, for

example, in the work of Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.[161] As

Showalter notes, cross-gendered pseudonyms employed by nineteenth-century women

writers are as much a symptom as an opportunity:

> To their contemporaries, nineteenth-century women writers were women first, artists second. A woman novelist, unless she disguised herself with a male pseudonym, has to expect critics to focus on her femininity and rank her with the other women writers of her day, no matter how diverse their subjects or styles.[162]

In the case of Emily Brontë's poetics, the addition of a belated androgynous

pseudonym actually supports the pre-existent gender performativity. Brontë's poems

---

[160] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1997), p.49.
[161] Sandra. M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 2nd edition. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1999), revised edition.
[162] Ibid., p.73

contain numerous examples of attempts to ungender and androgynise positions and personae by various means including the omission of gendered pronouns: his, hers, he and she. Brontë's use of non-gendered voices, where the I and you of the poetry occupy an androgynous position and where there is no linguistic indication of gender, places in readers in a position to choose gender based on their own interpretations. However, gender is also inferred by readers as part of an established poetic convention, for example, where the subject is assumed to be masculine and the object is assumed to be feminine. What makes Brontë's poetics unusual is the fragility of gendered subjectivity. Subjects in these poems are also defined in relation to what they are not, for instance where positions are gendered by association; a masculine voice, a feminine voice and a third voice which occupies the space in between genders. Brontë's use of poetic form supports both masculine and feminine approaches to innovatory approaches to rhyme and metre.

Twenty-first century studies of nineteenth-century poetics have started to look at the ways in which poetic personae ventriloquize gendered voices, or produce a kind of poetic puppetry, for example, Sarah Parker's recent study on the lesbian muse, Frederick Roden's readings of Victorian poetry and Rebecca Davies's work on ventriloquism in nineteenth-century literature.[163]   Several of Brontë's poems have no I. Does this then equate to a lack of subjectivity, a complete removal of performative poetic personae, or even a more powerful presence of voice from outside the text?   As Angela Leighton has noted Brontë's poetics often suggest an emptying out of subjectivity:

---

[163] See Helen Davies, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity 1889-1930* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2014),Frederick Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002),

'Monumentally sparing, these are poems which 'empty' themselves of all merely extraneous distractions of plot or context. Their object lies within not outside themselves.'[164] Although third sex positions and personae are explicitly foregrounded in Brontë's poetics, little critical work has focussed on the ways in which this may invoke a form of queer aesthetic.

Brontë's inversionary poetics, however, reflects on patriarchal privilege at the same time as it tentatively starts to explore gender and genderqueer performativity, as Lyn Pykett suggests:

> However, more than a simple reversal of conventions is involved, since in many of these poems, the masculine, or grammatically ungendered muse is not simply invoked, but rather becomes the subject of the poem. Such poems both articulate the struggle against the restriction experienced by the woman poet and are about the struggle to articulate. [165]

While it is possible to read these reversals as an attempt to challenge inherent poetic gendering and related power dynamics, it is also possible to read them as a form of queer poetics. Brontë constructs these positions using a form of split femininity or potential 'female masculinity' constructed in relation to female 'femininity' to use Judith Halberstam's term:

> Female masculinity is a particularly fruitful site of investigation because it has been vilified by heterosexist and feminist/womanist programs alike; unlike male femininity, which fulfils a kind of ritual function in male homosocial cultures, female masculinity is generally received by hetero-and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment. [166]

---

[164] Angela Leighton, 'The Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës,* ed. by Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, fourth edition, 2007), pp.53-72 (p.62).
[165] Lyn Pykett, *Emily Brontë* (Savage: Barnes and Noble, 1989, p.62.
[166] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, Duke University Press 1998), p.9

The referencing of queer subjectivity in Halberstam's definition of female masculinity is apposite here, although this thesis contests aspects of Halberstam's focus to suggest that non-binary femininity, or non-normative femininity is also a productive term in the exploration of the nineteenth-century women's writing. It can also be argued that Halberstam's conceptualisation of female masculinity actually reinforces binary gender characteristics as much as it undermines them. Halberstam clearly offers an analysis of ways in which gender characteristics are performative and not linked to biology but also offers examples of female masculinity that actually reinforce gender clichés and the nature of stereotypical masculinity.   These non-binary aspects of Brontë's poetry have been identified by feminist scholars, but not specifically in the area of gender. For example, Isobel Armstrong writing on Brontë's 'The Philosopher' hints at the radical potential of this rupture (in a period before the evolution of queer critical discourse), 'Emily Brontë's poem rages too, but again simple opposition is deceptive and a poem…actually breaks the restrictions of this confining oppositional and binary terminology altogether.'[167]

In several of Brontë's poems masculine objects try to exclude feminine subjects, staging a kind of poetic *coup de grace* in mid-text, foregrounding the potential dangers of binary swapping, for example, in 'The Philosopher,' 'To A.G.A' and 'To A.S. 1830.'[168] For Emily Brontë androgynous gender closeting and coding (non-declared), are already set up as part of her poetics that exist independently of issues of exposure to a wider readership. The coding of gender and desire in Brontë's work is self-contained and not constructed as a response to external pressure, or in response to publication, even if it

---

[167] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p335.
[168] Gezari, pp.7, 148,146

reflects the unstable gender dynamics within the conventions of romantic poetry itself. Brontë's decision to focus aspects of her writing on the recovery of undercover and censored spaces alongside constructions of transgressive and performative gender positions certainly suggests the foregrounding of a potential queer layer. By providing an explicit lens onto the hidden, Brontë actually draws attention to her own coding/closeting, in a kind of literary equivalent of being hidden in plain sight. The selected poems have been chosen because of their diverse constructions of intimacy, desire, subjectivity and subject/object positions with no distinction made between Gondal and non-Gondal poems. The British Library, which holds the surviving Gondal poetry notebook, summarises this alternative landscape:

> Gondal is the fictional North Pacific island invented by 12-year old Emily and her younger sister Anne in 1831. Gondal's landscape is similar to Emily's native Yorkshire moors, but also reminiscent of the Scottish highland setting of the works of her favourite author Sir Walter Scott. Emily and Anne wrote stories and poems about Gondal well into adulthood, with Emily continuing the saga until her death in 1848, at the age of thirty. None of the Gondal stories have survived, so the poems are the only available source for reconstructing the saga.[169]

However, there is a recognition of a different aesthetic operating within Gondal poems that may fit an alternative protective closet, or worldview where different values are applicable. Gondal poems also offer a reworking of conventional developmental patterns, often figuring a form of nominal heterosexuality as a perverse precursor to the later queer dynamics encoded in the more mature poetry and *Wuthering Heights*. The situation is further complicated by the current preference for publishing Gondal texts alongside other poems, rather than retaining the separation of the original notebooks.

---

[169] Gondal Note Books, via British Library Collection, http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-emily-bronts-gondal-poetry#sthash.tJ6RFOYD.dpuf [accessed 5 November 2015].

Additionally these poems are included because of their role in constructing important developmental aspects of perverse, non-normative poetics.

Reforming the Lyric

On initial inspection, Brontë's use of lyric form appears to be relatively conventional, employing a traditional ballad form in most of her poems, adhering to four-line stanzas and AB/AB rhyme schemes. At a surface level, Brontë's poems share similarities with the work of other Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth and and specifically *Lyrical Ballads*. [170] However, as Angela Leighton has noted this surface form in Brontë's poetry masks highly complex dynamics, and pronounced prosody. The ballad is often overlaid by problematized elegy, or by an elegiac focus which creates a layering of different kinds of form as Leighton suggests: 'Like Anne's, Emily's longing for the 'buried form' not only takes her across the divide of life and death, but also affects the form of the poetry in which she does so.'[171] The poems therefore often inhabit or attempt to inhabit a space which is between or beyond binary states or oppositions.   If Charlotte in Leighton's reading writes about nostalgia and memory, the focus in Emily's poems is more likely to be a form of memento mori, strangely accompanied by passing moments of sublimity and rapture, as well as tropes of grief and loss. Leighton makes frequent references to secrecy and confinement which is not unusual, but her particular use of the term closet is worth further investigation. In her readings the word floats free of connotations of sexuality and desire in spite of references to passionate states, and the term is unqualified by further analysis. Writing on Charlotte's poem 'Mementos' Leighton says:

> 'Keepsakes' and 'mementos' have forgotten what they were meant to keep or
> commemorate. They merely witness to the dust and mould of locked up

---

[170] William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads,* 1798 (London: Penguin, 2006).
[171] Leighton, p.62.

closets…These drawers and shelves are graves full of 'relics'. Echoing Tennyson's 'Mariana,' the whole house seems to turn into a mouldering closet of its own. [172]

This buried form provides an oblique commentary on both the hidden and the dead in Emily Brontë's poetry, alongside obsessive and fetishised tropes of grief, imprisonment and confinement.

The poems offer superficially regular rhyme schemes and rhymes, but also employ odd metrical anomalies, so that regularity falls away or often twists at the ends of stanzas, removing a feeling of satisfaction or a comforting resolution. Similarly, little comment has been made about the titles of poems, or the lack of them, in Brontë's work, other than editorial issues mentioned previously. Given the importance of naming in *Wuthering Heights* this seems surprising. Where there are titles they are often set up to challenge the reader (unknowingly) so that a poem called 'Hope'[173] is actually about the opposite of hope and 'The Old Stoic'[174] patently contains a persona who is not very stoical and so forth. The titles often also set up a dynamic between opposites and doubles, which again is taken up in *Wuthering Heights.*

In other titled poems such as 'The Philosopher'[175] and 'The Prisoner'[176] it soon becomes clear that readers cannot immediately identify who the philosopher or prisoner is, or where they are located in the text. 'The Philosopher' is a particularly odd poem in that it employs at least four personae and double ballad form (eight line stanzas) and then adds two lines in sequence cumulatively for each stanza as it progresses. This innovation suggests that Brontë's poetics also offer embryonic new positions in relation

---

[172] Ibid., p.59.
[173] Gezari, p.16.
[174] Ibid., p.30.
[175] Ibid., p.7.
[176] Ibid., p.14.

to lyrical ballad form, in combination with more conventional themes such as sublimity, faith and nature. Mary Galvin has recently suggested that technical innovation in poetry is often linked with forms of psychological, sexual and gender emancipation. Unfortunately, Galvin's work is frustrating in its use of the word queer as a synonym for lesbian, for example: 'The ambiguity that Dickinson strives to maintain in this, all her poems, can in itself be seen as an indication of her 'lesbian sensibility' and her 'queer mind.'[177] The queer aspect of her title is only used occasionally, as a synonym for lesbian, and the poets and texts she references are post the 1870 shift in definition.   However, it is certainly possible to substantiate an argument for a difference of view (including a strong visual lens) in Emily Brontë's work.

Turning to close readings of the poems,   in 'Stars,' the initial persona articulates and expresses a cherishing of darkness illuminated only by diffuse and gentle light. It aligns a longing for merger and wholeness with traditional associations of femininity and the light of the associated but (absent) moon. Note the clear reciprocated, gaze and pun on 'watch' (time and gaze):

> All through the night, your glorious eyes
> Were gazing down in mine,
> And with a full heart's thankful sighs,
> I blessed that watch divine. (5-8)[178]

Here is the psychological and emotional voice of the night speaking, 'I see you, I recognise myself in you, I want to be close to you, I desire you, and you make me feel safe.' (I am feminine and so are you or you are feminine and so am). The poetic persona also cleverly plays with expectations of intimacy and power by offering linguistic and

---

[177] Mary E. Galvin, *Queer Poetics*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.19.
[178] Gezari, pp. 5-6.

semantic repetition and multiplicity: 'Thought followed thought, star followed star' (13) as a source of wholeness and oneness, 'While one sweet influence, near and far,/ Thrilled through, and proved us one!' (15-16). You (the feminine) are here and everywhere, concentrated and diffuse at the same time in an uncanny premonition of Luce Irigaray's theories and their construction of diffuse and plural femininity. 'Stars' also radically suggests a kind of alternative, *écriture féminine* and autoeroticism, but also homoeroticism where femininity is reinforced by a reciprocated feminine gaze existing beyond or outside the maternal realm.

There have been a number of readings of Brontë's poetry which have touched on projection and autoeroticism. However, these readings have not provided an analysis of queer subject positions.[179] There is evidence of a persistent link between autoeroticism and homoeroticism in nineteenth-century women's writing which has been censored. In many ways, it still seems that the foregrounding of innate asexuality in nineteenth-century women's writing is more acceptable than actively desiring femininity or masculinity. Naming and identifying autoeroticism becomes a way of a avoiding same-sex identification that produces a strange alignment between queer subjectivity and autoeroticism, or queer and varying forms of asexuality. This situation is further complicated by the fact that the term 'autoerotic' can be defined in many different ways in different historical, philosophical and aesthetic contexts. For example, Irigaray's conception of the phrase and Havelock's Ellis's:

> As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity.

---

[179] See Betsy Erkilla, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History and Discord*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.66, Stevie Davies, *Heretic*, (London: Women's Press, 1994), p.223.

> Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two but not divisible into one(s)-that caress each other.[180]

Ellis's definition of female autoeroticism is separated from his theories of inversion. He conceptualises this form of erotic expression as a pre-cursor to heterosexuality, based on anecdotal evidence from same-sex communities:

> I may quote as fairly typical the following observation supplied by a lady who cannot be called inverted: 'Like so many other children and girls, I was first taught self-indulgence by a girl at school, and I passed on my knowledge to one or two others...We were horribly ashamed after, and that was the only time.'[181]

If female sexuality is derived from the doubleness of two lips, self-touching and innately self-referential, does it then follow that if taken to its logical conclusion that it contains a kind of gynophilic, queer essence within it despite performative gender characteristics?

Self and relational wonder is a useful trope to explore within Brontë's poetry, which often oscillates between relational and split subjectivity. However, tension between performative gender and ideas about residual male and female essences create serious issues for any queer or feminist theorist attempting to traverse this poetic terrain. As Irene Tayler suggests, 'In a sense Emily's position was far more radically feminist than Charlotte's to the end, Emily valued *female* being as the root and goal of her life.'[182] Femaleness becomes an extremely problematic term in a post-Butler, or Butlerian theoretical era, and this tension can cause considerable angst for researchers

---

[180] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p.24.

[181] Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition* (1897), ed. Victor Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p.165.

[182] Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.10.

working intersectionally in the fields of gender and sexuality; witness the current conflict in feminist and queer activism over differentiation between cis and trans women.

The critical issue here is whether there is genuine confusion between sex and gender in psycho-biographical readings of Brontë and her poetry, or whether this indicates a distinction between gender characteristics, labelled characters/personae and resistance to the resolution of binaries.   Despite this potential confusion, studies like Tayler's are important because of the way in which they foreground this potential fault line in Brontë's poetics.   While Tayler's summary is couched in essentialist terms, using a vocabulary that references sex rather than gender, it does suggest an interesting correlation between normatively gendered notions of ambition, creativity and domesticity in the nineteenth century.   However, this also mirrors the linguistic and conceptual confusion prevailing in the nineteenth century where terms like unsexed were used for women who failed to offer appropriately performed femininity – naturalising gender characteristics in the process.   However, Charlotte Brontë's references to (performative) femininity in her note on pseudonyms illustrates a clear understanding of the differences between sex and gender.   Although as Lorna Duffin notes, the definition of the term was often unclear even to those who were using it as a pejorative label. Quoting from *The Lancet,* that 'Elizabeth Garrett and all women's rights campaigners desired to "unsex" their sisterhood', Duffin writes 'What exactly this "unsexing," this "unfemaleness" involved was never made quite clear.'[183]   Conversely, this discourse also reinforces the primacy of patriarchal and heteronormative modelling which actually undermines other parts of Tayler's argument concerning desiring same-

---

[183] Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1978), within chapter, 'The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid,' pp.26-56 (p.48).

gendered subjects and objects. Unlike *Wuthering Heights,* Brontë's poetics have received little attention in recent feminist and queer criticism. There are notable exceptions, such as Jo Gill's work on the performative mentioned earlier (which situates Brontë's work alongside twentieth-century women poets such as Plath) but they are limited. This research aims to contribute to this debate by challenging assumptions about gender and desire in Brontë's poetics.

The clearly feminine persona at the heart of 'Stars' is set up to protect the intimate, undercover world of feminine/feminine desire from the aggression and violence of the monolithic, masculine world of the Sun: 'Blood-red, he rose and arrow-straight,/His fierce beams struck my brow' (21-22). Stevie Davies compares this imagery to one of rape and male sexual arousal, 'She writes of rape, of night by day; stars by sun; female by male.'[184] There is certainly a suggestion here of a form of phallic power and physicality which is mirrored in a violence of the language. In the poem the hard vowel sounds of the masculine sun are contrasted with the elongated vowel sounds of the central, feminine persona in a tangled binary. Even if the use of the language of rape might be considered excessive, there is certainly an assault (on the senses) and a forced imposition of power. There is also a form of heterosexually imposed shame within the reference, 'And scorch with fire, the tranquil cheek, /Where your cool radiance fell?' (19-20). Blushing and exposure are caused by unwelcome masculine advances, as opposed to the unashamedly erotic feminine/feminine dynamic of night watcher and stars which ensures no shame, only 'cool radiance.' The language of intimacy in 'Stars' becomes transmuted into the language of conflict as masculine and feminine positions fight, or rather as feminine positions come under attack from patriarchal and (presumably

---

[184] Davies, *The Artist as a Free Woman*, p.82.

heterosexual) energies. Brontë also outlines the difference between light that supports

and protects hidden intimacy and light that destroys:

> Oh, stars, and dreams, and gentle night;
> Oh, night and stars return!
> And *hide* me from the hostile light,
> That does not warm but burn;
> (My italics). (41-44)

 It is also important to note the lack of embarrassment and poetic self-consciousness in

employing erotic vocabulary, images of drinking, gazing, merging and throbbing: 'I was

at peace, and drank your beams' (9), 'All through the night, your glorious eyes/ were

gazing down in mine,' (5-6), 'Thrilled through, and proved us one!' (16), 'Your worlds of

solemn light, again, /Throb with my heart, and me!' (31-32) In this poem night and day

become inverted: 'Let me sleep through his blinding reign, /And only wake with you!'

(47-48), so that the persona sleeps as a way of avoiding unwanted attention in the

daytime, and wakes with the stars at night. The sexual nature of 'wakes' and

connotations of awakening in bed suggest an exploration of the possibility of erotic

arousal combined within a feminine/feminine embrace.

Strange Muses

As many academics writing on nineteenth-century poetry have noted, to read Emily

Brontë's poetry is to be constantly confronted with ambivalence and ambiguity in a

created world where very little is stable. This sensation of strangeness or disorientation

becomes even more pronounced when the particular area of poetic muses is addressed.

Brontë's poetry often subverts the idea of helpful, passive muses and asks significant

questions about the function of poetic muses. Subjects in Brontë's poetry are frequently

engaged in unhealthy and dysfunctional relationships with their objects or muses. At

their most extreme these poetic relationships border on the persecutory, voyeuristic, threatening and sadomasochistic.

'Hope' is a particularly arresting poem for a number of reasons.[185] The poem articulates extreme emotional responses from the position of a rejected subject and exhibits a constant flipping of poetic tone, from a love poem to a poem of grief and loss. It also exhibits a feminine/feminine subject/object dynamic. Feminine subjectivity can be read here on the basis of lines 2 and 3: 'Watching how my fate would tend, /Even as selfish-hearted men.' The subject voice is placed in opposition to masculinity or distinct from it, and therefore assumes femininity by default. The subject of 'Hope' shows a potentially morbid and unhealthy fascination with an unresponsive muse. The poetic subject wants to be involved in a dialogue, and its presence and gaze to be met, only for it to ignored and rejected: 'I looked out to see her there,/ and she turned her face away' (7-8) as if it doesn't understand the impossibility of that which it is attempting in a nineteenth century poetic context. 'Hope' asks a profound question: How can a feminine subject speak to a feminine object in Romantic poetry and the text tries to provide an answer. Brontë sets up links between highly charged sensory attributes and contrasts them with a failure to communicate. The poem's vocabulary is littered with communicative verbs 'watching', 'whispering', 'singing', 'looking', 'listening' in the form of ironic, over-compensatory overload. The poem also undercuts orthodox notions of authenticity and poetic truth by casting the muse in the role of fake, in the accusatory chanting of 'Like a false guard, false watch keeping,' (9) and again addresses notions of who or what ensures the enforcement of orthodox femininity. However, the text also undercuts the reliability of the assumed feminine subject by emphasizing an almost

---

[185] Gezari, Brontë, *The Complete Poems,* p.16.

exquisite, erotic obsession with the pain of rejection whilst simultaneously pleading for its ending: 'Hope whose whisper would have given/ balm to all my frenzied pain,' (17-18). It is important to note the sensuality and physicality of the language used here to emphasize the complexity of poetic response. The potential sadomasochistic aspects of this poetic dynamic are reinforced by the suggestion of bondage and imprisonment in the scenario. The subject persona of 'Hope' is trying to offer a construction of what she is seeing/experiencing which borders on the cinematic, combining visual and psychological projection.

The visual imagery of 'Hope' posits a scenario where both subject and object occupy the position of the gazer and the gazed upon, or to use more filmic language that of auteur and voyeur. Brontë's poems and *Wuthering Heights* are full of references to looking, watching, guarding, and demands for cognition and recognition of the gaze to be met, in a highly political act for a nineteenth-century woman writer. Female artists' and writers' assertion and construction of the active gaze is still a highly political act in many ways even in a late twentieth and twenty-first century context. Brontë's writing contributes to an ongoing and powerful subversion of cultural prohibitions of active female desire, viewing and speech.[186] Many of Brontë's poems subvert readers' expectations of roles and offer up a range of gender fluid aloof and rebellious objects (masculine, feminine and androgynous) for consideration, as if Brontë is challenging us to interrogate our own gaze and look again at these traditional conventions and positions.

---

[186] See J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen* 16.3 (1975) 6-18,
 Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row 1989), Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics third edition, 2003).

Where muses occupy more orthodox and inspirational positions they are rarely human, for instance, stars, wind, earth and flowers. One of the main questions to consider is why a poet would set up human muses to attack other positions. This thesis suggests that this subversion may actually foreground the reality of being a female writer trying to propose a form of queer, feminine subjectivity within an exclusionary framework. Catherine Maxwell's work on the female sublime in the work of male poets hints at a potentially extraordinary speculum aspect in Brontë's work. Maxwell argues that the male Romantic poet's work is affected by a form of feminine castration, wrought by an early characterisation of the femme fatale muse:

> Feminisation is imposed by the female sublime, frequently envisaged by the male poet as a penetrating, and often aggressive energy, which overwhelms or pierces a man's body or soul. This dominant form of femininity, more often associated with that type we call the *femme fatale,* engenders a passive feminisation in the male victim who may signify his submission to her not only in his castration but in the fact that he mirrors back to her a diminished and weakened version of her own self.[187]

It is as if Brontë is reflecting this pattern back in the form of reverse gendering, where masculinity becomes both the object and persecutory subject of poems hounding (female) femininity from the text, or replicating it in poems such as 'Hope', claiming a form of both female and male Romanticism in the process. This mirroring is continued in *Wuthering Heights,* which arguably picks up the theme of the male Romantic poet's closeted feminisation or threatening effeminacy in its characterisation of Lockwood and Linton Heathcliff.

---

[187] Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p7.

It is not hard to see how literary projections might begin to construct and illustrate a kind of persecutory self-loathing within a queer analysis, as shorthand for a form of internalised homophobia. Even the language which has historically been used to describe Emily Brontë and her work feels unusually attacking, and almost akin to the language of (unconscious) homophobia in studies written before the development of queer theory and reclaimed labelling, witness the particular use of 'misfit,' in Davies and 'freakish' as Lyn Pykett notes:

> Utimately, however, the assertiveness Brontë's powerful women is problematic, and is accompanied by a sense of isolation which is shared by many of her thematic voices in both the Gondal and the non-Gondal poems. Isolated from humanity at large, by virtue of their distinctive or special nature, exiled from their community by love, treachery, or the accidents of history, these speakers perhaps, dramatise Brontë's sense of her own *freakishness* and exceptionality. (My italics)[188]

There is also a significant argument to be made about the distinction between self-identification and ownership, as opposed to projected labelling and concerning how pejorative labelling is reworked into a form of empowered queerness. It is only possible in a twenty-first century context to unravel some of these projections, and to look at how they can be interpreted anew in the light of evolving critical perspectives like queer theory.

A notable feature of Brontë's writing within her poetry and *Wuthering Heights,* involves reversal and inversion of traditional binary oppositions such as culture/nature, mother/father, and human/animal. These patterns of inversion, whilst deconstructing orthodoxies and power dynamics, also provoke an unusual linguistic, parallel process. These performative poetics of queer inversion give an explicit link to nineteenth-century

---

[188] Pykett, pp.46-47.

sexology's naming of lesbianism, trans and cross-gender positions; although diverging

from Havelock Ellis' enforcing of gendered bisexuality as a form of confused

heteronormativity. Virginia Blain's recent work reflects on these oppositions in Victorian

poetry, but such are the complexities of this linkage that she has had to devise new

language to describe these alternative gender states, for example, in her construction of

the term 'transbian':

> Swinburne, for example, in his poetic pursuit of extremes, might be more
> sympathetically read as a transbian sensibility rather than, as is often claimed or
> implied, a more conventional homosexual. That is to say, the erotic direction of
> his verse, in all its sado-masochism, seems to move in quest of female/lesbian
> sexuality, the feminine as desired by the female, in a way that is strongly
> suggestive of the 'transbian' (a male who undergoes a sex change to female, not
> in order to pursue an erotic desire for the male, but rather, for the female:
> 'transbian' is a more precise term than 'male lesbian').[189]

These poetics work on the principle of taking conventional gender characteristics and

assigning them to their opposite, a process which culminates in the extraordinary

complexity of gendering, and gender anxiety, within *Wuthering Heights*.   Again these

poetics suggest that patterns of inversion are foregrounded in a much earlier period,

although the codification and disciplining of inversion is a phenomenon associated with

the late nineteenth century.   As Heike Bauer notes, accusations of 'sexual' inversion

were often used to impose narrow definitions of appropriate femininity:

> While Breger's analysis is closely linked to current debates about identity and
> queer theory, the focus of my own investigation is on the making of a gendered
> sexual theory… In contrast, female inversion was largely tied to issues of social
> rather than sexual difference, at least initially, and to the mapping of distinctly
> configured roles for men and women. Accordingly, a notion of inversion also

---

[189] See Virginia Blain, 'Period Pains: the Changing Body of Victorian Poetry,'*Victorian Poetry,* 42, 1, 2004,
71-79, (p.76).

played a role in broader cultural discourses around the so-called woman question of the 1880s and 1890s.[190]

Paradoxically, Brontë's poetics also frequently attempt to push through reversal, inversion and androgyny to a point where gender characteristics are truly conditional, contextual and performative, where the link between gender and biology is broken apart, or where subjects try to achieve ultimate escape from their bodily prison. 'The Prisoner' contains the most obvious example of this in Brontë's oeuvre:

'Oh dreadful is the check – intense the agony –
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again;
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.
 (53-56) [191]

The body and senses are not abject or shameful here, but they are ultimately incarcerated in a disciplinary dungeon not of their own making. This moment of epiphany is accompanied by a melancholy tone and a yearning for integration and healing of split subjectivity. Brontë is not trying to distort identity by making it monolithic, rather the search for wholeness is based upon diverse perspectives held together within a form of self-integration. The poem's hyperrealism is emphasized through a litany of physical and sensual responses and signs of arousal, throbbing and pulsing in a kind of kinetic/synesthetic climax.

The breaking open of subject positions and their pulling back is a central dynamic within Brontë's poetry. Lyn Pykett's excellent work on Emily Brontë's poetry raises these

---

[190] Heike Bauer, 'Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the *Fin de Siècle*,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18.1 (2009), 84-162 (p.1).
[191] Gezari, p.14.

issues of diffusion and fragmentation but does not offer further exploration: 'The desire for self-integrity, for a unified sense of self, together with a simultaneous awareness and fear of the self's diffusion and fragmentation lie at the heart of both the Gondal, and non-Gondal poetry.'[192] Brontë also subsequently starts to play with notions of androgyny and third sex positions that have historically been aligned with queer sexuality, for instance, with the use of 'third sex' and 'tribade' in historical slang for lesbians as well as other forms of female masculinity.   Although as Halberstam has noted notions of gender non-conformity have often been linked to notions of non-normative sexuality in ways that are over-simplistic.   These principles are obviously not consciously encoded into Brontë's texts, but there seems to be an unconscious processing based on these principles which is continually worked and reworked.   Brontë's elaboration and subversion of a traditional trinity within her poetry, most notably in 'The Philosopher,'[193] also adds an interesting counterpoint to Irigaray's concept of the Trinitarian, as an alternative to orthodox Christianity and phallogocentrism.

In 'The Philosopher' the initial persona addresses the philosopher of the poem's title but then desires to be beyond dialogue, identity and binaries, 'Oh for the time when I shall sleep/Without identity,/ And never care how rain may steep,/Or snow may cover me!' (7-10)   However, this poetic sleep is only achieved through death and the body with no identity is on the ground.   The persona also sarcastically undercuts the philosopher's thought and poetic imaginings, 'Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain/Concludes thy musings once again?' (5-6) Note the wordplay on muse and musings and the knowingness and sarcastic tone concerning the difficulties of both

---

192 Pykett, p66.
193 Gezari, p.7.

philosophical and poetic inspiration. The kind of death wish here is a significant feature of poetry by women writers in the nineteenth century, showing that one of the ways to be beyond the limitations of a gendered persona is to engage in the ultimate sacrifice of self-renunciation, and that the ultimate act of self-assertion and control is paradoxically that of self-destruction. It is only recently that feminist criticism has found a way to recover this feature, as a tradition, which paradoxically attempts to use this ultimate act as a way of speaking beyond conventional social control and by creating its own aesthetic. As Claire Raymond suggests: 'The aesthetic of anticipatory self-elegaics seizes the ambiguous rhetorical orientation of posthumous acclaim in order to subvert the traditional claims of elegiac commemoration and recuperation.'[194] Brontë, unlike other nineteenth-century female poets, utilises this trope in a particularly unique way, which isolates her from the kind of classical referencing to self-immolation, and to Sappho found in the work of other writers included in this thesis, such as Christina Rossetti. The desire for this ending means that the nominally feminine subject is self-destructive, but also that the power of the masculine object or muse identified here can also be so overwhelming that its uncontrollable presence and subsequent absence is negatory. Additionally, the desire for death's sleep in the first few lines of the poem (second stanza) happens long before the possibility of rescue by the holy ghost/spirit in stanza four: 'Three gods within this little frame, /Are warring night and day; / Heaven could not hold them all, and yet/ They are all held in me;' (17-20). Here God or gods are internalised within poetic personae, not worshipped or imposed from above by a patriarchal religion – the Trinity is used as a paradigm of self-conflict in the personas of philosopher, seer and Holy Ghost rather than as the zenith of divine harmony and inspiration. However,

---

[194] Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), p.1.

this warring is contained within the broader role of poet/writer and its possible construction of a God-like perspective in moulding and creating these disparate positions. Even if the philosopher, seer, and Holy Ghost are warring, they are contained by the fourth positional 'me;' 'Heaven could not hold them all, and yet/ They are all held in me;' (19-20). This description also indicates that the voice that speaks here is a fourth persona/narrator who occupies an observer's role within and without the poem – inside but detached. Again, what should be the ultimate muse is undercut and subverted within a form of poetic worship. The poem actually venerates the worship of creativity, the power of the poet/writer and their 'inky sea' (34) and the articulation of alternative discourses and galvanising social and philosophical change. Ultimately, the text reflects on nineteenth-century dialogues between prophetic poets and religious authority in addition to fragmenting, multiple subjectivities and spheres.

Variously described as visionary, mystic, non-conformist, Methodist, pantheistic, ecstatic, nature worshipping and even heretical, Brontë's poetry and its constructions of unorthodox faith have continued to intrigue theologians, literary critics and biographers.[195] Manifestations of textual desire are often positioned within arguments which locate Brontë's poetic fervour as an aspect of religious discourse; for example Emma Mason suggests a link between Methodism and eighteenth-century poetics to elucidate Brontë's passionate (queer) aesthetic (note the language of the other, unnatural and strange.) Mason focuses on these connections:

> Brontë's fascination with enthusiasm as a device through which she could validate her rendering of passion in a literary society that deemed the power of

---

[195] See Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: Women's Press, 1998), Simon Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Emma Mason, '"Some God of Wild Enthusiast's Dreams": Emily Brontë's Religious Enthusiasm,'*Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.1 (2003), 263-277), Lisa Wang, 'The Holy Spirit in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Poetry,'*Literature and Theology*, 14.2 (2000), 160-173.

her work masculine, *unnatural* and *strange* […] Brontë's understanding of enthusiasm is outlined as an idea that emerges from religious and political discourses popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[196] (My italics).

Brontë's poetics reflect on and construct, religious complexity, in the process ironically fitting into nineteenth-century discourses of religious crisis and fear, creating sensations and expressions of alienation and doubt often found in the work of other nineteenth-century poets. As Simon Marsden has noted Brontë's religious imagination situates her firmly within a long-standing poetic tradition: 'Brontë's writing is informed and animated by the religious discourses of its time, and particularly, by Romantic interpretations and appropriations of theological language.'[197]

Readings of the religious ecstatic in Brontë's work often foreground the potential for escape from poetic prisons, but in doing so expressions of physical and erotic arousal are subsumed within a spiritual and non-physical realm, and desire disappears in the process. It is now a necessary part of queer readings, or queering texts, to foreground censored desire as the driving force, that requires or uses ecstatic states as a cover. Both Marsden and Mason have proposed readings of Brontë's work which highlight notions of ineffability and the unspeakable within aspects of religious fervour. This ineffability, while on occasions conventionally joyful, is also connected to the construction of poetic personae who are unable to claim and reinforce their own voices. As Mason suggests, these personae suffer a loss of subjectivity, or agency, when they are taken over by ecstatic states: 'Confessing that she cannot speak A.G.A declares that her voice is muted,

---

[196] Mason, p.264.
[197] Marsden, ibid., p.1.

"My voice is choked but not with grief."'(28)[198] A.G.A is advising the reader that a force external to her possesses her voice (a trope which is reworked in *Wuthering Heights*). To use Helen Davies's model of poetic ventriloquism, these personae become puppets rather than puppet masters, and subjects who are controlled by forces outside of the texts: 'It is the ventriloquial condition of language use - the sense of not "owning"' our words, of always already speaking in echoes – that can help us to contemplate neo-Victorian conversation with the nineteenth century.' [199] Arguably, the whole of Brontë's oeuvre is overwhelmed with references to the need for psychological recognition, for excluded and distressed voices to be heard. From the poetic voice of 'Hope' through to Catherine's spectral crying at the window in *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë constructs these excluded figures in a prophetic, precursory acting out of Sedgwick's speech and spectacle of the closet.

The poem that starts 'I am the only being whose doom' illustrates how a lack of psychological recognition causes the text's subject to wither.[200] Playing with the oppositions of invisible and visible the poem's persona provides a diagnosis of social indifference, 'No tongue would ask no eye would mourn' (2) but also a fear of being seen, 'There have been times I cannot hide' (9). The final stanza offers a kind of cruel empathy and a recognition of both misanthropy and internalised self-loathing:

> 'Twas grief enough to think mankind
> All hollow servile insincere –
> But worse to trust to my own mind
> And find the same corruption there   (21-24)

(No punctuation at the end of the stanza in the original text.)

---

[198] Gezari, taken from Brontë's poem which starts 'O God of heaven, the dream of horror,' pp. 43, 44.
[199] See H. Davies, p.34.
[200] Gezari, pp. 99-100.

Containing tropes of hiddenness, secrecy, and emptiness, the dilution of subjectivity is represented by a kind of spatial closetedness. The text offers a foregrounding of private space in its metrical deviation of the line, 'In secret pleasure - secret tears' (5), mirroring intimacy through a form of poetic short hand. The poem also offers the promise of potential confession, 'And then experience told me truth' (19) but in the end this comes to nothing but the public discourse of hollow insincerity. This feeling of dropping away is emphasized by the subtle slip in rhyme between 'insincere' and 'there,' as opposed to here. Even the personae of Brontë's most ecstatic poems still suffer from the alienation that speaking in tongues creates and the language is monologic rather than dialogic. To return to Davies's thesis concerning misfitting and blood ties, the religious kin of father, son, and holy ghost, seem to offer a superficial salvation in Brontë's poetics but also lead to mental derangement and a form of psychic death.

Subjective Refusal

Reinforcing the trope of subjective demise Brontë's poetic oeuvre also exhibits another peculiar phenomena with a group of 'I'-less, subject-less poems (seventeen in total in Gezari's edition). These texts, while presenting a number of challenges for readers, are curiously overlooked in interpretations of Brontë's poetics. They pose a number of questions concerning the analysis of non-conforming or unconventional poetry, for example, texts that subvert established lyrical frameworks such as subject/object relations, or subject/muse dynamics. Possibly these texts can be seen as a resolution of, or solution to, binary limitations within gender and desire, and the problematic, persecutory relations found in other poems. Brontë's use of this subjective removal creates paradoxical effects through a troping of absence as presence, and a resistance of identity. Initial readings of these works provoke strong reactions concerning missing

129

subjectivity and its potential space on the margins, or outside the texts. The repetition of empty poetic spaces suggests the use of a protective blind spot or closeted expression operating as both sanctuary and place of exile.

These poems highlight another issue concerning the difference between subjectivity and voice in nineteenth-century poetry. Arguably taking away the 'I's (but not eyes) in these poems actually strengthens the focus on sonic and visual qualities so that the reader inserts themselves in place of the I, producing their own performing and performative perspective unmediated by the gap between external and internal subjects. These nineteenth-century non-human poems, ironically also provide a suggestive counterpoint to current concerns about the threatened role of the human in the academy as Yopie Prins suggests:

> But perhaps these anxieties and fascinations are more our own, as we read Victorian poetry anthropomorphically in order to hold on to an idea of the human, at a time where humanities seems increasingly in question. The pathos of this lyric humanism is that we try to insert the human in the places – or poems – where it is least certain. [201]

The subjects of these Brontë poems, if they ever had them, have already exited the scene to a place of safety, or leapt Sappho-like into oblivion leaving an empty poetic closet behind them. It is easy to assume that these poems are less embodied or grounded without 'I' positions but the opposite appears to be the case. For example, the untitled poem 18 in Gezari's edition, (first line) 'And first an hour of mournful musing,'[202] is packed with condensed, physical language, 'And then a gush of bitter tears' (2), 'And then a throb and then a lightening /And then a breathing from above' (5-6). By shifting the

---

[201] Yopie Prins, 'The Voice Inverse,' *Victorian Poetry*, 42. 1 (2004), 1-17 (p.46).
[202] Gezari, p.47.

focus away from conventional subjects these poems offer a heightened awareness and sensitivity of sonic qualities and sound and voice are privileged over identity. Here the subjective absence does not result in a removal of the body but rather a non-identification of it, and a form of third-person poetic voice. This non-identification further removes any signs of gender, you cannot gender something that does not declare itself, reinforcing the strength of poetic ambiguity, even if as Prins suggests, we try to insert interpretation and open up the space for our own projections. This feeling is intensified by the text's game playing and puns, musing and poetic muse, 'lightening' and lightning, which suggest a knowingness about its own potential secrecy.

> And first an hour of mournful musing
> And then a gush of bitter tears
> And then a dreary calm diffusing
> Its deadly mist o'er joys and cares
>
> And then a throb and then a lightening
> And then a breathing from above
> And then a star in heaven brightening
> The star the glorious star of love (1-8)

The repetition of 'And' produces a cumulative effect of a list which builds tension, heightening sensation and a feeling of excitement which mirrors the poem's narrative, and borders on the seductive and erotic. The text therefore uses bodily anonymity to fetishize touch and potential intimacy without actually revealing anything. The poem also offers the possibility of many readings combining binaries and breaking them simultaneously.

In poem 21 (first line) 'Awaking morning laughs from heaven' the tone is set by the immediate present tense outlining the daybreak scene.[203] The poem replaces a

---

[203] Ibid., pp.48-49.

conventional subject with a day that is personified through sound/voice (laughs). The

poem returns a muse object of sorts in its lady of the 'dovelike eyes.'(9) She is

characterised by visual and sculptural form in the stereotypical references to her

alabaster skin, white hands and 'snowy bosom' (12), which contrasts with the warmth

of her 'velvet cheek' (10). The stand-in subject positions continue to be taken by non-

human aspects which create a sonic voice for the poem, 'A fresh wind waves the

clustering roses, / And through the open window sighs' (5-6). However, at points in the

second stanza this patterning is challenged by an ambiguity which is caused by a lack of

punctuation, so that it is hard to tell whether it is just the wind sighing, or the lady as

well. The feeling of the generic is ruptured in line 13 of the poem by situating the lady

within a familial frame of reference, 'Her sister's and her brother's feet/Are brushing off

the scented dew.' (13-14). The text also makes puns on poetic rhythm (feet and feet)

and sprung rhythm 'And she springs up in haste to greet' (15). In these 'I'-less poems,

poetic non-conformity is used to explore reflections on the nature of lyric poetry and its

queer limits.

The trope of misfitting extends throughout Brontë's oeuvre, offering a range of

consistently inconsistent positions and formal characteristics, providing a notoriously

challenging level of poetic ambiguity. This results in the paradox of texts which

constantly undercut their own certainty. Even readings of Brontë's assertive faith

personae are constantly subverted by an overdetermined poetic voice, which hints at its

own vulnerability, most obviously and ironically in 'No Coward Soul is Mine', often used

as an example of potential spiritual transcendence. This overdetermined voice arguably

has wider applications in the context of nineteenth-century poetry, referencing as it does

the crisis of faith deconstructed, and reconstructed, by many poets throughout the

period. Brontë's poetics ultimately and ironically provide a fit for exclusion, vulnerability and marginality foreshadowing twenty-first century queer critiques, allowing the misfit to be both marginal and central in social and literary discourse.

Wuthering Heights (1847)

In this section I focus on aspects of ambiguity and ownership in _Wuthering Heights_ and their relationship to Emily Brontë's poetics and life writing.[204] Queer reading is offered as a missing textual link working with gaps, omissions and silences in the text and notions of gender disruption, closeting, alternative relationship structures and social anxiety. I also analyse how _Wuthering Heights_ constructs complex reflections of social anxiety in an earlier nineteenth-century context, in a text which repeatedly marks its own queerness. The word queer is used frequently throughout the text and mentions of the term run into double figures. There are many other aspects of the text that could be explored here, but for the purposes of this thesis the novel is included as a form of fictional life writing and as a key text in a potential queer canon.

Critics have raised the issue of Heathcliff's disruption of social norms through an analysis of gender in the text; including a suggestion by Stevie Davies that Heathcliff may be genderqueer or gender fluid: 'What sex is Heathcliff anyway? If this question seems absurd or perverse, so be it, since we are dealing with an author who took a positive pride in perversity and wilfully dissented from received opinions.'[205] Despite the slightly tentative nature of Davies's assertion, she does highlight a fundamental and seismic

---

[204] Emily Brontë, _Wuthering Heights_ (1847) (London: Penguin, 2003).
[205] Stevie Davies, _Emily Brontë: Heretic_ (London: Women's Press, 1994), p.197.

disruption of gender norms in the text. The novel constructs a model of gender fluidity so that both display and mirror opposite gender characteristics in a kind of strange gender swapping. Brontë's texts frequently break the link between biology and gender in various forms of social and linguistic gender performativity. If the I of 'I am Heathcliff' is sited within femininity, then 'he's more myself than I am' immediately sets up the possibility of masculinity within femininity and vice versa, in a form of transgender articulation. [206] These statements offer a microcosm of the text's refusal to stabilise and fix gender norms and its resistance to fitting in.

What also marks *Wuthering Heights* out as a distinctively queer text is the level of distress within its processing of psychological and textual closeting. Heathcliff's queerness demands complete recognition of its existence for psychological survival, the suppression of this recognition leads to both Catherine and Heathcliff's demise. Catherine tries to live on the non-queer side of the psychological fence by rejecting Heathcliff, but her refusal to face the results of her actions provides a synecdoche for shame and denial in the text. Ultimately, Catherine cannot acknowledge Heathcliff or herself. She literally breaks apart, unable to recognise her own subjectivity in the mirror adjacent to the closet (press).

Despite its queer developmental modelling, *Wuthering Heights* is seriously disturbed and haunted by male femininity and a fear of effeminacy, inverting Halberstam's focus. This is made manifest in the form of homosocial links, camp expression, triangulated relationships, shame and fear. *Wuthering Heights* repeatedly breaks the links between biology and gender in its characterisation, making it a hugely performative text, but a text that is uneasy with its own fluidity, which results in high

---

[206] Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* pp.81, 82.

levels of projection. Notable examples include Lockwood's perception of himself as an eligible worldly bachelor who is terrified of serious female interest, and who is seemingly more intrigued and fascinated by Heathcliff, and Heathcliff's hostility towards his delicate son Linton. It has often been suggested that Heathcliff loathes Linton because he is a constant reminder of Isabella and Edgar's genes and his lack of familial links. However, it is possible to suggest an alternative reading, that the characteristics that Heathcliff shuns in Linton are actually inherited from him, or that they represent a disowned queer, feminine part of himself. The chapters featuring Linton make explicit the connection between his character and male femininity. He is described as 'dainty' and 'whey-faced,' producing a direct link between between him and stereotypical feminine qualities. [207] The text explicitly mentions Linton's effeminacy in Volume Two, Chapter Five. Heathcliff sees his own social marginality in Linton's inability to conform to normative gender traits in his refusal to perform orthodox masculinity and his potential enactment of the spectacle of the closet:

> While they exchanged caresses I took a peep in to see after Linton. He was asleep in a corner, wrapped in a warm, fur-lined cloak, as if it had been winter. A pale, delicate, effeminate boy, who might have been taken for my master's younger brother, so strong was the resemblance: but there was a sickly peevishness in his aspect that Edgar Linton never had.[208]

This fear of effeminacy offers a curious and provocative link to discussions of Sedgwick's work on homosexual panic.

Wuthering Heights' complex narrative structure centres on the conflict between two diaries and two libraries, Catherine and Lockwood's, an aspect of the text which is

---

[207] Brontë, *WH,* pp, 181, 180, 220.
[208] Ibid., p.200.

often overlooked. The novel also includes significant reflections on the importance of power, education and literacy. If Brontë's poetics on occasion remove subjects altogether then *Wuthering Heights* represents the return of the excluded, in the form of Catherine's ghost and attempted ghost writing. In reclaiming the text, Catherine asserts her right to name herself as gendered author in a way that Emily Brontë cannot, even if her writing and rewriting of her names acknowledges the problem of patrilineal naming, whilst also parodying romantic fantasies of possible partnerships. Lockwood tries to dismiss Catherine's life writing as nothing:

> The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small – *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*[209]

The text inscribes a gendered, metaphorical conflict between feminine and masculine forms of life writing within Lockwood and Catherine's diaries which is mirrored by the literal conflict between the two characters at the threshold of Catherine's library, as Claire Raymond notes:

> The ghost Cathy returns because Lockwood has read her texts, her names proleptically inscribing the novel and not because he has asked for her return. Indeed, it is clear that the ghost does re-enter the room of its own writing, a speech of the dead enforced on the living.[210]

Ironically, this space also proves unsafe for Lockwood in his potential defenestration and being dragged out of the (closet) library into a liminal undead space. As Rebecca Steinitz notes, this shared desire for safe spaces ultimately eludes both Catherine and Lockwood:

---

[209] Ibid., p.19.
[210] Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing From Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (Farnham: Ashgate,2006), p.108..

'In, the novel then, the diary itself becomes the proverbial place of one's own, but its very status as such reveals how psychologically, textually and materially, one's own place can never be secured.'[211] Ideas of place and safety also feature significantly in Emily and Anne Brontës' life writing, providing a link between fictional and biographical forms of diary writing in the Brontës' oeuvre.

Emily and Anne Brontës' Diary Papers 1834-1845

The frontispiece of Deborah Lutz's recent study of material objects and the Brontës contains an early Ambrotype photograph of Haworth Parsonage.[212] This is not an unexpected inclusion in a biography of the Brontës; however, there is something compelling about the image which requires further investigation. The building is oddly out of scale with its surroundings and the picture is distorted which creates a strange feeling of dislocation; in short, the building looks like a doll's house or stage set with back drop. This reduced version of the Parsonage is highly appropriate given the Brontës' production and use of miniature objects, and their tiny books including tales of Glasstown, Angria and Gondal.[213] Contained within this one image is a metaphor for domesticity, role-play, self-figuring and play, tropes which receive considerable attention in Emily and Anne's *Diary Papers* and their wider framing within discourses of appropriate femininity and separate spheres. This representation also hints at more Gothic aspects of the Brontës' work found in both the juvenilia and later works, the inversion of childhood objects, the kittens/dead rabbits in the kitchen of the house in

---

[211] Rebecca Steinitz, 'Diaries and Displacement in *Wuthering Heights,*' *Studies in the Novel*, 32.4 (2000), 407-419, p.407.

[212] Deborah Lutz, *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2015), frontispiece. See Appendix Two.

[213] See The British Library collection of Brontë juvenilia, via http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/brontë-juvenilia.

Wuthering Heights and the mad woman in the attic in *Jane Eyre*. This aspect endures even in twenty-first century historical novels, such as Jessie Burton's *The Miniaturist* (2014), where the novel creates an atmosphere of fear in the manipulation of miniature biographical doll figures, reflecting psychological disturbance in a domestic setting.[214]

I now move on to consider Emily and Anne Brontës' *Diary Papers,* their unusual construction of diary form, and ways in which these small texts offer opportunities for the reading of intimacy, collaboration and hiddenness within a complex, creative and domestic space.[215] In her recent study of long nineteenth-century women's writing, Amy Culley includes novels, letters and diaries and emphasises a critical shift away from the idea of lone, private, life writers, to seeing life writing as an often shared and complex collaborative form:

> Approaching life writing as an expression of a personal feeling by a single author has tended to obscure its importance as an articulation of relationships and communal identities, or as a contribution to the history of a family, community or nation. [216]

Emily and Anne Brontës' *Diary Papers* offer a clear example of familial and communal writing practice and an opportunity to work with potentially intriguing constructions of space, voice and subjectivity, as well as providing opportunities for fruitful comparison with other diary texts. However, I want to suggest that one of the most intriguing aspects within these pieces of work has largely been overlooked: Emily's withheld writing and its effect on joint creative projects, intimacy and intertextuality. This withholding has been

---

[214] Jessie Burton, *The Miniaturist* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2014).

[215] Emily and Anne's *Diary Papers*, November 24, 1834, Emily and Anne's *Diary Paper*, June 26, 1837, Emily's *Birthday Paper*, July 30, 1841, Emily's *Diary Paper* July 30th 1845, Anne's *Diary Paper*, July 30th, 1841, Anne's Diary Paper, July 31st, 1845 accessed via City University, New York, webpages http://academic.brooklyn, cuny.edu/English/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/diary_papers.

[216] Amy Culley, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840: Friendship, Community and Collaboration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.1.

touched upon in some critical studies, most obviously, Augustin Trapenard's work, but it is has yet to be linked to readings of queer life writing and closeting.[217] Anne Brontë's Diary Paper of July 31, 1845 contains the following reference to partly hidden writing, 'Emily is engaged in writing the Emperor Julius's life she has read some of it and I very much want to hear the rest – she is writing some poetry too I wonder what it is about- .'[218] This intriguing reference suggests the complexities of Emily's part-shared closet.

The *Diary Papers* also offers access to gender fluid role-play inside and outside the Parsonage. In Emily's Paper of Thursday July 30th 1845 she writes the following: '[…] and during our excursion we were Ronald Macelgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosobelle Esualdar, Ella and Julian Egremont Catharine Navarre and Cordelia Fitzaphnold escaping from the palaces of Instruction to join the Royalists[…].'[219] This fluidity is also emphasised by a lack of information concerning the relationships between these Gondal personae, so that siblings could be spouses or vice versa, this jumble is further complicated by the inclusion of real figures such as Catherine Navarre, a lack of punctuation, and figures who are not retained in Emily's Gondal poems.

One of the most obvious and striking aspects of the *Diary Papers* is their intermittent and irregular nature and the way in which they are used to project forward and backward in time while also being written in the present. Anne and Emily's rejection of diurnal or daily diary writing does not necessarily indicate a completely random construction. The *Papers* are linked to significant events and specific dates such as birthdays, for example, Emily's papers of July the 30th, 1841, and July 30th 1845 and

---

[217] Augustin Trapenard, 'Auctorial (Im)postures in Emily Brontë's Diary Papers', *Brontë Studies*, 34.2 (200), 93-106.
[218] CUNY, p.6.
[219] CUNY, p.4.

Anne's paper of July 30th 1841 marking Emily's birthday. This quality combined with an oscillating dynamic of hidden and open states provides a clue to a possible reinvention, not only of life writing but also notions of privacy and self-construction. I propose an argument here that acknowledges current scholarship of complex subjectivity in the *Diary Papers,* but which provides a significantly different reading concerning the location of self/selves in these texts.   Augustin Trapenard, Juliet Barker and Simon Marsden all stress various forms of withholding in Emily Brontë's diary writing. Trapenard suggests that this is a conscious strategy within Brontë's diary writing, as a way of shoring up her control of self:

> And finally, it is that of a fictionalized writer, withdrawing into an imagined inner space and veiling herself behind the masks of multiple characters…In other words, instead of legitimizing herself as a writer, Emily Brontë was paradoxically staging her writing as something totally private, thereby preventing anyone from authorizing her.[220]

These literal but diversionary semiotics even extending to the naming of Emily Brontë's dogs Keeper and Grasper. Emily constructs an inner sanctum within her private writing through forms of multiple subjectivities, layered modes of writing and omissions. Lutz's use of cabinet in her monograph title is also highly suggestive of the presence of a closet. Brontë produces an environment where there is no distinction between daily events in the Parsonage and the fantasy world of the Gondals, as Deborah Lutz notes:

> The workaday life at the parsonage on a Monday washday and their writing, both of the actual and of the fantastical, are crucial and 'happening' just then. . To the two sisters, these events all carry weight; being Sir Robert Peel and being a peeler of potatoes and apples, with a rich fantasy life, are all equally worthy objects of slapdash lyricism.[221]

---

[220] Trapenard, p.104.
[221] Lutz, p. 38.

Although, the *Diary Papers* contain several sketches or drawings the most well-known is that included at the centre of Emily and Anne's Diary Paper of June 26 1837.[222] This central drawing clearly marks and labels both figures and objects including one labelled Emily. This immediately raises the question of split subjectivity between Emily, the writer, Emily the artist and Emily the figure inside and outside the paper. As unexpected readers we are left with a feeling of confusion about Emily's whereabouts if she can be in several places at once, and back to front. As Simon Marsden notes, this sketch produces an odd sensation of both presence and absence and what seems like a potentially perverse sketch:

> It is a curious form of self-portrait, a picture taken from a position from which it is impossible to see oneself. In sketching herself, Emily constructs the picture as if it was drawn by someone else, even to the extent of showing her pen lying on the table rather than in her hand. Emily effaces the act of drawing the picture just as she has that of writing.[223]

It is as if Emily is playing a game with her own subjectivity and testing the limits of self-representation, to return to the doll's house motif she is toying with her sibling and unforeseen readers. This chapter argues that what has been read as perverse self-effacement in Emily's *Diary Papers* is actually partly an enactment of the spectacle of the closet staged within the wider closet of Haworth Parsonage. Dominic Janes' summary of later creative representations of the closet could just as easily be applied to Emily's Brontë's diary project:

> In the course of the (twentieth) century it became possible for artists to begin self-consciously to depict what they saw as the forms and practices, of sublime,

---

[222] CUNY, p3.

[223] Simon Marsden, 'Imagination, Materiality and the Act of Writing in Emily Brontë's Diary Papers' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 28.1, (2006) 35-47 p.40.

secret desire or to experiment empoweringly with the ornamental and theatrical diversions of the stereotypes of the spectacle of the closet.[224]

The rooms of the Parsonage form part of the set for performances of oddity, surreal humour and private linguistic references.

This paper also plays with notions of fact, and fiction, life and art, permanence and impermanence. Emily's writing is spatially positioned both by her drawing which outlines the dimensions of the room, but also the clearly written labels for objects for example, the papers are labelled 'the papers,' the tin box is labelled 'the tin box' and the respective female figures are named as 'Emily' and 'Anne.' The use of literal, capitalised labels is also oddly similar to that found in later texts such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.   Alice encounters strangely labelled objects: 'Soon her eye fell on a little glass box that was lying under the table: she opened it, and found in it a very small cake, on which the words 'EAT ME' were beautifully marked in currants.'[225]   Both texts also share anxieties about safety, space and identity. There is an affective poignancy in the labelling that Emily employs, as if her own and her sister's presence is so under threat that naming is essential. The significance of personal objects to the Brontës' writing and biography has received detailed analysis in the work of Juliet Barker and Deborah Lutz.[226] However, the spatial and psychological aspects that surround the representation of these objects is arguably still a fertile area for research. The labelling of these objects implies a need to fix, identify and hold down reality and materiality, as if the objects are likely to be blown away at any moment by a sudden

---

[224] Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.191.
[225] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (1865) (London: Penguin, 1998), pp.14-15.
[226] Juliet Barker, *Sixty Treasures* (Keighley: Brontë Society, 1988), Lutz, 2015.

wind, or removed by some mystery force.   At their core the *Diary Papers* seem to be asking fundamental questions about what and where is a safe space for forms of self-identification and development.

Analyses of potential coding in these pieces of writing are notable by their absence. These *Diary Papers* share several aspects with Lister's explicitly coded writing, in their use of private language, barely legible handwriting, shorthand, dialect and combinations of public and private events in single diary entries/notes. They also pose a similar question about why this private writing needs to be encoded or encrypted. The *Diary Papers* produce a form of meta-discourse which draws attention to the physical and material aspects of their production.   The papers start as joint productions, or at least ones which allow Anne's thoughts to be subsumed into Emily's writing of events, until 1841 when Anne Brontë becomes the specified author of separate papers. Emily and Anne's paper of June 26, 1837 is labelled as a joint production but it is clearly controlled and reported by Emily's written I, for example, 'I guess that this day 4 years we shall all be in this drawing room comfortable I hope it may be so. Anne guesses we shall be gone somewhere comfortable.'[227] Although the earlier *Diary Papers* may seem at first to provide a rare example of non-alternate diary writing or merged creative production, in actuality they are largely maintained by Emily. Even the life writing of the hugely overlapping and conjoined Michael Field specifies individual rather than joint authorship of diary entries. As Juliet Barker notes, the 1837 paper signposts both the act of writing and the production and reproduction of materiality:

> The rough sketch below the bulk of the text shows two seated female figures, clearly labelled 'Emily' and 'Anne', at a large table. A number of sheets of paper labelled 'The papers,' are scattered over the table and next to Emily's right elbow

---

[227] CUNY, p.3.

is 'The Tin Box.'[…] Written at irregular intervals of approximately four years, the old papers were re-opened and examined when a new one was written. This paper like the others stills bears crease marks where it was folded into quarters before being inserted in the box.[228]

There are also readings of the *Diary Papers* which emphasise their spatial relationship to covered and private spaces, or which are more obviously focus on the material aspect of their production in Haworth Parsonage. This creates a conflicting dynamic between divergent critical approaches which stress either the shared or closed nature of these texts and between those that emphasise or conjoined subjectivity. As Simon Marsden notes, critical practice based on the notion of the daily diary, written across substantial periods of time, has struggled to acknowledge fragmented or alternative forms of diary writing:

 Irregular (that is kept infrequently according to the whim of the diarist and occasional (with entries written on special occasions or at fixed but infrequent intervals) diaries require their own critical studies to explore the ways in which identities might be constructed through infrequent recording.[229]

This infrequency offers a clear parallel between the *Diary Papers* and evolving ideas of queer, literary temporality. Although the papers are sequentially ordered by date, within a four year cycle, and not out of sequence, they create a strange feeling of being between time in their anxious projection and retrospection and their cyclical repetition of '4/four years' and 'pillopatate.'[230] In the paper of July 30, 1831, Emily writes, 'This day 4 years I wonder whether we shall still be dragging on in our present condition or established to our heart's content Time will show-.'[231] Although Emily, can partly control the staging

---

[228] Juliet Barker, Emily Brontë's *Diary Paper*, 1837 summary taken from the British Library website, <http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/emily-brontës-diary-1837> [accessed 23 May 2016].
[229] Marsden, *Imagination and* Materiality, p.35.
[230] DPs, Emily and Anne Brontë, November 24th 1834, Emily Brontë July 30, 1845, CUNY, pp, 2, 5.
[231] CUNY, p.3.

of her own closet from the safety of the Parsonage, she cannot control the passage of time and fears of encroaching pathology and potential mortality. The Parsonage may be constructed as a place of safety in these pieces of writing but it is one which sits adjacent to a graveyard, above a village with seriously high mortality rates and extremely low life expectancy, as the British Library summary of Benjamin Babbage's public health report notes:

> The average life expectancy was 25.8 years; 41.6% died before the age of six. Perhaps, most appallingly, Babbage's investigation confirmed that the graveyard, situated on the hill at the top of the town and in front of the Brontës' home, was so overcrowded and poorly oxygenated that decomposing, putrid matter filtered into the water supply.[232]

The arguments proposed in this chapter cover wide-ranging tropes of non-binary resistance in Emily Brontë's poetry, *Diary Papers* and *Wuthering Heights*. New readings are offered which elucidate overdetermined androgyny, self-loathing, persecutory muses, autoeroticism, queer and genderqueer anxiety in Brontë's writing as well as self- and subjective determination. Within this research novel perspectives emerge alongside existing scholarship and discourses of lyric, Romantic, religious and gothic poetics. Brontë's perverse construction, and obviation of restrictive psychological states of bullying, punishment, discipline and imprisonment, without access to fully functional escape routes, is paralleled by the remarkable treatment of the stages of closeting in *Wuthering Heights* and the complex protective strategies of the *Diary Papers*. If Brontë's writing resists normative fixing by constant shifts in non-binary subject positioning and evangelical language, then the work of two mid-Victorian devotional poets moves the

---

[232] Benjamin Hershel Babbage, *Sanitary Report on Haworth* (1850) (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1850). British Library summary via https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/sanitary -report-on-haworth-home-to-the-brontës [Accessed 3 June 2016], p.1.

control of disclosure into the arena of the pseudo-confessional, and deferred states of

grace and reception.

Chapter Three

<u>Christina Rossetti and Adelaide Anne Procter: Poetry's Strange Reserve</u>

Virginia Blain suggests that the analysis of nineteenth-century religious poetry is due for a renewal, as the next stage in a process which has already included the recovery of queer aspects, or the queering of poetic texts,

> The queering of Victorian poetry is probably long overdue. And what next? Perhaps a new push toward re-opening religious debates from a new knowledge base and a newly sensitized perspective which seeks somehow to put the religion back into the poetry.[233]

The evolution of queer theoretical perspectives has not only coincided with a new interest in religious poetics but also the links between religion and sexuality. This chapter explores the relationship between queerness and religious belief in the poetry of Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) and Adelaide Anne Procter (1825-1864) and develops recent work on Tractarian poetics by queer theorists.[234]

While Rossetti's work still often features as part of an established academic canon, Procter's work is less well known. However, their poetic oeuvres share a number of characteristics, offering insights into female piety, homo-affective dynamics, and the religious discourses of Tractarianism and Anglo-Catholicism. Their poetry offers a wide range of forms and genres, a marked propensity for both under-statement and over-statement, and shifts from the apparently pious to the Gothic macabre in rapid succession.   Biographically they also share pivotal positions within notable same-sex aesthetic and social communities, Rossetti within and without the Pre-Raphaelite

---

[233] Virginia Blain, 'Period Pains: The Changing Body of Victorian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 41. 1, Spring 2004, 71-79, (p.72).
[234] See Duc Dau, 'Perfect Chastity: Celibacy and Virgin Marriage in Tractarian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 44.1, 2006, 77-92 (p.77), Frederick. S. Roden, *Same-Sex Desire and Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Brotherhood and informal sisterhood, and Procter within the Langham Place Circle and a wider coterie of male writers, including her father, the poet Barry Cornwell, Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray.

Both Rossetti and Procter consider religious and erotic devotion and tropes of secrecy, veiling and the hidden in their work. These obscured elements are often attributed in Rossetti and Procter's case to an observance of the Tractarian doctrine of Reserve. As the study of nineteenth-century, religious poetry has been revived in the last twenty years, Tractarian aesthetics and Reserve have been recovered. As Mark Knight and Emma Mason suggest, the complexity of spatial use in Tractarian poetry is ripe for reinterpretation: 'Many of Rossetti's poems invite the reader into the spiritual space of the poem, what Pater would call a 'cloistral refuge'...Ritualist poetry like Rossetti's then, offered an incandescent portal into God's mysteries.'[235]

This section provides a definition and conceptualising of queerness in the chosen texts based on the pledging of female desire and devotion, the consistent refusal of default, heteronormative positions and the overriding influence of female and feminine biological and social bodies. It also touches on ideas of refuge, enclosure and safe spaces in religious houses and spiritualist communities, for example, the use of convents in Rossetti and Procter's work. The connections between Hellenism, Tractarianism, and the Oxford Movement and Sappho's role as bridging muse are also brought together and analysed alongside the broader genre of the 'fallen woman' poem and nineteenth-century constructions of female virtue.

---

[235] Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.108.

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born into a family of academics, artists and writers and her poetry enjoyed critical acclaim but limited sales during her lifetime. While the place of Rossetti's poetry in canonical terms has long been secure, Procter's work has been largely overlooked despite significant sales of her work. As Gill Gregory notes:

> According to Coventry Patmore, demand for her poetry was greater than for any other English poet with the exception of Tennyson. Some of her poems were widely sung as hymns in the latter half of the nineteenth century; undoubtedly the most famous of her lyrics was 'A Lost Chord' set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1877. Her poetry was translated into German and published in America. Individual poems appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine, Good Words,* and the *English Woman's Journal.* [236]

Procter's work enjoyed a high profile with a large popular following in the nineteenth century, and she was accorded the accolade of being 'Queen Victoria's favourite poet.'   She also benefitted from a wide circle of literary connections, being friends with several male writers including Charles Dickens, as well as women writers and campaigners such as Emily Faithful, Matilda Hays and Bessie Rayner Parkes. Procter submitted a large number of poems for publication in Dickens' *Household Words*, initially under the pseudonym Mary Berwick (not wanting to be accused of undue influence as the daughter of one of Dickens' closest friends, the poet Barry Cornwell),   and published three poetry collections, *Legends and Lyrics (Vol 1 and 2)* and *A Chaplet of Verses* during her lifetime. Following an extended period of critical and academic neglect Procter's work resurfaced in collections of Victorian women's poetry published in the 1980s and 1990 and in Gill Gregory's biography.[237]   More recently, Procter's work has been

---

[236] *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry: Gill Gregory, *Adelaide Anne Procter*, - *http://global.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/online/*2004 [accessed 23 November 2015].
[237] Gill Gregory, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

considered alongside Rossetti's and Dora Greenwell's in studies which focus on nineteenth-century religion and literature, and on the revival of Tractarian poetry and Anglo-Catholic writing. Procter converted to Catholicism around 1851.

Dickens wrote the posthumous introduction to Procter's *Collected Works,* which contains amusing anecdotes, but very little analysis of her work. This introduction is particularly revealing of male writers' attitudes to female writers. Where Dickens does mention Procter's works directly he often frames this in the form of an apology for the seriousness of tone which they contain. In addition, Dickens persistently refuses to make any assessment of Procter's work. He justifies this by suggesting that Procter had no interest in gaining recognition for her skill as a writer: 'She would far rather have died without seeing a line of her composition in print, than that I should have maundered about her here as "the Poet," or "the Poetess."'[238]

The Introduction is redeemed by the inclusion of two letters written by Procter during a visit to Italy. The European setting is important, as is the idea of foreignness constructed here. The importance of 'foreignness' and alienation as a cipher for poetic queerness is discussed at greater length in a later section. One of these letters includes a description of Procter's visit to a country wedding. The text hints at the possible freedom allowed by alternative cultural settings: 'I began to be afraid that some idea of our dignity would prevent us getting a partner; so by Madame B's advice I went up to the bride, and offered to dance with her. Such a handsome young woman! Like one of Uwin's pictures. Very dark, with a quantity of black hair, and on an immense scale.' [239] (It only becomes clear,

---

[238] Charles Dickens, 'Introduction' to *The Complete Poetical Works of Adelaide Anne Procter* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co. Publishers), p.xix
[239] Procter,Ibid., p.xv.

later in the letter, that Procter has obstructed the first dance between the bride and groom and offered an alternative partnership in the process!)

Several of Procter's larger narrative poems have titles which indicate a pronounced interest in foreign settings, 'A Legend of Provence', 'A Tomb in Ghent', and 'A Legend of Bregenz', which provide a counterpoint to poems on the theme of home/homelessness and marginal, exiled existence. This may not seem particularly significant until the notions of foreignness and femininity are analysed in detail. In her recent work, Annamarie Jagose has proposed a form of queer coding in nineteenth-century texts which foreground single female characters in foreign settings, or which indicate feminine personas of no clear and fixed abode. She uses the example of Miss Wade in Dickens' *Little Dorrit* to propose a theory of rogue femininity, and an association with foreignness and non-domesticity, which is actually more disruptive to bourgeois norms than attachments to other women:

> Single and singular, angry and awkward in the amiable company of middle class families, possessed by something that no one can specify yet everyone can volubly suspect. Figured in terms of contagion and disease, more at home in France than in England, drawn to women who subsequently risk becoming like her. Miss Wade is represented through the syntax of desires not easily named.[240]

These rogue females are labelled and defined by a language of contamination and danger. As single women they are represented as a female Svengali taking away the identities and souls of their victims. This combination hints at a link between undefined female sexuality and vampirism in nineteenth-century texts, the predatory single woman feeding and gorging on female bodies and removing subjectivity to produce doppelgangers. These predatory figures provide an abject mirror image to the healing

---

[240] Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p 41.

maternal and sororal substitutions in Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and Procter's 'A Legend

of Provence' (see Fallen Women section).

Tractarian Beliefs and the Closeted Poetics of Reserve

Knight and Mason give the following summary of Tractarianism and its cultural influence:

> The Oxford Movement, also known as Tractarianism, is perhaps the most literary
> of those nineteenth-century theologies discussed in this book, and emerged in
> the 1830s from the academic environment of Oxford University. The Movement's
> central figures were poets as well as preachers, and doctrinal system was
> grounded in poetics as much as theology.[241]

Virginia Blain's reference to 'putting the religion back into the poetry' [242] raises a number

of questions, not least of which is whose religion this might refer to and how does

nineteenth-century poetry reflect the diversity of religious beliefs and observances and

the often subtle nuances between different denominations? This issue is particularly

pertinent in the case of Rossetti and Procter's religious poetry.   Evaluating the

importance of Tractarian beliefs and practices on Rossetti and Procter's poetic oeuvre is

extremely challenging, not least because historians seem to hold widely divergent views

on the complexities of Tractarian theology and religious discourse in the mid-nineteenth

century.   However, certain aspects are known, Tractarianism revived the practice of

taking the Eucharist and placed a greater weight on the importance of symbolism and

ritual within the Anglican Church. Definitions of what constitutes religious poetry, or

religious uses of poetry, seem to vary greatly in a nineteenth-century context, as do the

types of texts involved. Diverse types of writing are often considered under the umbrella

---

[241] Knight and Mason, p.87
[242] Blain, 'Period Pains,' p.72.

heading of religious writing ranging from: articles of faith, hymnals/hymns, liturgical explorations, evangelical tracts, and poetry which considers the relationship between the poetic subject and God. In the case of Tractarianism, this is complicated further by its use of poetry as a space of liturgical and spiritual expression, as Knight and Mason suggest, 'For the Oxford Movement, poetry was synonymous with religious truth and offered believers the best and most appropriate way of communicating and understanding their faith.'[243] Recent criticism seems split between critics who consider the restraint and withholding in both writers' work as evidence of adherence to Tractarian doctrines of reserve, and those who see it as indicative of emotional and psychological suppression. However, there are other possibilities given the often hostile social environment concerning the disclosure of secrets within Tractarianism, which on occasions bore a marked resemblance to Catholic confession and penance. This overlap with Catholicism left Tractarianism open to a number of savage attacks from satirists and religious opponents throughout the nineteenth century, so that potential Tractarian confession became considered as a source of exposure, deviance and a fetishized source of fascination.   The strong links between Tractarianism and literature (poetry in particular), illustrate the ways in which this opposition could be diffused or elided. Poetry for Tractarian adherents acts as a part-sanctified, part-confessional space outside the realms of formal religious practice, providing a means of indirect, declarative speech and expression, outside or beyond the realms of attack.

Diane D'Amico and David A. Kent explore this dichotomy within twenty-first century critical appraisals of Rossetti's work: 'Reserve seems to play a role when Rossetti scholars seek to understand or explain something of the restraint in her poetic style, as

---

[243] Knight and Mason, p.100.

well as the impression that her speakers sometimes give of either having a secret or of keeping silent.'[244] I suggest an alternative argument, that the supposed application of Tractarian reserve actually enables both writers to articulate ambivalent and ambiguous desires. Within these works they employ strategies which enable access for some readers who are able, or ready, to read this code, but which keeps others at a safe distance. This code therefore allows an alternative form of reserve to co-exist with liturgical referencing and to be hidden by and within poetic structures. Most critics identify Tractarian poetry as encoded but stop short of identifying how this coding might serve other functions, for example, Knight and Mason:

> The idea of encoding religious knowledge in poetry was called 'reserve' by the Tractarians, a central aspect of their doctrine and indicating that God's scriptural laws should remain hidden to all but the faithful. Devotional writing and biblical exegesis alike were thus meant to present religious truth using metaphor, figure and allegory in a manner only the initiated believer could understand.[245]

Far from being a sign of unquestioning religious compliance this application is constantly interrogated and challenged through the use of poetic ambiguity itself. In articulating and drawing attention to hiddenness, secrecy and the confessional, both poets subvert this restraint and foreground textual teasing and game playing, which is necessarily at odds with the reserve which the poems nominally seem to support. Annamarie Jagose has suggested that this use of subversive disavowal is a particular

---

[244] Diane D'Amico, David. A Kent, "Rossetti and the Tractarians" *Victorian Poetry* 44. 11 (2006), 93-103 (p. 94).
[245] Knight and Mason, p.101.

feature of nineteenth-century queer writing – foregrounding tropes as disavowed or marginal but paradoxically making them centrally significant.[246]

Reserve and restraint can also be employed as aesthetic tools as Karen Dieleman suggests, 'Restraint, the poet learns, can be more effective than "eloquence of lamentation" or "devotional ecstasy.'[247] For instance, Rossetti explicitly references confessional poems through the use of titles: 'Life Hidden', 'My Secret,' 'Mirage', 'May' ('I cannot tell how it was'), 'Golden Silences'.[248] Procter employs a similar technique in her work but does so within the body of texts rather than giving them "coded" titles. For instance, in her poem 'A Legend of Provence' she draws attention to the narrative encryption:

> And thus the Legend ended. It may be
> Something is *hidden* in the mystery,
> Besides the lesson of God's pardon shown, (My italics.) (315-317)[249]

The potential relationship between confessional spaces and literary and social closets is under-explored in existing queer analyses of nineteenth-century literature and theology. Revisiting existing theoretical definitions of the closet, most obviously Sedgwick's, it is not hard to see how reserve and closeting might operate as overlapping states within Rossetti and Procter's poetry, given the often pronounced tensions between spiritual withholding and passionate expression:

> There is no unthreatened, unthreatening conceptual home for the concept of gay origins. We have all the more reason, then, to keep our understanding of gay

---

[246] Jagose, p.67.

[247] Karen Dieleman, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Religious Poetics: Congregationalist Models of Hymnist and Preacher,' *Victorian Poetry,* 45.2 (2007), 135-157 (p.142).

[248] Christina Rossetti, *Poems and Prose*, ed., Simon Humphries, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 27, 80, 123, 50, 237.

[249] Adelaide Anne Procter, 'A Legend of Provence,' *Complete Works,* p.178.

origin, of gay cultural and material reproduction, plural, multi-capillaried, argus-eyed, respectful, and endlessly cherished. [250]

Although recent monographs have attempted to identify common features and methodologies within queer and lesbian poetics by female writers, mentions of poetic closeting are curiously absent.[251]   For many theorists it seems that without public identity there can be no closet, or that the closet must remain hidden within literary discourse. Sedgwick hints at this paradox in spatial construction of the closet which also resonates within a literary framework: 'That curious space that is both internal and marginal to the culture: centrally representative of its motivating passions and contradictions, even while marginalised by its orthodoxies.'[252]

Reserve also offers an alternative term for a historical phenomenon rooted in an earlier period of women's writing, the end of the long eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth-century. Crista Maria Crusifilli and Cecilia Pietropoli offer a reading of the uses of reserve in their analysis of confinement, domesticity, and its subversion in their recent study of Romantic women[253]. Crusifilli and Pietropoli explore the challenge involved in negotiating this confinement and the forcing of women's writing into a potential literary ghetto of female verse:

> Forced to write with a publishing market in mind, women poets astutely elaborated a rhetoric of modesty, which only apparently complied with traditional assumptions regarding female writers, while at the same time, they addressed a much wider audience and more substantial issues.[254]

---

[250] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet,* 2nd edn (Berkeley: California, University of California Press, 2008), p333.

[251] See Roden, *Same-Sex Desire* and Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity 1889-1930* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2014).

[252] Ibid., p56.

[253] Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli, eds. *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007), p.3.

[254] Ibid., p.3.

Most recent feminist readings tend to focus on these challenges rather than the ways in which this confinement is semiotically constructed within late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women's writing. Rossetti and Procter's poetics offer an alternative, highly complex elaboration of the potential for queer subversion and transgression within these spaces, which is both queer (odd) and queer (same-sex.) They find ways to turn confinement, domesticity and privacy sub-textually against itself, whilst superficially adhering to it and the notion of separate spheres, paradoxical limitations enable both poets to shed light on supposedly taboo areas of gender and sexuality.

Sappho as Nineteenth-Century Cultural Bridge

Sappho exerted a huge influence on both male and female lyric poets in the nineteenth century, as fallen woman, queer poet, alternative mother/lady figure, poet, icon, leader of a creative community. Sappho was born at Lesbos in about 612BC. After a period of exile in Sicily she returned to the island and was at the centre of a community of young women devoted to Aphrodite and the Muses. Rossetti wrote several poems on Sappho reflecting on her role as muse and poetic icon. Rossetti's work offers an obvious example of the interplay and usage of Sapphic and Marian models, while Procter's work occupies a fully Marian perspective. This research does not attempt to cover old ground rather it explores how the split between normative and non-normative aspects of Sappho's identity informs communication between queer creative communities, whilst simultaneously providing a part-coded space.

Rossetti's status as a High Anglican is marked not only by an adherence to a particular form of Christian theology in her writing, but also by her usage of tropes of

Marian devotion and female/female worship. Rossetti, used as a model for female saints and the Marian in her brother's paintings, sets about reclaiming or resurrecting a form of feminised speaking subjectivity. In essence, Rossetti's poetry explicitly combines 'feminised' aspects of classical, Tractarian and Catholic traditions to propose a form of what Frederick Roden has defined as 'queer virginity' (non-married, non-hetero-normative, not reproductive.) Roden's definition of queer virginity is partly derived from Theodora Jankowski's, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*:

> Any early modern virgin who chose willingly to prolong her virginity – or especially to adopt it as a permanent condition had no place in the sex/gender system. She was a queer virgin and occupied an unofficially unnamed position that was both dissident and highly resistant.[255]

Roden argues that queer virginity does not indicate sensual or aesthetic celibacy or the absence of the erotic, but the opposite, writing on Rossetti that 'Rather the homo-affective space implied by her laudatory writings on virginity is often so sensual that there is reason for positing the presence of same-sex desire.'[256] Duc Dau's recent work on virgin marriage is also provocative, but it is limited by its exclusion of female Tractarian poets from its theories of virgin marriage.[257] As Marina Warner suggests, Mary's status as mythic virgin makes her both an object of worship, but also paradoxically, an object of desire:

> The emphasis on Mary's body, on her miraculous virginity and motherhood, concentrates attention on female physicality and biological processes; it

---

[255] Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern British Drama*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p.113.
[256] Roden, p.13.
[257] Duc Dau, 'Perfect Chastity: Celibacy and Virgin Marriage in Tractarian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 44.1 (2006), 77-92, (p.77).

carnalises her figure, grounding her character in the flesh even as it makes her an exception to all womankind.[258]

If the link between the cultural and biological maternal is broken then what is left is a safe outlet for the expression of homo-eroticism working from within the protective sanction of apparent cultural and religious orthodoxy. These forms of refuge arguably offer space for the cultural maternal within the masculine symbolic, and a subversion of phallogocentrism which is more usually associated with the orthodox religious ecstatic. Many analyses of female religious ecstasy are focussed on forms of penetration in the modelling of normative paradigms and usually cite representations such as the phallic penetration of Bernini's statue of St Teresa and omit ecstatic, same-sex connections. Theorists based within psychoanalytic traditions have struggled to recognise or acknowledge this homo-affective ecstatic/erotic space, with the exception of Luce Irigaray, beyond a form of multiple jouissance or doubled absence. This challenge stems from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and their simultaneous raising and debasement of 'woman,' Lacan writes in *Le Seminaire XXIII:* 'It was an absolute necessity for the human race that there be an Other of the Other. That is the one we usually call God, but which analysis reveals to be, quite simply, woman.' [259]

Ground breaking works of feminist and queer scholarship have recently set out to reclaim this othering, and to challenge the association between the maternal and the reproductive, or the maternal and the heterosexual within theories of the queer

---

[258] Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.XVIII.
[259] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIII, Le Sinthome,* ed., Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p.128.

familial,[260] overriding psychoanalytic theories of the maternal such as Julia Kristeva's[261]

and their residual basis within Freudian developmental models.   Ruth Vanita

conceptualises this challenge in a model which explains the obvious appeal of Rossetti

and Procter's poetry for queer theorists:

> In nineteenth century England the interplay of Sapphic and Marian myths posits continuing clitoral joy and romantic same-sex love and friendship as possibilities for both women and men.   This interplay exists not only in marginal texts but also in canonical texts that were influential models in their own time or soon after and continue to be so today[262].

This chapter situates itself within the recovery of the cultural maternal/sororal

and 'queer virginity'.   It also further explores diverse types of poetic closeting and the

construction of a queer aesthetic.   If Emily Brontë's poetry plays with ideas of being

hidden in plain sight, then Rossetti and Procter extend this metaphor to foreground open

secrets through strange encounters, bodily substitutions and the re-writing of the

significant muses of Sappho and the Virgin Mary.

A considerable amount of research has focussed on Hellenism and it links to male

homosexuality in a nineteenth-century literary and social context.[263] Fewer studies are

available which focus specifically on the engagement of female poets, their use and

interrogation of Hellenic referencing and the construction of queer, female poetics.

---

[260] See Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Duc Dau and Shale Preston, eds., *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (London: Routledge, 2015). Roden, 2014.
[261] See Julia Kristeva, *'STABAT MATER*'* in Julia Kristeva and Arthur Goldhammer, 'The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives,' *Poetics Today,* 6.1 (1985), 133-152.
[262] Vanita, p.96.
[263] See Stefania Arcara, 'Hellenic Transgressions, Homosexual Politics: Wilde, Symonds and Sicily', in *Studies in Travel Writing*, 16.2 (2012), 135-147, Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994). John Lauritsen,'Hellenism and Homoeroticism in Shelley and his Circle,' *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49.3, (2005) 357-376, Daniel Orells, 'Greek Love, Orientalism and Race: Intersections in Classical Reception,' *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 58 (2012), 194-230.

Yopie Prins's work on Sappho is one of the notable exceptions. However, even Prins herself acknowledges a major lack of research in the area of lesbian or queer female Hellenism:

> Yet the lesbian implications of 'Greek' learning - or 'thinking Greek' - remain largely unexplored in current work on Victorian Hellenism. Critics have described the role of classical scholarship in the cultural construction of masculine identities and homoerotic desire, but without acknowledging the emergence of a Hellenic discourse of lesbianism. [264]

Prins stresses that in using Hellenic referencing, queer female poets and writers are partly situating their poetry within a predominantly masculine, high cultural framework, which leads to the work being read as gender-inverse rather than performatively masculine. This is the kind of part-masculinity, or masculinity by association, which Rossetti cleverly undercuts in her satirising of notions of brotherhood and male creativity in 'Goblin Market' and 'In an Artist's Studio'. For nineteenth-century female writers the appropriation of classical references is not only a marker of 'serious' poetry and a revision of sexual politics, but also a signifier of a certain class status which afforded access to an informal classical education and (at the end of the century a formal one via Oxford and Cambridge colleges). Even studies which have started to recover evidence of female Hellenism, or which contest the received ideas concerning women's access to classical sources in a mid and late Victorian context, rarely touch on forms of non-heterosexual discourse and poetics, for example, Shanyn Fiske and Isobel Hurst's studies of Hellenism and classicism.[265] When Fiske focuses on women writers' usage of classical references she does so using exclusively heterosexual role models, such as Medea,

---

[264] Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1999), p78.
[265] Shanyn Fiske, *Heretical Hellenism: Women Writers, Ancient Greece and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

although she does include a short generic comment on Hellenism and dissidence in nineteenth-century women's writing in her introduction:

> Their writings reveal that women used Greek knowledge to assert authority in the male dominated fields of scholarship and publishing, to express subjectivities and sexualities disallowed by conventional Victorian gender ideologies.[266]

Similarly, Hurst's monograph focuses on the use of Hellenic and classical models in Victorian women's writing but again elides the question of non-heteronormative desire. She does reference Sappho but primarily focusses on the influence of male writers such as Homer.[267]

Scholarly work on Victorian Hellenism has therefore set up a kind of Sapphic split as follows: Sappho, heterosexual, poet, fallen/abandoned woman, victim, survivor and Queer, L/lesbian, poet/priestess, Hellenic sibyl, erotic muse, leader of a same-sex community. This splitting, which arguably provides an opportunity for new reading has caused significant problems for researchers interested in women's writing and Hellenic modelling, although critics have started to find ways of tackling this issue. For instance, Roden's recent work on Rossetti, argues that it was possible for women writers to be aware of both sides of this Sapphic divide and suggests that women writers may have had a much more sophisticated awareness of the links between Hellenism and homosexuality than previously thought. Roden argues this proposition by referencing Rossetti's poetics rather than biographical or wider cultural referencing. Some scholars however, still dispute knowledge of this coded layering. In in his Introduction to a recent

---

[266] Ibid., p17.
[267] Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 220.

edition of Rossetti's work Simon Humphries proposes acknowledgement of Sappho as feminist poetic icon in Rossetti's work, but disputes awareness of Sappho's same-sex desire as unlikely in a mid-nineteenth-century context:

> For such poets Sappho was available, in translations and imitations, as an acceptable figure of the poetess – an appropriation that relied on understanding her predominantly homosexual love poetry to have been heterosexual (as, until late in the century, it usually was understood). This reading was supported by the legend that Sappho killed herself, out of love for the boatman Phaon, by leaping into the sea; a legend that made her creativity inseparable from desertion and early death.[268]

Such an interpretation is contentious not only in its outright rejection of coded knowledge concerning Sappho's homosexual desire, but also in its extreme application of Foucauldian theories of unified homosexual as opposed to heterosexual identity. Humphries disputes the possibility of earlier access to a non-heteronormative Sappho, existing outside a clear-cut distinction between the binaries of homosexual/heterosexual and in doing so excludes the potential use of Sappho as queer model.

Rossetti and Procter were highly educated women, but it is open to speculation as to how aware they might have been concerning the links between Hellenism and male homosexuality. Procter, unlike Rossetti, omits any mention of Sappho or other classical role models from her work, using other sororal and maternal role models to explore desire between women, although it is highly likely that she would have understood the potential Sapphic duality. Ironically, and confusingly, Humphries actually mentions Rossetti's referencing of the two kinds of love cited in Plato's *Symposium* in his

---

[268] Simon Humphries, 'Introduction' to *Christina Rossetti Poems and Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp.Xvii-Xlii (p.XXX).

Introduction, two pages after ruling out the possibility of reading female homosexuality resonances within mid-Victorian editions of Sappho's work:

> We do know from William Michael that the two authors Christina was most drawn to were Plato and Dante. We might not expect a philosopher to be a notable resource for her poetry, although 'A Valentine', written for her mother in 1882, does allude to the distinction in the *Symposium* between two kinds of Love (perhaps surprisingly, but not unintelligibly, given that the higher kind, of which Frances is an embodiment, is exclusively homosexual.[269]

Roden argues that it was not impossible for Rossetti to have an awareness of homoeroticism in literary works as well as wider classical allusions:

> Intellectual Victorian women were not ignorant of same-sex desire in classical texts. A woman as well-read as Christina Rossetti may have recognised classical female as well as male homoeroticism.[270]

It was possible for women writers to have exposure to these aspects of male homoeroticism through a grounding the classics and an interest in cultural movements heavily influenced by Hellenism and Greek writers (particularly Plato in the mid-nineteenth-century). Additionally, these expressions of interest were becoming more frequent in circles where educated women had access to a wider range of cultural influences, eventually culminating in women's acceptance within the field of classical study in higher education at the end of the nineteenth century.

Even if biographical reading is still speculative and problematic, Rossetti's work provides explicit examples of highly sophisticated Sapphic modelling, where the tension between contested normative/non-normative frameworks is clearly foregrounded. In

---

[269] Humphries, p.XXXii.
[270] Roden, p.67.

her poem 'What Sappho Would have Said Had her Leap Cured Instead of Killing Her' Rossetti attempts to re-write Sappho's demise and cultural fragmentation, through a form of poetic resurrection.[271]   Rossetti clearly identifies and empathises with the plight of the female poet/artist, but perhaps more importantly she identifies with a Sappho who is saved by a leap away from heterosexuality, whilst raising the issue of Sappho as an abandoned, fallen woman: 'Living unloved, to die unknown,/ Unwept, untended and alone.' (13-14)[272] However, Rossetti goes on to offer an alternative ending within her construction of a Sapphic persona where (mother) nature and the cultural, non-reproductive maternal provide a form of comfort and healing:

> I would have quiet too in truth,
> And here will sojourn for a while,
> Till I am foot-sore in my youth.
> I will lie down and quite forget
> The doubts and fears that haunt me yet.
>
> My pillow underneath my head
> Shall be green grass; thick fragrant leaves
> My canopy; the spider weaves
> Meet curtains for my narrow bed;
> And the dew can but cool my brow
> That is so dry and burning now (43-54)

Here the natural imagery exhibits images traditionally associated with femininity, spiders, weaving and water (dew), in a scene which is set within a kind of Titania-like fairy bower which allows Sappho momentary refuge before moving on, 'I must go forth and bear my pain.' (60) This imagery also suggests a kind of potion of feminine fluidity in Sappho's absorption within a feminised form of healing mother earth. Rossetti's use

---

[271] Rossetti, pp.19-21.
[272] Ibid., p.3.

of metaphors of touch, craft and fluidity aligns Sappho as a fully feminised subject in tropes which are acutely reminiscent of Irigaray's work on embodied femininity:

> As for woman she touches herself in and of herself without any need for meditation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman "touches" herself all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible in to one(s) – that caress each other.[273]

In doing so, Rossetti invokes the possibility of Sappho being lured to her death by her desire for a masculine body, which involves a rejection of feminised space and her own, innate embodied subjectivity. If you follow this arc to its logical conclusion it suggests that for a woman poet and poetic subject to follow a heterosexual desire is to risk the possibility of a violent end and alienation from self. The text offers this respite and cure as an antidote to the desolation of failed heterosexual attachment and abandonment, although the last lines suggest that the Sapphic voice is unable to give up its masochistic attachment to a masculine 'Love':

> ([I must go forth and bear my pain.]
>
> I must bear my pain, till Love shall turn
> To me in pity and come back.
> His footsteps left a smouldering track
> Where he went forth, that still doth burn.
> Oh come again, thou pain divine,
> Fill me and make me wholly thine. (60-66)

The theme of the restorative and antidotal feminine is taken up frequently in Rossetti's poetry, most obviously in 'Goblin Market.'

Visual representations of Sappho provide additional clues for the interpretation of nineteenth-century Hellenist semiotics and the unlocking of Sappho as a powerful,

---

[273] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p24.

cultural signifier. Prins's study contains a number of illustrations and etchings of Sappho, which she uses to support her argument concerning the construction of Sappho within Victorian poetics; however, perhaps the most striking image of Sappho (utilised on the cover) is left without analysis.[274] The monograph shows the brooding, dark, and foreboding image of *Sappho* produced by Charles Auguste Mengin (1877) one of the most well-known representations of the figure.[275]   What makes Mengin's study so startling is the extreme contrasts set up between lightness and dark, strength and vulnerability, assertion and victimhood. At first glance Sappho's figure seems charged with energy and sexuality, with her breasts exposed, hair flowing and her luminous skin adorned with jewellery and wrapped in sensuously diaphanous robes.   On closer inspection, however, her gaze is averted from the viewer's and she looks over the edge of a cliff outside the frame of the painting. She holds an Aeolian lyre in her right hand to indicate her status as lyric poet and her left hand is draped in the direction of her final leap with its middle finger pointing in the direction of the ground beneath. Her retention of the lyre is symbolic of her attachment to a creative identity and her role as a lyric poet.

The painting is utterly bleak in its depiction of her surroundings of rocks and darkness; the only life found is in the distant birds circling in the background. The horizon is behind Sappho and the hint of light is unavailable to her.   The robes are sculptural and beautifully painted but reminiscent of funereal dress as if Sappho is anticipating her own demise.   The semiotic ambiguity or confusion often present within Victorian and *fin-de-siècle* images of Sappho suggests her role in reflecting conflicting ideas of femininity in a nineteenth-century context.   It is perhaps apposite at this point to cite Prins's thesis

[274] Prins, (cover).
[275] See Appendix Four

concerning Sappho's role as a blank space or fragmented screen onto which writers and

academicians were able to project their own ideologies for their own ends, Prins writes:

> In the course of this book, I develop a theoretical argument about the Sapphic signature as well as a historical account of its significations in Victorian poetry. By the end of the century, Sappho had become a highly over-determined and contradictory trope within nineteenth-century discourses of gender, sexuality, poetics and politics.[276]

Sappho therefore cannot control her own identity because she is discovered in a

nineteenth-century context as a series of fragments.   When Rossetti cites Sappho, she

does so as a symbolic figure of female creativity rather than citing her words.

Simeon Solomon's Sapphic study, *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*

(1864) is an example of an early depiction of a possible linkage between Sappho and

same-sex relationships.[277] The image provides a striking and obvious contrast with

Mengin's *Sappho* in its depiction of female intimacy. Sappho and Erinna are holding each

other in an intimate embrace. In the background of the painting a pair of doves/love

birds rest on a ledge away from a solitary blackbird (possibly a reference to the solitary

and partnered versions of Sappho). The picture depicts Sappho embracing her fellow

poet Erinna in a garden at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. Solomon's construction of

Sapphic intimacy is also particularly poignant given his struggles with his own sexuality.

Solomon was prosecuted twice for indecency with other men.   He was subsequently

committed to mental institutions by his family in an attempt to find a cure for his

queerness which inevitably failed.   As Carolyn Conroy notes: 'During this time Solomon

was admitted to separate private lunatic asylums in London, presumably by his

---

[276] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.13.
[277] See Appendix Five.

desperate and confused family... and on both occasion the artist was unsurprisingly, discharged, 'unimproved.'[278] Solomon produced several other studies of Sappho, including a drawing where Erinna is being embraced by an anonymous male figure and ignoring Sappho's despondent expression.[279] This triangle echoes the tensions between queer and non-queer cultural attributions. Sappho acts a site of struggle not only between male and female poets, but between queer and genderqueer poetics. For example, in Swinburne's oeuvre the male queer poet takes the place of the female Sappho, and speaks with and through a woman's voice. As Catherine Maxwell notes, the appropriation of Sappho's poetics produces surprising results in nineteenth-century poetry:

> In the Victorian period Sappho becomes an explicit element in the male poet's description of his role. What before constituted a submerged and hidden argument with Milton becomes increasingly plain as two of the leading Victorian male poets, Tennyson and Swinburne appear to 'come out' as women.[280]

The complexity of Sapphic identity and ownership may well be a reason why poets such as Procter avoid referencing her in their work, choosing to focus on other constructions of feminine sexuality and creativity such as the Marian, angelic, and saintly. Mengin's study of *Sappho* graphically illustrates the tensions between sexuality and potential victimhood.

---

[278] See Carolyn Conroy, 'Solomon's Life after 1873' – Simeon Solomon Research Archive, via http://www.simeonsolomon.com/simeon-solomon-biography.html. [accessed 1 November 2015]
[279] See Appendix Six.
[280] Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p.33

Procter was less interested in the recovery of female poetic traditions and the role of the woman poet than many of her contemporaries, including Rossetti, as Gill Gregory notes:

> Unlike other nineteenth-century women poets, such as Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, Procter does not overtly ponder the vexed question of the poet, particularly the woman poet and her accession to fame.[281]

To reference Sappho would inevitably have foregrounded contemporary debates about the role of the female poet. As Jo Gill suggests, an avoidance of engagement in this debate does not preclude pejorative labelling or pigeonholing for female poets: 'Poetry by women then is engaged in a constant process of self-assessment or self-scrutiny: it is constantly asking questions about its own place in poetic traditions, cultural contexts or poetic forms.' [282] It is, however, possible to trace references to the idea of a feminine, lyric tradition in Procter's work from an oblique angle. For example, Procter's poem 'A Lost Chord' can be read as a kind of homage to Sappho's lyrical demise.[283] Procter also explores ideas concerning female, single-sex, separatist communities in her work which resonate with Sapphic as well as Marian allusions. For the most part though Procter chooses to align her female personae alongside the exiled and oppressed, and refuses to engage in classical, intertextual referencing. However, the idea of a socially engaged poetry was further complicated by posthumous obituaries, such as Jessie Boucherett's that stressed Procter's commitment to the real world:

---

[281] Gregory, *Life and* Work,p56.

[282] Jo Gill, *Women's Poetry* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.50.

[283] Adelaide Anne Procter, 'A Lost Chord,' in *Complete Poetical Works*, p.188-189.

She would argue that if poetic genius really did unfit its owners for the practical business of life, then its possession was a misfortune, and poets ought to be classed with cripples and other helpless or deficient beings.[284]

Procter does dedicate poems to women but she does not utilise dedications as a form of cultural, recovery or canonical construction. Away from her explicit Sappho poems, Rossetti also engages in forms of literary homage, foregrounding women's writing and women writers in her use of intertextuality, for instance, in her referencing of Letitia Landon in her poem 'L.E.L' and Barrett Browning in 'Monna Innominata'.

Classical influences abound in other ways in Rossetti's work, as well as connections to wider lyricism, for instance, her overwhelming use of (Petrarchan) sonnet form provides an important and interesting example of the feminising of active desire in the use of a feminine voice and subjectivity.   Conversely, however, it also locks Rossetti into a kind of associative, bound space where the worship of female muses and forms of (assumed heterosexual) love are always slanted against, or opposing, the possibility of a feminine voice or subject.   Studies by feminist academics such as Marianne Van Remoortel have started to challenge received ideas about the extent to which the sonnet form was gendered by the early nineteenth century:

> By the nineteenth century, the sonnet was no longer straightforwardly masculine nor was it gender free. Rather, it had become a complex genre with mixed gender-affiliations, fit for ambitious male and female poets, modest poetesses and occasional versifiers, a genre that was fraught with masculine metaphors of power and control while simultaneously constituting a feminized space of sensibility and private utterance.[285]

---

[284] Jessie Boucherett, 'Obituary – Adelaide Anne Procter,' *The English Woman's Journal*, XIII (1864) p.19, http://www.ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html [accessed 3 December 2015].
[285] Marianne Van Remoortel, *Lives of the Sonnets 1787-1895: Genre, Gender and Criticism* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011), p91.

The creation of an ambiguously gendered space was often productive, but an excessive association between the sonnet form and appropriate femininity or private writing also led to a downgrading of aesthetic worth. In her repeated use of sonnet form, Rossetti foregrounds this struggle, and the possible ways in which love poetry can be constructed from a feminine standpoint. In choosing the sonnet form, Rossetti also situates herself within a tradition which has long-standing associations with desire and eroticism. As Stephen Greenblatt states:

> Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was introduced to English poetry by Wyatt and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes.[286]

This unrequited aspect also links Rossetti's poetry back to the fate of Sappho and sets up a tension between religious themes and desire which are a pronounced feature of Rossetti's work. The link between sonnet form, lyric poetry and Sapphic referencing, provides Rossetti with a connection to earlier 'Sapphic' poetry and 'poetesses' (poetry on the theme of Sappho rather than lesbian) by female Romantic poets such as Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Smith, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon. Critics such as Leighton have also focussed on the ways in which the regularity of the sonnet as poetic form contains and as acts as a counterpoint to the intensity of expression in Rossetti's poetics.[287] Accusations of excessive high Victorian sentimentality aside, the missing classical ink in Procter's work may partly explain why her poetry is less well known, and why she was omitted from collections of nineteenth-century female

---

[286] Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology English Literature – The Victorian Age* (London, W.W. Norton and Co, 2012), p. PA24.
[287] Angela Leighton, '"When I am dead, my dearest": The Secret of Christina Rossetti,' *Modern Philology*, 87 (1990), 373-388, (p.373).

poets from the 1890s onwards, until her work was rediscovered by feminist academics

in the 1980s. Rossetti's use of classical allusions allows her to sit within an older tradition

of women's writing offsetting a potential lack of interest in Victorian religious poetry

through a large period of the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

<u>Sisterhood and Fallen Women</u>

One of the most obvious binary oppositions in nineteenth-century culture is that

applied to the control of femininity and female sexuality. Lynda Nead outlines this

extreme paradigm:

> In general terms, female sexuality was organized around the dichotomy
> virgin/whore…Woman was believed either to assist or to exacerbate male sexual
> control and her sexual identity determined whether or not she was seen as a
> respectable and responsible member of society… Throughout the nineteenth
> century the difference between the 'respectable' and 'the fallen' were defined
> and redefined in an attempt to create clear moral boundaries.[288]

There are a large range of poems written by Victorian women writers on the theme of

the fallen woman, for example, Rossetti's, 'Eve', 'A Daughter of Eve', 'Despised and

Rejected, 'Procter's 'Three Roses' and 'A Woman's Answer,' and poems by

contemporaries such as Dora Greenwell's 'Christina' and Augusta Webster's remarkable

'A Castaway.'[289] Less directly, the presence of the socially and biblically fallen woman

haunts Victorian women's poetry. She casts a multifaceted and highly complex

shapeshifting shadow over a large number of poems by nineteenth-century women

writers, even when the tone or theme of the poem exhibits little obvious connection to

---

[288] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 1990), p9.
[289] See Dora Greenwell, *Poems* (Edinburgh: Alexander Strahan & Company, 1861), p.1, Procter, pp. 218, 277, Rossetti, pp. 158, 194, 151, and Augusta Webster, in *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed., by Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.602-616.

the figure.   The basic binary of angel/whore also precipitates others pairings such as victim and survivor, chaste and unchaste, fallen and saved, respectable and unrespectable, clean and unclean, touched and untouched, embodied and disembodied. The fallen woman is therefore a notoriously difficult term to pin down, as is the complex relationship between literary constructions of fallen femininity, and the reality of social exclusion and judgement in the nineteenth century.   Angela Leighton stresses the centrality of the fallen woman poem for women poets, but also hints at the possibility of the opening up of indirect, queer possibilities in these texts:

> The scene of encounter between fallen and unfallen woman, which 'The Convent Threshold' telescopes into the single figure of the lover-nun, recurs like an obsession in women's poetry. Its most obvious purpose is to forge a forbidden social liaison across the divisions of moral law and sexual myth.[290]

It is this forbidden latency which is ripe for queer reinterpretation, and which is missing from Leighton's analysis which is more generally focused on class and feminist readings of sisterhood.   This forbidden quality also inculcates a quality of shame, an area which is still barely touched on in readings of nineteenth-century texts, even within scholarship that applies queer theoretical perspectives.   Queer theorists have started to tackle this area but work on the full significatory impact of shame on identity and identification is still in its early stages as Virginia Burrus has argued: 'If shame has come out of the closet, we are perhaps just beginning to understand its scope and complexity.'[291] This may seem a minor point but the construction of fallen identity in many respects sits in a parallel

---

[290] Angela Leighton, '"Because Men Made the Laws": The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet,'
in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed., Angela, Leighton (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), pp. 215-34, (pp.214-215).
[291] Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.1.

position to the construction of queer voice, both attempting to negotiate a route through shame, and reclaiming it as a source of empowerment. In other words, they ask similar questions about how it is possible to speak from forbidden positions, and against religious and social orthodoxies embedded in notions of sin, from internally safe, undercover positions.

Fallen women poems also exhibit a number of characteristics found in queer poetics. Intimacy is often explored through coded familial tropes of sisterhood and the maternal, in a single sex space, as well as within (hetero)-normative dynamics, and the language of a feminized erotic is explored through the use of performative, floral tropes of virginity and its loss. This is not to exclude or denigrate feminist analysis of romantic friendships rather that this research is more interested in the processing and ownership of the forbidden and the ways in which texts and subjects withhold or utilise their own queerness, within and without closets. In contrast to Marcus, other critics such as Carolyn De La Oulton have argued that Victorian, romantic, female friendships were threatening to heterosexual dominance because of their capacity to extend beyond pre-cursory function into potential queerness. De La Oulton's analysis of their removal from texts such as Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* shows the difference between censorship and self-conscious closeting:

> But at precisely the point where they create a female-centred community, the references to passion and the spontaneous 'holy fire' of female kisses must be cut off. This idyllic communion appears tenable precisely because it is of short duration, and the last lines celebrate not the relationship between the two women, but the final understanding between Aurora and Romney. It is this heterosexual embrace that resolves the final scene, as Marian literally disappears into shadow and Aurora is restored to social usefulness in her complementary relationship with Romney. [292]

---

[292] Carolyn W. De La Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.97.

However, as Rossetti shows in Goblin Market, these two strands are not necessarily mutually exclusive, even if both aspects are moved into the private sphere outside the scope of the poem, through a formal of nominal, normative closure.

Groupings of poems based around flowering and deflowering include Rossetti's poem, 'A Daughter of Eve' where the persona explicitly links her virginity with flowers, 'A fool to pluck my rose too soon, / A fool to snap my lily.' (4-5).[293] The poetic persona seems to provide a reply to, or an alternative version of, Dante Rossetti's poem 'Jenny'. The fallen woman has woken up and found a voice unlike the sleeping Jenny, and in doing so, she mourns the loss of time, seasons and consciousness:

> My garden-plot I have not kept
> Faded and all-forsaken,
> I weep as I have ever wept:
> Oh, it was summer when I slept,
> It is winter now I waken. (6-10)

The doubling of tenses in the third line of the second stanza serves to emphasise the quality of loss despite being in the present moment. The third stanza of the poem suggests the potential presence of an unfeeling customer, akin to the voice of Dante's poem, 'Talk what you please of future Spring.' (11) The final line of the poem also offers the ultimate rejection of this you/subject, 'I sit alone with sorrow.' (15) The daughter of Eve refuses to acknowledge a subjective presence and replaces it with a metaphor. It is almost as if sorrow becomes personified as an imaginary friend or companion.

The substitution of identity is a feature of several fallen women poems. Hence, the feature of overlapping queerness is often present in the poetry sitting within this

---

[293] Rossetti, *Poems and* Prose, p.194.

merger or layering. Leighton describes Procter's 'A Legend of Provence' which features a fallen woman as 'a strange poem'[294]. Procter's poem 'Three Roses' uses organic metaphors to reference and reduce the female body, turning polite Victorian floral signification on its head. [295] It combines traditional floral imagery with ideas of romance, gift giving, forced deflowering, the Trinity and death. It also coldly outlines the objectification of the female subject by its use of pronouns:

> The red June roses now are past,
> This very day I broke the last, -
> And now *its* perfumed breath is hid,
> With her beneath, a coffin-lid; (17-20)
> (My italics.)

Gender-neutral poems are often assumed to have a male voice and in turn a heterosexual one, although the subject persona has no allocated gender. In her reading of the poem, Gregory hints at this doubled aspect and suggests the presence of a poetic split subjectivity:

> The fact that the speaker, the initial recipient of the rose, is ungendered adds to the confusion about boundaries. This suggests that Procter is also exploring an alter ego, a shadowy figure, who may be an observing self, watching on as the more vulnerable persona is fated by the strength of an involuntary emotion that is too strong for the more conscious self.[296]

In the poem, the central persona is not gendered and has to be determined by the reader, although Gregory assumes that one of the speaking personae is male. This androgyny is curious, given the warning which the poem supplies concerning the loss of

---

[294] Leighton, p.351.
[295] Procter, p.218.
[296] Gregory, p.136-137.

virginity, and the possible damage inflicted by sexual knowledge, more usually

associated with heterosexual scenarios. 'Three Roses' also shows what happens to the

value of a woman's rose after it is plucked. It is as if the poem is caught between gender

taboos, a female poet creating a masculine persona actively desiring a female object, ,

undeclared sexuality, and a resulting split, if closeted queerness, which is aided by poetic

ambiguity itself. The commodification of virginity is a pronounced feature of many fallen

women poems, most famously Rossetti's 'Goblin Market', where the text's commodity

fetishism extends way beyond the obvious goods that the goblins are selling, to the

bartering for a purse.[297] The brutal and dehumanizing question of who owns the female

body, female sexuality and voice, and at the most fundamental level, the right to self-

definition is particularly pointed in nineteenth-century culture. Legally women were

passed from father to husband in marriage, excluded from the ownership of their own

property/inheritance and on occasions their children, for much of the century,

alternative non-legal marriages between small numbers of women notwithstanding. As

Angela Leighton notes, female virtue, while being held in vitally high esteem in

nineteenth-century culture, can be rapidly absorbed into the patriarchal laws of

mercantile capitalism, where moral guardians are still potentially available for sale:

> If, on the one hand, woman represents a last remaining absolute good in a world
> of threating expediency and enterprise, she also, on the other hand, represents
> a perishable good, the misuse of which diminishes the value. The 'moral law' is
> not only feminized, but economized, and thus comes very close to the law of the
> commodity.[298]

Such is the extent of potential fallenness in a nineteenth-century context that it

is possible to argue for a significant number of poems that deal with female poverty,

---

[297] Rossetti, line 324.
[298] Leighton, p.344.

exclusion, abandonment and desire to be read under this heading. Deborah Anna Logan

offers a useful definitional framework, reflecting the breadth of the potentially fallen

within Victorian society and literary constructions. Logan's study concentrates on the

construction of fallen women in prose texts with the exception of some commentary on

Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*:

> Extending the analogy, what I argue throughout this study is that the term
> *unchaste,* during the Victorian period, assumes extrasexual connotations. The
> term expands to incorporate alcoholics and anorexics, the insane, the infanticidal
> and depressed, and even slave women. This book's central projects are to
> disentangle the many behaviors relegated, for the sake of neatness and
> convenience, to the category of 'fallenness.'[299]

Christina Rossetti and Adelaide Anne Procter volunteered to be become rescue workers

for fallen women in refuges, Rossetti at The London Penitentiary, formerly known as The

Mary Magdalene Home in Highgate and Procter at Providence row in the East End of

London. Many middle-class women participated in this informal social work with

working-class women, although this assistance was limited by paternalistic and

patriarchal views of charity and social class divisions reinforced by secular and religious

orthodoxies. These homes often made clear differentiations about levels of falleness

between women who had been abandoned by errant men, those who were obviously

engaged in overt prostitution, and others with varying forms of antisocial behaviour.

Women writers had a genuine interest in raising awareness and offering a voice for

socially excluded women. As Christine Sutfin argues, even writers like Augusta Webster

who were prepared to seriously challenge existing ideas concerning class and gender,

had to use their own elevated social status to make their point:

---

[299] Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse*
*(*Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1998), p.9.

Webster used her own respectability to enable her disreputable persona to speak. Furthermore, she did what no other respectable writer had done to the same degree when she gave narrative authority, psychological complexity, and a knowledge of social forces to a prostitute persona.[300]

As Gerald Maskell notes, there is an explicit link that extends from Procter's social activism to her writing: 'Her devotional lyrics, *A Chaplet of Verses,* were published in 1862 as a benefit for Providence Row, a night refuge for homeless women and children opened in 1860 under the care of the Sisters of Mercy.'[301]

One of the most interesting aspects of writing on fallen women concerns the development of socially redemptive femininity as metaphorical space of refuge. Rossetti provides her most obvious example of this in the radical act of female solidarity and compassion in 'Goblin Market'. However, Rossetti does not always characterise the feminine as redemptive in her work. Despite 'Goblin Market', Rossetti's poetics display a much greater degree of gender performativity than might be expected. 'The World – SONNET,' (1854) a lesser-known short poem of one stanza, describes a feminine beast and bringing of temptation without the possibility of redemption. The poem contrasts attraction and aversion and is reminiscent of Emily Brontë's 'Hope'. It embodies the world as a seductive woman who is likely to prove a source of temptation through her serpentine hair. Here Rossetti uses a feminine figure to suggest the corruption of Eve: the Edenic serpents become part of her body and she seeks to corrupt others. It also provides an example of an early literary form of femme fatale.

---

[300] Christine Sutphin,'Human Tigresses, Fractious Angels, and Nursery Saints: Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and Victorian Discourses on Prostitution and Women's Sexuality, '*Victorian Poetry*, 38 (2002), 511-532 (p.514).
[301] Gerald Massey, *Adelaide Anne Procter* via http://gerald-massey.org.uk/procter/index.htm[accessed 23 November 2015].

The poem uses explicitly erotic language, contrasted with images of disease and horned bestiality to construct a secular view of worldly desire. There is a suggestion that the subject is torn between sexual desire and spiritual downfall. The romantic tone is stressed by the long vowel sounds and repetition of 'wooes' in a kind of imitation of doves cooing (doves feature repeatedly in nineteenth- century art as symbols of peace, fidelity and love) in an almost onomatopoeic invitation to intimacy. Rossetti also suggestively inverts gender stereotypes by associating the public daylight with the acceptable face of feminine desire, and the moonlit nights with the appearance of a demonic changeling in an extreme reversal of Brontë's 'Stars' and its gendering of day and night:

> By day she wooes me, soft, exceeding fair:
> But all night as the moon so changeth she:
> Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy
> And subtle serpents gliding in her hair
> By day she wooes me to the outer air,
> Ripe fruits, sweet flowers and full satiety;
> But through the night, a beast she grins at me
> A very monster void of love and prayer.
> By day she stands a lie; by night she stands
> In all the naked horror of the truth
> With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.
> Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell
> My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
> Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell? (1-14)[302]

The voice of the poem seems to suggest that the worldly without the sacred is a source of degeneration, 'A very monster void of love and prayer.' (8), and asks what use is devoted, romantic friendship without spiritual devotion. The poem posits a view of the World as feminine and animalistic, in an earlier version of the predatory world of the male creatures. 'The World' was written in 1854 but included in the 1862 *Goblin Market*

---

[302] Rossetti, 'The World – Sonnet,' *Poems and* Prose, p44.

and Other Poems collection. There is a clear connection between this poem and 'Goblin Market' note the similarity in the language used: 'No longer wagging, purring,/ But visibly demurring,/Grunting and snarling,' (391-393). Poetic constructions of fallen women offer further considerations of moral judgement and the behaviour which may be covered by this term.

Procter's 'A Legend of Provence'[303] is a poem which on the surface seems far more conservative in its articulation of a fallen woman than 'Goblin Market', but after close reading is surprisingly radical in its implications. The poem asks questions about notions of seeing, visions and the visionary, and plays with concepts of spirit, spiritual and apparitional. It is also unusual in its use of decentred, subjective framing. The poem uses an unidentified first person (who may or may not be a part of the wider sisterly community) filtered through a portrait, placed within a dream, within a fable. This device is similar to that used in both Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio.' The text incorporates aspects of the Gothic and the sensation novel in its doubled ghost story and poetic plot twist.

The implications of possible homoeroticism are contained in the text by the use of a dream-like poetic persona. The text is full of sensuous language which speaks of a barely suppressed language of desire: 'leaping flame,' (5) 'My foolish tremors,' (8) 'I seemed to trace,' (11) (fingertip touching), 'I gazed and dreamed, and the dull embers stirred' (15). A duality of innocence and eroticism is embodied in the figure of Angela, who is associated with symbols of innocence, for instance lilies and evolving, budding

---

[303] Procter, *CPW*, pp.169-179.

sexuality. She is often linked with flowers and flowering buds in the poem. She places

her daily flowers on the altar, in an act of same-sex devotion to the Virgin Mary:

> But most of all, her first and dearest care,
> The office she would never miss or share,
> Was every day to weave fresh garlands sweet,
> To place before the shrine at Mary's feet. (79-82)

However, this act is followed by ominous signs suggesting a subsequent deflowering by

the coiled serpent of male sexuality, 'And still the quiet nuns, toiled, prayed and sang,

/And never guessed the fatal, coiling net.' (171-172)

Angela's potential fall is hinted at by an early link to sexual imagery. However,

she is reclaimed by a divine Marian substitution at the end of the poem. Her convent

community never fully registers her fall and she is received back as an unadulterated

member of the feminine body: 'Didst thou not know, poor child, *thy place was kept*?'

(270). Angela is saved from social and spiritual ostracism by an act of returned devotion

and an act of supplication to the Virgin Mary, 'Mary mild, / Mother of mercy, help me! –

help your child!' (263-264). This remarkable egalitarian exchange occurs when the

beatified figure of the Virgin Mary stands in as a sister substitute. Here there is an

obvious link to Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' in the Marian splitting, between Mary and

Mary Magdalene. Both poems allow the possibility of two kinds of Marian roles and one

version of the Marian saves the other. The connections between these two forms of the

Marian are further complicated by the use of the term 'Magdalene' in a nineteenth-

century context, from the pejorative to Magdalene sisters (nuns). These poems suggest

a possibility of redemption unavailable through secular or social means, but which

simultaneously break apart the distinctions between body and soul, flesh and spirit. 'A

Legend of Provence' also makes a distinction between spiritual and social fallenness, Angela is re-virginised, or alternatively remade *virga intacta* and cleansed by the Virgin Mary's aid. The Virgin Mary acts as supplicant, and lays forgiveness at the feet of the fallen woman and asks her to raise herself.

'A Legend of Provence' has radical implications in a mid-nineteenth-century context. The poem suggests that a woman can be fallen and saved without sanction if she retains a link to a community of sisters, and if she retains her faith in the power of the divine feminine. Historical scholarship on the function of convents and nunneries in nineteenth-century women's lives is still relatively scarce. However, as Gloria McAdam notes, the period saw a significant number of women joining religious communities: 'England in the nineteenth century can be seen as a period of boom during which women flocked to enter an increasing number of convents.'[304] Same-sex separatist communities arguably placed women beyond many of the heteronormative social strictures relating to gender appropriacy and domesticity in the period. As McAdam argues the link to the ultimate mother figure of the Virgin Mary allowed Catholic nuns to claim maternal privilege without the restrictions of actual motherhood:

> Clearly, in her virginity Mary provided an obvious role model for the nun: her modesty, purity and chastity being the marks of contemporary female decency. So, whilst at first sight paradoxical, it is not untenable to suggest that the social discourse of the woman as religious enabled the nun's rejection of the societal norms for women, and at the same time presented her with the possibility of respectability and reverence by aligning herself with the female ideal of her time.[305]

---

[304] Gloria McAdam, 'Willing women and the rise of convents in nineteenth-century England,' *Women's History Review* 8.3 (1999), 411-441 (p.412).
[305] Ibid., p.419.

Procter's poem refuses to impose a nominal heterosexual marriage in the place of this divine and embodied feminine union. 'Goblin Market' and 'A Legend of Provence' focus on the issue of how women become fallen and how they can be saved by the power of touch, and a return to the female body and feminine body (as in community, either domestic or religious). Both texts are unusual in their construction of embodied redemption, decentred social engagement, and their appeal to alternative readers. 'Goblin Market' is nominally a parable or warning under the cover of children's literature and 'A Legend of Provence' can be situated within a tradition of popular fable writing, Both are included in poetry collections, which often focus on unresolved internalised conflicts between religion and desire.

Procter's work, however, also contains a notable example of a problematized return to the female body, in her poem 'The Requital.' 'The Requital' is an extraordinarily odd poem, which despite its basic ballad form and regular rhyme scheme takes major types of Victorian femininity and blows them apart in devastating fashion. In the poem the fate of a homeless, orphaned, angel child is linked with that of a fallen woman who offers her shelter. With the latter becoming a kind of angel of the house by the taking in of a desperate child:

> A weary woman,
>   Pale, worn and thin,
> With the brand upon her
>   Of want and sin,
> Heard the Child Angel
>   And took her in. (43-48)[306]

---

[306] Procter, pp.191-193, p.192.

The text plays with notions of inside and outside, biological and cultural maternity and the implications for women who take on the role of mother in Victorian society. The poem situates the angel child as a kind of streetwalker in a public space in a chilling reference to child prostitution and child sexuality. The poem also cleverly plays with vocabulary in its use of the word want, contrasting need and lack with desire (wanting/longing) and moral judgement, to be found wanting. 'The Requital' presents a setting which embodies a Victorian underbelly and offers a world-view in line with Marcus's *Other Victorians*[307]. It also contains a microcosm of otherness in its treatment of sexuality, which finds an uncanny resonance in Foucault's ideas of nineteenth-century scrutiny of peripheral sexualities and use of religious language:

> What came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage. It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past to step forward and speak, to make the difficult *confession* of what they were. No doubt, they were listened to; and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities. (My italics.) [308]

Both the personae in this poem are female but only one of them has a voice and is able to ask for help (the angel child):

> 'Give me rest and shelter
> Beside your fire
> And I will give you
> Your heart's desire.' (21-24)

---

[307] Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1966)
[308] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction,* 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1998), p.38.

The angel child, left to bargain for its survival and the granting of a heart's desire has uncomfortable sexual overtones. The fallen woman never speaks in the poem and is described by an anonymous, third-person voice. The poem asks questions of the reader about the nature of female victimhood. The final stanza of the poem provides a shocking conclusion where the child having offered the woman her heart's desire has killed her: 'Up the first sunbeam/The Angel fled; / Having kissed the woman/And left her – dead.' (57-60) This conclusion leaves the reader with a multitude of questions. Was the fallen woman's heart's desire to die? Was the woman overwhelmed in the process of caring for the child, or is this a kind of metaphorical pregnancy and death in childbirth? Are there implications of danger in the kissing between two females or incestuous overtones, which mean that the fallen woman's demise is inevitable? The poem also provides another strange association with possible vampirism in that the angel is never seen in daylight, (appearing during a moon-less night), and runs away at sunrise and causes death by a kiss. The poem leaves the reader with more questions than answers about what it means to be fallen, a victim of poverty and the recipient of fatal kisses.

Procter also inverts notions of parenthood, protection and feeding to produce this exchange of female bodies and in the process constructs an angel of death. The poem's most powerful question is ultimately what happens to femininity when it is deified and sanctified to the point where a female angel kills with impunity and without sanction? The redemptive angel who enters a domestic space and becomes the angel in the house also becomes the parasitic angel of death. Rossetti's early poem 'Repining' also offers an interesting counterpoint to Procter's 'The Requital,' within a text that combines third and first-person writing, and which is both monologic and dialogic.[309]

---

[309] Ellen Alleyn, (Christina Rossetti), 'Repining', within Rossetti, *Poems and Prose*, pp. 12-19.

The poem's basic rhyme scheme and metre serve as a cover for more complex internal dynamics. The text offers a female persona with a voice who becomes silenced by a visitation from a male angel, after asking that the angel stay with her until the morning. It is the male angel who requests her to leave her bedchamber and venture out into the world: "He answered: 'Rise, and follow me.' (49) The text explicitly notes the young woman's virginity, 'The wind ceaseth, Maid' (53). The poem combines Marian connotations with gothic allusion to potential vampirism (the angel does not want to be seen in the light) and an almost ghostly exit into the public domain, 'She bound her hair up from the floor, /And passed in silence from the door.' (55-56)

The problematic issue of how to give voice to the suffering of fallen women challenges poets to find alternative poetic forms and solutions. The extent of voice is determined not only by degrees of fallenness but also by the presence of female witnesses and advocates. For example, in 'Goblin Market', Jeanie has no voice because she has no sister to support her and hear her pleas, her silence precedes her death. Laura and Lizzie are allowed to speak because they have each other. Fallen women who are marked for death are often signified by a lack of female support. Marian Erle survives in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* because her fallen state is imposed upon her by rape, but also because she has a female audience in Aurora. Her nominal voice extends across five books of the poem, although it is filtered through Aurora's transcription. Angela in Procter's 'A Legend of Provence' has no direct voice for the majority of the poem, and is described by the third-person narrator, or by the other nuns. At the end of the poem, she prays to be rescued and finds her voice in the process of invoking female help, which appears in the extraordinary form of the nun/Madonna. Although, speaking through, appears to be more common and more socially acceptable than speaking as, within

these texts, Cornelia Pearsall suggests that both of these aspects were regularly featured within nineteenth-century dramatic monologues involving fallen women:

> One such community, is a loose coalition of 'fallen women' populated by female figures, whose sexual history is a governing concern, who either are spoken of or speak themselves. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Jenny' is countered by a number of monologues spoken by fallen women themselves, including poems by Dora Greenwell, Augusta Webster and Amy Levy, in which speakers assert thoroughgoing understanding of their situations.[310]

Despite significant restrictions in the nineteenth century there is considerable evidence of a genuine desire to hear, represent and acknowledge the voices of socially-excluded women in literature and art. The question of how to voice the voiceless is also impacted in part due to the influence of contemporary critical theory; poetic voices are now generally read as personae, not those of the poet, although there is a connection between them. Even if we think of personae as more like characters in a play, theoretical developments concerning the performative make it harder to differentiate between lyric and dramatic poetry. However, some recent work has sought to tackle these issues, for example, Glennis Byron's study on the form provides a clear frame of reference, elucidating the workings of poet and speaker, character and subject (2003).[311] Critics also on occasions read dramatic monologues as a combination of persona and author, further complicating the picture. For example, Leighton's reading of Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' specifies the clear presence of both poet and persona: 'Like so many poems about the fallen woman by women poets, it is a dramatic monologue, in which

---

[310] Cornelia. D.J. Pearsall, 'The dramatic monologue,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.67-88 (p.74).
[311] Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003).

the single speaking voice is both the self's and the others, both the poet's, and the characters.'[312]

The presence of the fallen woman haunts Victorian women's poetry. She casts a shadow over a large number of poems by nineteenth-century women writers even when the tone or theme of the poem bears very little obvious connection to the figure. For example, Procter references the fallen woman directly in several poems but also includes oblique references in other poems, for instance in 'A Woman's Answer':

> The Poets that you used to read to me
> While summer twilights faded in sky;
> But most of all I think Aurora Leigh,
> Because – because – do you remember why? (41-44) [313]

Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold'[314] is another notable example of a fallen woman poem and a dramatic monologue. It features an erotically charged interaction between two women, one alive and one socially dead (confined within a convent). The poem constructs a dynamic which allows the central persona to voice dichotomies of flesh/spirit, heaven and earth, life/death and secular/sacred. From the start, the poem's irregular sonnet form indicates subjective turmoil and uncertainty, and conflicting emotions emphasised by consistently inconsistent rhyme scheme. The poem's stanzas appear to be paired in groups of line numbers but then the pattern is disrupted by a twenty-five line stanza, and the penultimate and final stanzas of eleven and twelve lines form an irregular cross shape perhaps indicative of its irregular faith. This irregularity in the poem's structure also reflects the emotionally unbalanced state of its main persona.

---

[312] Leighton, p.116.
[313] Procter, pp.277-279.
[314] Rossetti, pp.85-89.

The poem's title sets the tone for a poetic elaboration of space, boundaries and communion, both spiritual and sexual. Frederick Roden includes the poem in his analysis of Rossetti's "sister" poems. He suggests a reading of the poem, which offers a potential poetic exploration of possible familial desire between Christina and Maria Rossetti. It is not difficult to see why this reading might be available, but it is not necessary to be in possession of this biographical detail to situate the poem's dual personas as cultural, religious sisters with a biological link. One can agree with Roden about the pronounced homoeroticism of this group of poems, if not the collapsed, literal reading of Christina and Maria's relationship in them: 'Through Maria, Christina constructed a Beatrice who could lead her to God and be her muse. Christina's use of Maria in this process is homo-erotic.'[315] If we assume that Rossetti's readers were empowered to read her poetic subjects as feminine then the setting of a poem at the edge of a convent also implies a feminine object and a closely connected one at that.

The intimation of shared genetics/blood line is exemplified in the poem's first two lines: 'There's blood between us love, my love, /There's father's blood, there's brother's blood' (1-2). It is however, also possible to read against this incestuous acknowledgement by proposing an interpretation of this blood as a symbol/metaphor for bloodshed and sexual violence. The blood becomes a block to consummation and potentially thwarted reproduction. Two feminine personas, either a split subject, or a more conventional subject and object, cannot procreate: 'And blood's a bar I cannot pass:' (3) in other words blood cannot be passed on, without or without the idea of a blood bar as an incest taboo in a form of queer relationship. The poem also sets up an allusion to thwarted communion and Christian transubstantiation in the blood of Christ.

---

[315] Roden, p.66.

The first three lines give an indication of the complexity of the poem's overlapping secular/sacred vocabulary, including a layering of social and religious bodies, of Christ and the convent space, which allows devout women to become a joined body of sisters. The poem's subject is kept from this sharing of blood by her exclusion from the convent and her inability to cross its threshold. This body-blood pattern of Eucharistic imagery is continued through two thirds of the poem, and further developed through a colour palette of white and red, 'My lily feet are soiled with mud, / With scarlet mud which tells a tale' (7-8). Rossetti's use of tropes of purity and innocence in the 'lily feet,' alongside scarlet, suggests a taking of virginity, or the marking of a deflowering. The use of strange enjambment between lines 8-9 is particularly powerful. It plays with the reader's expectations (there could well be a full stop after 'a tale' to reflect common usage of the expression but Rossetti chooses to straddle and run the lines together). The tale becomes a tale 'of hope' whilst retaining the phrases more conventional connotation. This tension cleverly equates the subject's conflict between spiritual adherence and erotic desire with the idea of being torn and pulled in different directions. The telling of a tale also implies a significant shorthand or marking of previous events, together with a layering of voice, narrative and secrecy.

The third and fourth stanzas expand tropes of heaven and earth and unmet gaze, the two women looking in different directions as if trying to achieve a state of merger by incorporating what the other lacks: 'Your eyes look earthward, mine look up.' (17) And 'You looking earthward what see you?' (30) The embodiment of desire in others is characterised as a relentless orgy of suffering and torture whether in Christ, or in hell: 'They bore the Cross, they drained the cup, / Racked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb' (25-26). This language and the repentance of sins is oddly unconvincing in

the context of the poem's central dynamic of female/female eroticism and devotion 'repent' and 'repentance' are included throughout the poem to singularly unconvincing effect. Desire between women is characterised as an enjoyable exchange, 'You sinned with me a pleasant sin:' (51) 'Alas for joy that went before, / For joy that dies, for love that dies.' (63-4).

The dynamic of intermittent gaze is continued in stanza 7, and contrasted with poetic voice. The poetic persona of the poem feels compelled to reject the beloved's gaze by following and articulating religious orthodoxy, which causes physical pain:

> Only my lips still turn to you,
> My livid lips that cry, Repent.
> Oh weary life, oh weary Lent,
> Oh weary time whose stars are few. (65-68)

There is a clear distinction here, between returning, turning lips, and that which makes them livid. The lips become livid because of the anger of imposed repentance and the way that they are forced to ventriloquize doctrinal beliefs. Masculinity fares very badly in this text; where it appears at all it in the form of a degraded, contaminating devil: 'His locks writhed like a cloven snake – ' (102). Although, not socially labelled as fallen this suggests a haunting by heteronormative notions of corruption and sin. An opposition is proposed between masculine and feminine versions of temptation and desire. In the next stanza a different kind of visitation appears in the shape of the dream-like feminine muse where the object of poem speaks for the first time, 'you came to seek me there,/ And 'Do you dream of me?' you said.' (114-115). The subject does not answer and pretends to reject the muse's advances. The psychological and emotional turmoil is conveyed in the see-saw up/down motion or sleep and awakening.

Rossetti repeats the play on the tension of voice and expression by employing a kind of poetic censorship, which ironically finds a way to express the forbidden and unsayable: 'I cannot write the words I said,/My words were slow, my tears were few;/But through the dark my silence spoke/like thunder' (130-133). Rossetti also subverts poetic convention by introducing the idea of a subject who both writes and speaks, thus introducing the idea of the subject as poet. By denying speech and removing words, the utterance becomes paradoxically more powerful. By creating a speaking silence, the presence of both hidden and forbidden desire, is simultaneously contained, and expressed in a singular, poetic phrase. This device cleverly foregrounds the forbidden and censored aspects of desire at the same time as its nominal rejection. 'The Convent Threshold' weaves together these coded tropes in a complicated poetic matrix of literary, religious, and erotic referencing.

The poetic subject achieves a resolution by accepting the possibility of communion after death, within a heavenly realm where it will be possible to lift the veil of separation between sexual and sacred – in the lifting of both the nun's veil, the veil between worlds and the bodily veil of the hymen. The poem continues to explore notions of hiddenness and secrecy (veiling) as well as consummation. The combination of veiled and veiling suggests both a reference to the nun's habit and the taking of the nun in a sexual penetration: 'Then you shall lift the veil thereof' (144). The text also suggests a liberation from binary oppositions of earth/heaven, spirit/desire in the merger of the unveiled. At the end of the poem the two figures stand together beyond the threshold which has separated them, 'And we stand safe within the door,' (143) (Another example of safe but sexually shared space between women in nineteenth-century texts written by female poets). As Roden notes, Rossetti's nuns may be many

things but what they are not is sexually disinterested: 'Whomever Rossetti may have been her nuns are not asexual.'[316] Although the subject has tried to repent of previous sins, she is quite happy to return to them at the end of the poem away from the oppressive weight of her coffin-like leaden tester' (bed canopy): 'There we shall meet as once we met, / And love with old familiar love.' (147-8).

If 'Goblin Market' uses the idea of feeding as a trope of fallenness, 'The Convent Threshold' uses the state of virginity and veiling to explore the relationship between spirituality, devotion and queer desire. Both poems suggest the power of female bodies to redeem and transcend sanction and corruption. Ironically, extreme nineteenth-century views on female sexuality tended to support same-sex and separatist communities, the argument taken to its logical conclusion being that it was not possible for a woman to be sexual without a man and therefore, an all-female community cannot be erotic. However, this discourse does little to explain the anxiety concerning how middle-class women could be contaminated by contact with working-class fallen women in a single-sex environment.

Both Nancee Reeves and Anna Kruguvoy Silver have cited pronounced links between religious fasting, sacrificial penance and feminine forms of vampirism in Rossetti's oeuvre, which produces an alternative kind of devotional feeding.[317] This feeding sits alongside a tension between body and soul, or spirit and flesh which also exists in Rossetti's work, and which has its roots in *The Bible*. What might seem discursively far-fetched becomes strangely persuasive when the links between Christian litany and vampirism are explored in greater depth. As Nancee Reeves argues:

---

[316] Ibid., p.61.

[317] Nancee Reeves, 'Vampires and Goblins: Coleridge's Influence on Christina Rossetti', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 21 (Spring 2011), 63-72. Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

If we consider the parallel with (Coleridge's) 'Christabel', where sisterhood is a major component of the vampiric evolution, the radical nature of Laura's redemption by her sister is apparent. In both *The Vampyre* and 'Christabel,' the taking or exchanging of fluids is the precursor to death or life-in-death, but in 'Goblin Market' where Lizzie voluntarily lets her sister suckle, it is the path to redemption.[318]

The destructive vampires in 'Goblin Market' are actually the Goblins themselves inducing death via proxy, through the feeding of their forbidden poisoned and adulterated fruits, protecting their own bodies in the process. This redemption is however, achieved after the warning provided by another woman's death and dead body (Jeanie's). It is this other fate which provides the impetus for Lizzie's altruistic sacrifice:

'Good folk', said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
'Give me much and many:'-
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny. (363-367)

'Goblin Market' differentiates between exploitative sacrifice of women by men or masculine creatures, and altruistic sacrifice between sisters, in the difference between being sacrificed and choosing to make a sacrifice to save another. Food occupies and supports parasitic relationships in both texts. Both texts also ask deep questions about how women can achieve independence and creative self-definition. 'Goblin Market', therefore, combines an elegy within a redemptive parable. Both 'Goblin Market' and 'In an Artist's Studio' offer, or try to offer, the possibility of bodily, spiritual, and literary resurrection.

---

[318] Ibid., p. 64.

For Rossetti and Procter poetic ambiguity offers a way to negotiate beyond conventional gender restrictions and ideological judgement, but also offers a way of drawing attention to their own queerness through the use of innovative voice, metre, language, form and iconography. The opacity of faith and devotion is inverted, so that an alternative queer space becomes available within orthodox religious discourse that cannot be removed by external judgement or censure. In Procter's 'A Legend of Provence', the final stanza famously draws attention to its own "mystery" but pre-empts further investigation by situating this within the language of faith, which can touch, but which cannot be touched. However, this foregrounding of hiddenness in both poets' work facilitates queer reading and readership by highlighting its own awareness of what is being withheld, and provides a way of leaving the poetic closet door tantalisingly ajar, if not open.

Failed Closets and Awkward Subcultures in the Writing of Michael Field and Amy Levy

This chapter will explore connections between Michael Field's life writing, *Works and Days* (1870-1914)*,* their poetry collections *Long Ago* (1889)*,* and *Whym Chow: Flame of Love,* (published 1914) and Amy Levy's *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (1884) and *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (1889)*.* All texts are situated within the context of wider *fin-de-siècle* debates and discussions of gender, sexuality, urban/public environments and creativity. Both Field and Levy's work now occupy significant positions in the canon of *fin-de-siècle* work by women writers and continue to receive appraisal from academics working with queer and feminist theory, and in the case of Levy analyses of Jewish identity and Anglo-Jewish identity.

Katharine Harris Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Emma Cooper (1862-1913) published poetry and plays together under the pseudonym Michael Field. Bradley and Cooper were aunt and niece; they embarked on a physical relationship from 1885 and lived together in Richmond from 1899. They studied together at Bristol University and were independently wealthy due to an inheritance.   Their work received considerable praise from critics until 'Michael Field' was exposed as the creation of two women writers. As Virginia Blain notes, Michael Field's reputation was largely unsustainable after this revelation:

> But after it was known that Michael Field was two spinsters his works were shunned, until at length they resorted to anonymity and found success in 1905 with *Borgia*. Lionel Johnson was the only critic ever to praise them as they felt they deserved. Nevertheless they published twenty-seven tragedies, eight

volumes of lyrics, and a masque and had one (prose play), *A Question of Memory* briefly staged in London.[319]

Michael Field's Life Writing, *Works and Days,* and the Ambivalence of Identification

> I am without my Love, in the twilight, when at the best one is sad to death. She is in Oxford. I am here a fragment. But I love my art & will not dare to injure it…There is no fellowship, no caress, no tight winding-together of two natures, no tenderness when my Love is severed from me; and there seems to be no life in people…So I sit by my table doubly dead.[320]

Edith Cooper wrote the above diary entry on Tuesday, 29th July 1890. This one small paragraph offers a remarkable insight into the layers of creative and erotic identification within Michael Field the poet, Michael Field the relationship, and between Edith Cooper and Katharine Bradley. Here the central conundrum of Michael Field and Michael and Field is addressed explicitly. In creating a single entity/subjectivity there is always a tension between splitting and doubling regardless of the further complication of gender swapping. Cooper is Field, without Michael (Bradley) here at the same time as she represents the partnership of Michael Field. She is a fragment (part of a whole) but also a double. Cooper also makes an implicit link back to Field's poetic reworking of Sapphic fragments and ideas of cultural threads through her reference to tight winding. What remains crucially ambiguous here is what Cooper means by 'But I love my art & and will not dare to injure it,' and the distinction between 'I love my art' and 'my love.' Cooper is simultaneously constructing Bradley as her muse/art and love but also trying to process the ways in which these two elements are differently figured and existing with a clear

---

[319] Virginia Blain, 'Katharine Harris Bradley 1846-1914', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 'Edith Emma Cooper (1862-1913), also included in this entry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): online edition September 2011, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article.38348 [accessed 2 December 2015].
[320] *Works and Days* entry (Edith Cooper, Tuesday, 29th July, 1890) within
Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo, eds., *Michael Field, The Poet* (London: Broadview, 2009), p.256.
All chapter references to *Works and Days* and letters are taken from the Broadview edition.

space between them. This chapter explores the tensions between splitting and doubling in Michael Field's work and the ways in which these are connected to, and with, queerness and desire.

While there has been a considerable revival of interest in nineteenth-century women's life writing over the last forty years, as part of feminist and queer reclamation or partially obscured and hidden texts, *fin-de-siècle* life writing by women has received less attention. However, new critical work on diaries and journals has been assisted by the publication of new selections of their work.[321] In the case of Michael Field and their double writing, limited extracts of their diaries published as *Works and Days* are now available outside of the confines of the British Library, online, in biographies, or in published, abridged versions. *Works and Days* provides an interesting counterpoint to Lister's diaries, written across a similar period of time (1870-1914), forty-four years against Lister's thirty-four years. These texts operate as long-nineteenth-century bookends in the history of queer life writing but are rarely considered together.

Works and Days is a multi-layered, multi-functional text, which offers a curate's egg of daily notes (nominally outside the Michael Field name), letters, thoughts on public and private gatherings, and a who's who of *fin-de-siècle* artists, writers and designers. Bradley and Cooper were central figures within a large number of social and cultural *fin-de-siècle* groupings. They were friends with Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts, Bernard Berenson, Robert Browning, Mary Costelloe, John Gray, Vernon Lee, Alice Meynell, Arthur Symons, John Ruskin, and Mary Robinson amongst others. Bradley and Cooper were open and subject to multiple cultural influences, as well as strangely separate from

---

[321] Ibid.

them, simultaneously worldly and yet otherworldly. These volumes also include extremely complex meta-writing on the construction and maintenance of Michael Field as a creative entity/brand, queer subjectivity and intimacy. The constitution of Michael Field is both implicit and explicit, asserted as unproblematic and simultaneously deconstructed through Bradley and Cooper's discussions concerning the use of the label. The *Diaries* also contain insights into the evolution of Michael Field's poetics. Additionally, they reference the use of Michael Field as a fragile, protective, literary closet against public and critical censure and disapproval (which perversely and paradoxically, Bradley and Cooper spend a lot of time subverting). Thus, to read Michael Field's life writing not only challenges pseudonymous closeting, but also blurs the boundaries between different forms of writing. The diary entries frequently move from notes on day-to-day events, creative practices, and the relationship between life and work. *Works and Days*, although published posthumously unravels the cover of Michael Field and holds it up for discussion. Despite its extensive length and detail the text, is often sphinx-like and provides no easy insight for those researching Bradley and Cooper's writing or biography – although the second is certainly less problematic than the first. All the voices in *Works and Days* are self-conscious; in other words, they are constructed as part of a private volume intended for publication, and are written self-consciously with an ultimate audience in mind. Verisimilitude is a deeply problematic textual issue here. Emma Donoghue's biography of Bradley and Copper clearly illustrates the enmeshed and intertwined trinity of Bradley, Cooper and Field. Donoghue summarises her project as follows: 'I offer this short and personal study of the intertwined lives of a couple - who as people, and as writers - have come to haunt me.'[322]

---

[322] Emma Donoghue, *We are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1998), p.1.

What is transparent from reading the journal writing, is that Michael Field is never just a pseudonym, but a complex statement of intimacy, dialogue and doubling in itself (incorporating Bradley and Cooper's pet names), even if Bradley's initial rationale for the use of a male pseudonym offers a more prosaic explanation:

> But the report of lady-authorship will dwarf & enfeeble our work at every turn. […] And we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips. We must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature – exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors: we cannot be stifled in drawing room conventionalities.[323]

The extent of Michael Field's abhorrence concerning lady-authorship seems extreme, given that a number of female authors used their own names in the *Fin de Siècle*. This research suggests that this aversion has deeper psychological roots, and that there are a number of occasions in the diary writing where the reaction is so excessive that it hints at a form of psychological projection and transference. Michael Field may ultimately have more in common with these conventional ladies than they like to admit, despite protestations to the contrary. Conversely, and paradoxically, Michael Field are not averse to manipulating a lady-like persona when it suits them.

As Chris White has argued, academics looking to use *Works and Days* as a decoding device, or interpretative tool, to unravel the nature of Bradley and Cooper's queer familial and erotic partnership, as well as Field's collaborative poetics and drama, are likely to be disappointed:

> It would be a mistake to assume that these journals offer anything like a straightforward access to the 'truth' about the relationship, or Katharine and

---

[323] Katharine Bradley to Robert Browning, *Works and Days*, 23 November, 1884, Thain and Vadillo, p.311.

Edith's understanding of it, even given all the usual reservations about the mediated status of autobiography.[324]

Situating Field's life writing is made even harder by the constantly shifting discursive context in the late nineteenth century. Terms and concepts such as aestheticism, decadence and New Women are notoriously fluid, hard to pin down, and often overlapping, in both a *Fin de Siècle* and twenty-first century context. Subject to ridicule within satire and popular culture, these *fin-de-siècle* terms have historically given rise to reductive stereotypes, and negative representations with little relation to artists and writers' attribution of their own work, their position in *fin-de-siècle* culture, and the rationale of complex artistic movements and groups. As Bristow notes*,* some of these terms became so vilified that their exponents were forced to give them up completely in their recognised form:

> Decadence had to be done away with altogether, even by its advocates. Aestheticism is frequently defined alongside its relative decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* period, although it is often hard to tell where aestheticism ends and decadence starts, or vice versa, and the two terms are not mutually exclusive. [325]

George Landow's recent analysis provides a useful if contentious outline of both areas:

> Aestheticism places greater emphasis on the creation of art and stresses form over subject matter. Poetry in this vein often relies on intricate verse forms, mostly French, which present demanding technical requirements and feature verbal music, including insistent rhyme and repetition. Aesthetic verse also emphasizes visual description and colour. The Aesthetic alienation and retreat from life are recapitulated in the verse itself […] The Decadent, in contrast, wages a guerrilla war against the dominant culture. [326]

---

[324] Chris White, ' 'Poets and lovers evermore'' Interpreting Female Love in the Poetry and Journals of Michael Field,' in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing,* ed. by Joseph Bristow (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp.26-43, pp.26-27.

[325] Joseph Bristow, ed.,*The Fin-de-Siècle Poem*, *Literary Culture and the 1890s* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p.12.

[326] George Landow, *John Evelyn Barlas, A Critical Biography: Poetry, Anarchism, and Mental Illness in Late-Victorian Britain* (2012) — via http://www.victorianweb.org/decadence/cohen.htm [accessed 2 December 2015].

Social ambivalence also extended to the figure of the New Woman pejoratively characterised in the late nineteenth century as bicycle riding, pipe smoking, inappropriately masculine, suit wearing, odd and queer/genderqueer.   Field's relationship to the idea of New Womanhood is particularly problematic given their dislike of key figures such as George Egerton and their significant affiliation with the poetics of male writers, or those who were influenced by masculine queerness, for example, Vernon Lee. Forms of newness and difference were frequently attacked in the *fin-de-siècle* period in a way that caused serious damage. In fact the word new itself became a byword for social satire and a generic term which was diluted by its overuse in the terms new journalism, new women, *The New Review*, the new fiction, and the new art.   The constantly evolving relationship between artists and writers and these terms is suggestively illustrated by Bradley and Cooper's changing attitude to diverse aesthetic publications, as a suitable/unsuitable home for the work of Michael Field:

> Dear Sir,
> I must request you to return my typed copy of <u>Rhythm</u>. I dislike the *Yellow Book*, both in its first and second number & greatly regret that in a sudden rashness of sympathy I proposed to contribute to it – It has been all my fault, & I should not ask you to return an accepted paper if your delay in printing had not convinced me that you feel M.F is not an ingredient in the *Yellow Book* broth […]as for metaphor's sake I must name it. Trusting you will see that I do not write in a spirit of contention, I am
> Sincerely yrs &c
>
> [E.C]
> <u>Thursday – July 17 1894</u>.[327]

Cooper's change of heart perhaps reflects a wider confusion about the cultural manifesto which *The Yellow Book* was espousing, and a continual tension between a desire to espouse artistic freedom and a desire for appropriacy. This tension is most

---

[327] Thain and Vadillo, p.262.

obviously illustrated in the conflicts between Aubrey Beardsley and John Lane. As Sally

Ledger has argued, *The Yellow Book* offers an intriguing example of *fin-de-siècle* cultural

debates in miniature:

> It may have adopted the colour of 'the wicked and decadent French novel' and it
> may have been culturally identified as representing 'all that was outrageously
> modern,' but *The Yellow Book* was, more complexly and more interestingly, a site
> for the most significant cultural dialogues and conflicts of the *Fin de Siècle*.[328]

In her journal article, Ledger references *The Yellow Book's* publisher's statement on the

aims and objectives of *The Yellow Book*, which highlights the conflicting and confused

dynamic at the heart of the publication's project:

> While *the Yellow Book* will seek always to preserve a delicate, decorous and
> reticent mien and conduct, it will at the same time have the courage of its
> modernness…It will be charming, it will be daring, it will be distinguished.[329]

As Ledger rightly points out these terms cause a conflicting dynamic at the heart of the

publication: 'delicate', 'decorous' and 'reticent' sit uncomfortably alongside the modern,

'daring', epithets that would in the near future attach themselves to a magazine whose

title became a byword for aestheticism and decadence.

Michael Field/Cooper's description of their visit to the Bodley Head shop (to

purchase a copy of *The Yellow Book*) indicates that the conservative aspects of the

publication's presentation have disappeared altogether.   The writing is as excessive as

the extremes, which are contained within the retail space itself:

> As we came up to the shop we found the whole frontage a hot background of
> orange-colour to [<] sly [>], roistering heads, silhouetted against it & [<] half – [>]
> hiding behind masks. The window seemed to be gibbering, our eyes to be filled

---

[328] Sally Ledger, 'Wilde, Women and *The Yellow Book*: The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and
Decadence,' *English Literature in Translation*, 1880-1920, 50. 1 (2007), pp.5-26 (p.9).
[329] Ibid.

with incurable jaundice […] One felt as one does when now and then a lost woman stands flaming on the pavement with the ghastly laugh of the ribald crowd in the air round her. One hates one's eyes for seeing.[330]

The description is full of pathological metaphors in its fevered, delirious imagery, as if the space brings on a kind of allergic or toxic reaction, or as if Michael Field are sickened by their experience of extreme decadence/yellowness. The faces hidden behind masks suggest a sense of threat in unnatural, artificial performance as if Michael Field's covering identity is being mirrored back to them, in a bizarre encounter. A disembodied 'lost woman' symbolises projected vulnerability. The entry suggests that Michael Field's radicalism has reached its tolerable limits. The link between disease and *The Yellow Book* is also reiterated in Michael Field's letters when Katharine Bradley writes to Mary Costelloe (undated 1894): '"Friday I have the Yellow-Book Fever – I must speak."'[331]

The most infamous example of an attack on aestheticism's 'pathology' is contained within Max Nordau's *Degeneration,* which supposedly offers evidence of deviance, notoriously savaging artists and artistic production in the process:

> There might be a sure means of proving that the application of the term 'degenerates' to the originators of all the *fin-de-siècle* movements in art and literature is not arbitrary, that it is not baseless conceit, but a fact; that would be a careful physical examination of the persons concerned, and an inquiry into their pedigree. In almost all cases, relatives would be met with who were undoubtedly degenerate, and one or more stigmata discovered which would indisputably establish the diagnosis of 'Degeneration.'[…][332]

As Bristow notes aesthetes become an easy target for polemicists:

> In his 1893 volume Nordau turns to the already degraded ….*Fin de Siècle* in order to make the staggering assertion that modern artists shared the same

---

[330] Thain and Vadillo, Wednesday, April 17, 1894, p.261.
[331] Ibid., no date [1894], p.329.
[332] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (1895) within Ledger and Luckhurst, p.16.

degenerate nature as criminals and neuropaths. Moreover, Nordau maintains that members of the artistic avant-garde, like these other reprehensible types, had the ability to contaminate everyone who came within this reach.[333]

 Although Nordau's views were extreme and subject to satire, the damage inflicted by his writing and other works in a similar vein by Bénédict Morel and Cesare Lombroso, was significant. The effect of this pseudo-scientific discourse arguably reaches its apotheosis in the prosecution and conviction of Oscar Wilde. The forces of what Foucault describes as the functions of power, and what Sedgwick identified as homosexual panic, are confronted by artists and writers pushing at the boundaries of available space either from within alternative forms of the normative in creative marriage, or from more explicitly dissident positions.   The most energised period of aestheticism thus also marks the start of a formidable backlash; creative regeneration and ownership of one's own nature is flipped to become pathological degeneration. *Works and Days* contains an entry which clearly illustrates the dangers of being closely associated with Wilde and the fear of being exposed as queer in certain environments which are not known to Bradley and Cooper. Edith Cooper writes in a diary entry of (April 1895):

> On Sunday night after talk about Carducci's <u>Satana</u>…I dream that we stop at a restaurant half way up a mountain & a woman far down the table begs to speak with us when the table d'hôte is over, for she has heard things against us. 'Oh' says a woman on Michael's left 'what an interesting talk that will be – [<] suspect [>] it will be about your works.' Michael replies 'I have no fear at all about my works – I know quite well they all came from Satan.' [.] At her right hand I whisper 'For goodness sake, don't say these things – remember the Oscar Scandal!'- How characteristic both remarks![334]

---

[333] Bristow, p.7.
[334] Thain and Vadillo, p.264.

This entry is remarkable for a number of reasons. Cooper's anxiety and fear of shaming is obvious here, and forms a kind of reverse homosexual panic, contrasted with Bradley's provocative and highly amusing defiance and defence of her textual pandemonium. The subconscious lack of a united front outside of textual assertions of being 'against the world' is obvious here.[335]

Cooper's writing, in the guise of a dream, clearly shows the tensions in her relationship with Bradley, the creative entity Michael Field, and differing approaches to the reading of both the work, and the relationship.   As Virginia Blain has suggested the emphasis on Field's sublime doubling often papers over the aesthetic and personal cracks within their world and the dialogic aspect of their work:

> The poetry produced by the two British women who lived and wrote together in the late nineteenth century under the joint pseudonym 'Michael Field' has been regarded as a univocal product by its admirers and detractors alike. Yet such a reading of their work, […] tends to homogenise it and disguise the much more dynamic dialogic structure that sustains it. This structure stems from the real differences between the two poets […].[336]

Blain also amusingly and appositely describes the ineffective maintenance of Field's closet, 'Yet one senses they were trying desperately to preserve a secret that was already out; they were standing in the closet with their backs to the world and the door wide open.'[337]   The diaries provide explicit examples of social encounters where Bradley and Cooper's Fieldian entity has already been identified. Bradley is horrified at the thought of exposure and appalled at the fascination that their relationship and creative entity engender, although in most cases she is already too late, for example:

(1890)

---

[335] 'It was deep April and the morn', Ibid., p.128
[336] Virginia Blain, '"Michael Field, the Two-headed Nightingale": lesbian text as palimpsest,' *Women's History Review*, 5. 2 (1996), pp. 239-257 (p.239).
[337] Ibid. p. 250.

> Yesterday, Monday July 21, we were suddenly summoned to Mrs Chandler Moulton's last 'at home' in Weymouth Street. The first moments were misery and humiliation. Mrs Moulton introduced us as a poet, as Michael Field, & we stood, our wings vibrating in revolt, while hollow fashionable women lisped their enchantment at meeting with us. A moment came when this could be borne no longer, I laid a master-hand on the hostess and told her to introduce us by our Christian names.[338]

This scene of horror as written by Bradley strangely invokes connotations of female vampirism, with Michael Field being preyed upon by a group of fascinated, insatiably hungry women. The women's lisping, snake-like mouths open to consume them with their monstrous hollowness. There is a feeling of revulsion here, but also a sense of erotic frisson in the summoning of an aesthetic harem, and the power of same-sex, possibly kindred desire. The vibrating wings link Bradley and Cooper with Fieldian uses of bird imagery and to the stock doves and song-birds in their poetry. The image also links Bradley and Cooper with a kind of animalistic persona and sonic footprint, like a humming bird. More prosaically, it also intimates the ruffling of Bradley and Cooper's social and reputational feathers. Bradley and Cooper's bid for literary recognition required the maintenance of the entity and label Michael Field long after the closet horse had bolted. For better, or worse, Bradley and Cooper decided to maintain their investment in their brand, as a name of possible future import which could still be read in a partially closeted space by new readers.

Beyond caricature, New Women writers were engaged in debates about oppressive femininity, female sexuality, educational access, social and political enfranchisement and ways of challenging the gendering of cultural forms. Michael Field's work is often included in collections of New Women writing, as well as collections

---

[338] Thain and Vadillo, p.239.

of aesthetic writing by women, although the criteria for inclusion differs from publication to publication. Biographically they fulfil the criteria by being independent, educated spinsters often based in an urban space, and partly acting as *flâneuse*. Carolyn de la Oulton and Adrienne Gavin have tackled definitional issues (how to define New Women, New Woman writing) in a recent collection, by framing these debates within a larger *fin-de-siècle* context that allows the work of diverse women writers to be included under the loose heading of 'authors of change.'[339] In the case of Michael Field, this is particularly helpful, given the lack of overt political agendas and ideological positions in their work, as well as their refusal to adopt conventional positions. However, others have argued that this refusal almost invalidates their inclusion in feminist collections, if not in anthologies of queer writing. As Julia Saville notes, writing on *Sight and Song* and *Long Ago*, Michael Field are resistant to labelling and fixed positions:

> At the same time what these poems - and by extension, Bradley and Cooper – resolutely refuse is the stability of any subject position that could be appropriated into what today we might label as identity politics. For this reason the poems of *Sight and Song*, unlike the Sapphic poems in *Long Ago*, are difficult to assimilate into the category of *fin-de-siècle* feminist poetry. If anything, they formalise the slippage and variety of the gender position with which Bradley and Cooper themselves plan the entries to their joint journal, Works *and Days.*[340] *(*My italics).

Bradley, Cooper and Field's marked refusal of identity labels for themselves and their work offers points of similarity with Lister's refusal of contemporary labels for her sexuality and genderqueerness. The question here is whether this is a form of closet avoidance, a wider negotiation of queer subjectivity/ties, a kind of *jouissance*, a form of

---

[339] Carolyn de la Oulton, Adrienne E. Gavin, eds., *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle: Authors of Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
[340] Julia F. Saville, 'The Poetic Imaging of Michael Field' in Bristow, pp.178-206 (p.198).

reputational management, or possibly all of these in combination. What Field's inclusion

in various collections of feminist, New Women and queer writing does show, perhaps, is

a more sophisticated understanding of the elasticity of terms and diverse forms of

writing which it is possible to include under these headings. Saville's point about

extension is open to challenge. Michael Field's poetic personae are not Michael Field,

even if Michael Field is partly Bradley and Cooper; textual positions are not biographical

positions and any confusion between the two can overemphasise an alienated

perspective. Conversely, there are moments within *Works and Days* when Bradley and

Cooper are not sure of their own relation to Michael Field and where they start and

Michael Field ends.   Michael Field starts to take on a weird life of its own and becomes

a third entity between Bradley and Cooper.   For example, the following entry by

Katharine Bradley from 27th April 1907 outlines the enduring complexity of this issue,

(still pertinent twenty-three years after the initial enquiry):

> I am under the guard of S. Michael the cleaving angel – wholly and forever beneath his divine protection –
>
> Invoked so carelessly [,] he has given me of his power…
>
> 'Which is Michael and which is Field' asked little Arthur [Symons] in 1884 –
>
> 'Oh I don't know I am Michael.' And I am.[341]

The claiming of masculine power is implicit in the reference to Michael the avenging

angel. This symbol is threaded throughout Field's oeuvre, together with evolving links

between religion and queer subjectivity which develop into a form of devotional poetics

accompanied by Bradley and Cooper's conversion to Catholicism. Gender performativity

is not limited to the use of a masculine pseudonym. Bradley and Cooper's use of a

---

[341] Thain and Vadillo, p282.

masculine pseudonym is not nominal.   By using bi and transgendered figures, such as

Tiresias and his/her, staff of creativity and tropes associated with decadent and aesthetic

masculinity, Michael Field opens up a space for queerness and same-sex desire to be

poetically embodied, in conjunction with normative or expected subjectivities.

Arguably, *Works and Days* does offer a reasonable delineation of the gap

between Bradley and Cooper's social engagement with contemporary debates, and

Michael Field's poetics; for example, there are numerous entries detailing Bradley and

Cooper's discussions on aestheticism, decadence and the issue of restrictive femininity,

even if elaborations of how these affect their creative output are more limited.   For

example, Katharine writes the following concerning a discussion with Oscar Wilde:

> We agreed – the whole problem of life turns on pleasure. Pater shows that the
> hedonist – the perfect hedonist is the saint. 'One is not always happy when one
> is good; but one is always good when one is happy' [.] [...][342]

Works and Days also details numerous supportive encounters with other

women writers whose work is more clearly aligned with feminist positions, such as Amy

Levy and Mathilde Blind.   The diaries record how Michael Field and Bradley/Cooper

took part in the reading of other poets' work as well as their own.

Although Michael Field's writing is predominantly situated within an aesthetic,

fin-de-siècle movement and moment, it is also characterised as proto-modern/ist, out of

its   own   period,   and   before   its   time,   despite   Bradley's   command   to   'Be

Contemporaneous' (in a similar vein to Pound's 'make it new').[343] It is perhaps inevitable

that a joint poetic oeuvre that starts with the title *Long Ago* is always in the process of

---

[342] Ibid., p.241.
[343] Ibid., p.256.

queer projection and queer retrospection. Famously noted by Bradley in the diaries 'We are Michael Field. Again, he [Robert Browning] said, "Wait fifty years."'[344] The concept of being out of period is also shared with Lister.   Lister is often referenced as the first modern lesbian in analyses of her textual queer personae and psychology.   The formation of queer temporalities is a relatively recent area of exploration for queer and feminist theorists but one which offers some fascinating perspectives on relationships between majority and minority discourses, cultural/subcultural evolution, and ideas of newness, novelty and the avant-garde. Theories of queer temporality raise questions about whether dominant systems are ever ready, or ready enough, to receive queer and feminist expression. Michael Field are not necessarily obvious New Women but they are avant-garde.

Ellipsis, opposition and the spectre of incest

The spectre of incest haunts the margins of Field, Bradley and Cooper's work – like an unwelcome guest at a queer dinner party, always outstaying its welcome. One of the most remarkable aspects of Michael Field's posthumous revival and recognition is the lack of comment on incest taboo, and the blood ties between Bradley and Cooper. In Bradley and Cooper's case the trope of the queer familial and familiarity is actualised in the form of biology (aunt and niece).   This fact forces us to think about the possible connections between adverse critical reception, queerness/lesbianism and incest taboo.

Queer theorists have started to address this issue more explicitly, for instance Kate Thomas:

> Second, Bradley and Cooper were aunt and niece. Their relationship was incestuous. Michael Field is under-studied, to be sure, but this fact of the

---

[344] Ibid., p 233.

relationship has been so politely avoided that it is something of an elephant in the maiden-auntly parlor.

Thomas goes on to argue that the fact of incest has a strange effect on Bradley, Cooper and Field's critical reception, so that their lesbianism becomes sanitised in the face of this more extreme non-conformity and the fact of their queer familial relationship is always ultimately somehow sabotaging their bid for literary recognition:

> My proposal is that Michael Field has always been — and perhaps always will be — 'out of time' : there are relationships among Bradley and Cooper's incestuous, multigenerational lesbianism, the lateness of literary and critical attention to their work, their own sense that as poets and lovers they joined hands and wrote against their age, and their often expressed, often-extravagant desire for literary immortality. [345]

This leads one to wonder firstly, where the record of opposition exists, secondly, how it is possible to negotiate this taboo in a twenty-first century context (where in theory Bradley could have been prosecuted for sexual offences), and thirdly, how this closer married connection is reflected in their work, apart from, and in conjunction with same-sex desire? Incest taboo is enduring in most cultures, whereas the taboo of lesbianism is not, in many western cultures. While Bradley and Cooper do refer to family opposition and enforced separation in their unpublished letters they stress that their desire to be together is natural:

> My own Deare, my Stock-Dove,
>
> Sweet, very sweet is your call to me, I love it dearly & it does not coo in vain for me. I will come and heaven favouring, we will indeed be happy! We will talk of Lucrece and Loyalty & the white book and feel the warm folding arms of nature around us both. But wait a little for our dear little Pussie's sake. She is getting better and parents want her to have a full week at Weston now this lovely

---

[345] Thomas, Kate, '"What Time We Kiss" Michael Field's Queer Temporalities,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 13.2-3 (2007), 327-351, (p.329).

weather is given to us. Let her have this [<] full [>] week and then <u>I will come</u>. <u>They promise that</u>.[346]

The correspondence between Bradley and Cooper is often couched in strategic or conspiratorial terms and with an uncensored lack of shame. Katharine Bradley writes the following to Edith Cooper in April 1885:

> Now P. this is what we will do. We will just wait…we will somehow get seven days in London. But if I told Scott we wd. stay with her one week, and go out on the Friday afternoon she always receives, she would, she wd. do *just what I told her*… Indeed, I shall not come home till they send you to fetch me. That will bring parents to their senses…Now put down its moral paws and love me. P.P. come to me: it is not natural for us to live apart. Your own V.[347]

In a similar vein to Lister, Bradley and Cooper insist on the naturalness of their relationship and their desire to be together. They also use their familial link to assert their close connection in the face of 'moral paws.' Despite Bradley and Cooper achieving their objective of living together, their letters and *Works and Days* are scattered with multiple references to waiting and being told to wait, as if the time is never right for Bradley, Cooper, Field. This theme is also taken up in their unpublished poetry. Thain and Parejo's edition reproduces a letter from April 1885, preceded by a poem 'Two of Us' which contains the following lines:

> [<] We cry, deserted in the olive groves [>]
> Even that nameless land,
>   From which the sun in banned,
> Loathing and fearful we [<] must [>] penetrate:
> Yea, alienate
> From goodness, famish for the Face obscured
>   In cavern of sin's seamless sepulchre,
> Till all that thou dost write
> We have endured, –
>   Thy word's interpreter;

---

[346] Field, *Letters*, Thain and Vadillo, p.303.
[347] Ibid. p303.

>And thou at last empower us, without slur
>>On thy dear Fame,
>Unto our mortal signature.
>>>To add thy Name (24-37)
>>>V. [K.B] [348]

Note the use of 'endured' here, and its multiple connotations: waited, suffered, survived and lasted. Michael Field and Bradley/Cooper's poetics become an exercise in being both in time, out of time, and beyond time. The failure to achieve 'Fame' is inexorably linked to a sense of being beyond, both in a positive and negative sense; beyond censure, beyond understanding and beyond the pale.

In attempting to transcend both aesthetic and social judgement, they become both inside and outside time in both their life writing and poetry: 'My love and I took hands and swore, /Against the world, to be Poets and lovers evermore.' (4-6) [349]   In yoking their partly biographical selves with their relationship and their poetics, Michael Field become subject to shifting, reverse moral judgements in a twenty-first century context, where the aesthetic and social judgements flip. Their work now receives a higher level of recognition, but is often still accompanied by a feeling of unease about the crossing of a taboo. The quote from 'It was deep April and the morn' features regularly in articles on Michael Field but the focus is usually on the first part of the line, rather than the second. It is perhaps useful to ask in what sense are the persona and personae of Field against the world. Is there a visceral feeling, on a deeper level, that the world might just be against them?   Part of the problem here is that despite being separate from their work they cannot differentiate between the entity, poetics, and relationship, which seriously affects how any negative appraisal is received, 'We are

---

[348] Ibid. p.302.
[349] 'It was deep April and the morn,' Ibid, p.128.

hated as Shelley was hated by countrymen, blindly, ravenously.'[350]   Problematically for

the reader of *Works and Days* it is not entirely clear who the 'we' is or why it is 'we' and

not the work.

In the case of Michael Field, contemporary re- conceptualizations of incest within

queer theory offer limited use. Judith Butler's work on incest helpfully reconfigures the

relationship between incest and the queer familial:

> But what concerns me most is that the term 'incest' is over inclusive; that the
> departure from sexual normalcy it signifies blurs too easily with other kinds of
> departures. Incest is considered shameful, which is one reason it is so difficult to
> articulate, but to what extent does it become stigmatized as a sexual irregularity
> that is terrifying, repulsive, unthinkable in the ways that other departures from
> normative exogamic heterosexuality are? The prohibitions that work to prohibit
> non- normative sexual exchange also work to institute and patrol the norms of
> presumptively heterosexual kinship.[351]

Freud's original characterisation of incest unfortunately serves to illustrate the extent of

exclusion within the archetypal framework; it is primarily focussed on male,

heterosexual usurpation of the rule of the father/patriarchy:

> Psychoanalysis has taught us that a boy's earliest choice of objects for his love is
> incestuous and that those objects are forbidden ones - his mother and his sister.
> We have learnt, too, the manner in which, as he grows up, he liberates himself
> from this incestuous attraction. A neurotic, on the other hand, invariably exhibits
> some degree of psychical infantilism. He has either failed to get free from the
> psychosexual conditions that prevailed in his childhood or he has returned to
> them - two possibilities which may be summed up as developmental
> inhibition.[352]

---

[350] Ibid., p 260.

[351] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.157.

[352] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (1913), (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p.19.

The obvious absence of the girl child shows the dominance of the father and the potential threat contained within the usurpation of patriarchy, and by extension heterosexuality. However, it can be posited that there is still little discursive space available for the exploration of relationships which sit in both spaces, or which exist outside or across existing prohibitions, exclusively based within heterosexual frameworks inherited from psychoanalysis. In other words, homosexuality and incest are both equated as deviant but not existing simultaneously. Other queer theorists have focussed on the links between pseudo-incestuous literary relationships, and notions of sorority and fraternity as tropes for queerness.[353]

However, some recent studies have started to confront the issue of biological links more explicitly, for example, Marcus's work on nineteenth-century manifestations of mother/daughter erotic dynamics.[354] This is not to suggest that the issue is deliberately censored in the treatment of Michael Field's biography and writing, but that it is possibly considered too difficult to handle. This leaves researchers in something of a double bind, in offering 'proof' of sex in a personal, creative relationship, which may mean offering 'proof' of a form of incest too. This may seem a diversion, but Butler also suggests that the taboo on homosexuality is older than the incest taboo, which sheds an interesting light on this discussion. As Jay Prosser notes in a recent chapter on Butler's work:

> Butler argues that the incest taboo is preceded by the taboo on homosexuality, for it is this that inaugurates the positive Oedipus complex, that is, the incestuous desires in the first place. The child's compliance with the taboo on homosexuality ensures that his/her object cathexis is directed toward the opposite sexed-parent. In a move designed to refute the primacy of heterosexuality over homosexuality, Butler asks: What then is the productive effect on heterosexuality

[353] See Duc Dau and Shale Preston, *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[354] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

of the prohibition of homosexuality? What happens to the once-desired, now-outlawed homosexual love object? Where within the subject does this object-cathexis go?[355]

Alternatively, is this relationship automatically outside incest taboo because there is no threat of reproduction? More recently, psychologists like Edward Westermarck have suggested that incest taboo can and does exist outside of a reproductive, and by extension, exclusively heterosexual framework, that prohibitions are based on proximity and innate aversion to sexual contact with close family members regardless of their gender.   These debates, if ultimately unresolvable, do offer an opportunity to ask some challenging and intriguing questions, not least of which may be how is it possible to read this intergenerational, or multigenerational queerness in Field's work.

Michael Field and Bradley/Cooper repeatedly challenge available norms, structures and chronologies and blur boundaries between different forms of writing and textual personae. It can be argued that they are still 'waiting' for critical and theoretical practice to catch up with 'him'/them. It seems that 'the fowl and the pussycat' as Sharon Bickle calls Field/Bradley/Cooper, in her collection of their love letters, have blown the metaphorical pea-green boat out of the theoretical water on more than one occasion.[356] One other major challenge with Field's writing is its consistently inconsistent energy and the development of paradox as art form.

---

[355] Jay Prosser, 'Judith Butler, queer feminism, transgender, and the transubstantiation of sex' in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. by Donald E.Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 32-59 (p.33).
[356] Sharon Bickle ed., *The Fowl and The Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

Audacious Poetics and Hellenist Modelling

> In simple truth all worship that is not idolatry must be audacious; for it involves the blissful apprehension of an ideal; it means in the very phrase of Sappho – ……….'And this I feel in myself'[357] (Michael Field Preface to *Long Ago*).

Katharine Bradley, Emma Cooper and Amy Levy were educated in classics at Bristol and Cambridge Universities respectively. Classical influence is explicitly acknowledged in their work although their uses of Hellenism are vastly different.   Michael Field and Amy Levy use classical figures and coding to explore dissident positions and outlets, to articulate alternative, queer, desiring utterance, alongside a critique of normative feminine positions to produce versions of poetic intersectionality.   These often multi-layered positions support Richard Dellamora's argument that sexual dissidence is often found to be working beyond binary terms in literary texts: 'This provocation has been of immense value in enabling work in sexuality studies during the past decade. There is, however, good reason to question whether sexual dissidence is always structured within binary terms. The evidence presented in many of the following…suggests it is not.' [358] These layers also significantly challenge the established conventions of univocal lyric poetry, and the relationship between genres. Multiplicity often becoming conjoined with hybrid forms of poetry and drama to produce dramatic verse, or verse drama. These positions also find resonances in plural classical forms such as the Greek chorus. As Yopie Prins has noted, the Hellenic influence of writers like Pater in the *Fin de Siècle,* opened up a space for women writers to construct their own version of queer philology:

---

[357] Thain and Vadillo, p.57.
[358] Richard Dellamora, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.5.

By analysing Field's exploration of Sapphic space in the poems of *Long Ago* and Levy's 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' these readings investigate how intolerable utterance finds a voice/s through and in poetic subjectivity. For Michael Field the tension between fragmentation and doubling is perfectly matched in the work and figure of Sappho. Both muse and poet, subject and object of desire, heterosexual and queer, Sappho allows Michael Field considerable scope for the aesthetic expression of closer marriage. Field's collection of Sapphic fragments, *Long Ago,* uses Sappho's epithalamium as a basis for this exploration, specifically through the manipulation of gendered poetic subjects in lyric form. One of the most challenging aspects of reading the untitled poems of *Long Ago* is to read these texts without knowing the identity of the subject and subject of the text. This ambiguity is redolent of Field, Bradley, Cooper's mutable identity outside the text. To ask who the subject of *Long Ago* is, is to echo the questioning of Michael Field as both cover and container.   Is the subject of *Long Ago*, Sappho, the muses, maenads, wild women, or Michael Field in the guise of Sappho, or a combination of all of these? Prins situates her analysis within a process of doubling, but this process replicates itself textually to such an extent that the layers go beyond double, into triple and multiple layers.

As Thain and Vadillo have argued this plurality is what makes the texts in *Long Ago* so challenging and intriguing: 'This complex multiplicity of the lyric voice, both male and female, single and double, homosexual and heterosexual, is one of the most

---

[359] Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p.47.

distinguishing features of the collection.'[360]   If Michael Field are simultaneously inside and outside these texts, contained and uncontained how can we read this?   Does the frequency of plural subjectivity enable the acknowledgement of collaborative, closer married writing, or show the limits of Field's Sapphic cover?   The joy and the challenge of reading Field's lyric poetry is in the negotiation of these multiple positions.   Perversely and paradoxically, Field's single, masculine authorship, which supposedly allows prohibited voice, is always in the process of being undermined by this rupturing plurality, a plurality, which leaves textual clues to the possibility of dual or doubled authorship. What Michael Field as pseudonym does give is a protective space for the exploration of the female body as (nominally normative) object of desire, simultaneously queered and doubled through the filter of Sapphic subjectivity.   The tensions between these binary and multi-layered positions reaches its apotheosis and potential resolution in the figure of Tiresias, the bi-and transgendered figure of poem LII, first line: 'Climbing the hill a coil of snakes.'

If *Works and Days* shows the level of complexity in the construction of Michael Field, it also hints at the overlap between Michael Field as author, Michael Field as relationship and Michael Field as potential poetic subject and muse.   This creates considerable challenges for researchers used to removing authors and ideas of intentionality from textual reading in postmodern literary criticism.   How do you read texts where biographical layering is awkwardly present, where private conversations and dialogues are hidden in plain sight?   This leads us to ask if the body of Michael Field, is always inscribed beyond nominal subjectivity, developing a cumulative erotic charge through its constant literary incorporation within the body of work.   Additionally, and

---

[360] Thain and Vadillo, p56.

potentially Michael Field's work contains an erotic charge which is only fully discernible to the two writers themselves. If call and response patterns are present in this poetic dialogue, does one poem answer another in a continual semi-private conversation? Michael Field's poetry is always for Bradley and Cooper as well as a potential, if largely unknown and unidentified readership. In this poetic dance, Michael Field toy with existing ideas of lyric intimacy to produce a new form of queer poetics.   Alternative timelines are created by the use of ancient queer philology, retrospection and projection, to create a marker of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics, simultaneously inside and outside contemporary poetics and chronology itself (as Kate Thomas has suggested in her work on Field and queer temporalities).[361] The external failure of Field's dramatic project becomes re-absorbed into their poetry and looped back to produce another space for a multiple Greek chorus.

Bradley and Cooper find a home for their fragmented, doubled and multiple positions within Sappho's incomplete poetics. There is a reason why Sedgwick largely references prose, rather than poetry to elucidate her arguments about the influence of heterosexual/homosexual binaries. The line between two sides of a binary coin is frequently challenged by the ambiguity of unidentified and ambiguously gendered, desiring speakers often in flux in poetry. Michael Field's work extends this ambiguity by incorporating dual time schemes and genders to break down orthodoxies and established positions. Michael Field's queer self-readership and audience provides a uniquely complex strategy of resistance, at the same time as it elides labelling. It is no coincidence that several of Bradley and Cooper's closest friends were involved in explicitly acknowledged same-sex partnerships. As Frederick Roden suggests, this

---

[361] Thomas, '"What Time We Kiss," p.327.

influence is significant not just biographically but poetically (writing on Cooper's 'Fortitudo Eugenis' within *Poems of Adoration)*:

> Bradley and Cooper did not live in isolation, nor were they the rather innocent, devout Anglican women that the Rossetti or Keary sisters were. Rather they counted as friends male couples such as Ricketts and Shannon, not to mention Gray and Raffalovich. Thus Cooper's Christian imagination fully fleshes out the love relationship between the two men that was only suggested by earlier works.[362]

Although *Long Ago* explicitly acknowledges its links to Sappho, it still leaves the reader with a series of questions concerning the identity of the speaking subject/s. Are the muses in these poems, Maenads, wild women, resurrected Sapphos or the muse as poets? Is the Sapphic doubling that Prins has posited also present in the fundamental self/other relationship to readership and audience. Is Michael Field's position as both subject and object of their own work, a doubled double? How can we read this extra layer or secret drawer at the centre of Field's work which is only accessible to Bradley and Cooper themselves, even with the addition of the supposedly revelatory *Works and Days*? Does the frequency of plural subjectivity, the poetic we, enable this to be more explicitly embodied, or does this plural subjectivity show and damage the limits of Field's individual, authorial cover?

The polyphonic tone of *Long Ago* is set from the outset, although the regular rhyme schemes used in all the poems suggests a unified if not singular tone overall. Field's first fragment I starts with the word 'They,' and the plurality continues throughout the poem through the repetition of 'they' and 'theirs' finally resolved in 'A choric

---

[362] Frederick Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.212.

measure.' (18)[363] In this case, the correlation between plurality and potential subversion is minimised by the use of the third-person plural. However, there are fragments where plural subjectivity is used in the first person, for example, in the second stanza of fragment III, where the 'we' is personalised and interchanged with the third person: 'We who have laurel in our hair-'/ (27) 'Each for the poet that she loves/ (35) 'Soon as my girl's sweet voice she caught,' (37) . [364] This stanza combines a myriad of references to the muses and poetry as muse. Many of the 'fragments' within *Long Ago* focus on the idea of poems about poetry and the interrelationships between personal and poetic muses. Field's grouping of Sapphic female writers offers a mirroring of *fin-de-siècle* literary immortal culture and the performance of poets, poetry and loved objects. *Long Ago* arguably starts the process of Field, Bradley and Cooper's attempt at a dedicated poetics of posterity and the giving of devotional offerings, in a kind of floral worship which appears in different guises throughout their poetic oeuvre. Thain and Vadillo suggest this in their notes to the Broadview edition:

> Sappho cultivated a literary salon at Mitylene, where many maidens studied music and poetry under her guidance. Around her gathered cultivated poetesses such as the celebrated and gifted Erinna of Telos and Damophyla of Pamphylia…Her pupils included Anagora of Miletus, Gongyla of Colophon, Euneica of Salamis, Mnasidica, Gyrina, Andromeda, Gorgo, Anactoria, and Dica, many of whom are currently addressed or referred to in her poetry. [365]

The multiplicity of Field's poetic voice/voices allows them to play with the closet supporting and undermining their own nominal poetic identity. However, as Michelle

---

[363] Thain and Vadillo, p.58.
[364] Ibid. p.60, pp.59-60.
[365] Ibid. n. 2.

Lee has noted, the rupturing of their supposed singularity, inside and outside the poetry, was to prove one of the reasons for Michael Field's undoing:

> This polyphonic poetic 'voice' was partially Michael Field's downfall, once Field's identity was fully known throughout the women's coterie. However, their collaboration, as radical and unconventional as it was, particularly in the face of the traditionally singular-voice lyric poetry, was not the only reason for Field's loss of literary favour.[…] In particular, another impediment to Field's literary career was Bradley and Cooper's devotion to writing 'out of time.'[366]

The two 'dear Greeks' as Browning called them, recalled by Bradley in 1888; 'Mr Browning came in greeting us as his 'two dear, Greek women,' [367] ultimately became unravelled by a combination of outing and self-outing. Michael Field's inclination for aesthetic perversity, going against literary fashion in the hope of achieving a stronger legacy, ultimately backfired. Bradley and Cooper inadvertently subscribe to the notion of circular time, and things coming round again. The irony is that in using Sappho's fragments as a basis for *Long Ago* Michael Field are attempting a project of completion as well as multiplicity. In these fragments Bradley, Cooper and Field are completing each other and completing each other's work, as well as acknowledging their poetic and biographical marriage.

Field's outing also has the unfortunate side effect of foregrounding the self-referencing and reflexivity of their work, in other words; it becomes extremely difficult to read the poems without substituting the poets for the poetic personae. This pattern is established from the first text of *Long Ago* where 'they' can be read autobiographically as well as Sapphically, and in the use of puns and poetic in-jokes (note the reference to

---

[366] Michelle Lee, 'Inventing Michael Field: Can Two women Write Like One Man?' *Poetry Foundation*, web article, published January 27, 2010, http://www.poetryfoundation .org/article/238584 [accessed 2 December 2015].
[367] Within *Works and Days*, Thain and Vadillo, p.233

time in the first line and penultimate lines and the continual development of the braiding

motif which can be read alongside Field's obsession with interweaving. However, there

are elements which mark these poems as highly pertinent within a decadent aesthetic,

for example, the emphasis on play, sensuality and pleasure, which is matched by the

erotic rise and fall of the rhythm in fragments I and III, and the referencing of Bacchic

and Dionysian revels.   Fragment I offers a sensual menu of rapturous touch and taste

where the choice of language fully embodies the erotic charge: 'Theirs was the violet-

weaving bliss,/And theirs the white, wreathed brow to kiss.' (4-5)[368] The pairing of floral

and plant imagery, with puns on lyre and lying (down), 'The Lyre unloosed their souls;

they lay/Under the trembling leaves at play' (10-11) suggests the kissing of veiled, petal

like labial lips.

Fragment III offers a doubled Sappho in the competing stanzas and histories or

Sappho/Phaon, and Sappho/Erinna. Desire is split between two positions, but ultimately

absorbed by the final stanza's same-sex community.   The poem sets up the notion of

dialogue between these aspects of Sapphic desire within a voice which seems to be the

voice of Sappho speaking about herself in the third person: 'The joys o'er which bees

murmur deep/Your Sappho's senses may not steep.' (16-17) The second stanza is held

between stanzas written in the first person, 'Than, I for scent and splendour rove' (5)

and 'Honey, clear soothing, nectarous, sweet;/ On which my heart would feed,' (18-19).

Ultimately, the 'I' of the previous stanzas is combined with the plural 'we' in the final

stanza, and Sappho returns to the social and poetic fold after having been rejected by

Phaon's abandonment, 'Phaon, thy lips withhold from me/The bliss of honey and of bee'

---

[368] 'Fragment I' from *Long Ago* in Thain and Vadillo, p.58.

(23-24). This Sappho does not leap but returns to the maidenly community and crowns an alternative muse in the form of Erinna:

> Soon as my girl's sweet voice she caught,
> Thither Euterpe Sped,
> And singing too, a garland wrought
> To crown Erinna's head (37-40)

Michael Field's bodily poetics constantly layer the classical, poetic, literary oeuvre or body of work) and authorial I to imbue their writing with an erotically charged energy. Even in Field's later devotional poems this layering is retained within sacred rituals, for example, communion and transubstantiation.

One of the most well-known and intriguing poems within *Long Ago* employs a curious and highly complex form of genderqueering alongside poetic and bodily transformation. Fragment LII constructs the figure of Tiresias. The first stanza is full of phallic imagery but voiced by an ungendered poetic persona in the third person as if recounting a Greek myth. However, the threat of emasculation is hinted at from the beginning of the poem:

> Climbing the hill a coil of snakes
> Impedes Tiresias' path - he breaks
> His staff across them – idle thrust
> That lays the female in the dust, (1-4) [369]

On closer reading it soon becomes clear that masculine and feminine qualities are mixed and overlapping (snakes can read as both phallic and feminine, redolent of Eve and Edenic fall). The poem cleverly employs enjambment to reinforce the disintegration, deviation and impediment of Tiresias' singular, straight path, which is overridden by a

---

[369] Ibid., p.72.

228

circular coil of snakes. As Sara Ahmed has recently noted, deviation from an allocated path is usually a sign of imminent queering or queerness:

> The word queer derives from the Indo-European word 'twerk,' to turn or to twist, also related to the word 'thwart' to transverse, perverse, or cross. (Sedgwick 1994, viii). That this word came to describe sexual subjects is no accident, those who do not follow the straight line, who to borrow Lucretius's terms, 'snap the bonds of fate,' are the perverts: swerving rather than straightening, deviating from the right course. To queer the will is to show how the will has already been given a queer potential. [370]

This circular trope is also revisited later in the first stanza, 'When womanhood was *round* him thrown' (12).   The second line should run through as a whole to the third, but appropriately remains stuck on the word 'breaks,' so that Tiresias can be read as part broken before he uses his staff to strike the snakes, or that he is somehow doubly broken by this serpentine threat. He may have laid the female in the dust but he becomes feminized in the process, and though afraid and trembling, his experiences are provocatively combined with sexual pleasure, arousal and the giving up of the body when the phallic becomes vaginal. Curiously, the poem does not state that Tiresias is a woman, but that he lives as a woman at this point. Tiresias' womanhood is in the process of becoming but is never fully fixed. The poem employs a complex approach to the relationship between gender and biology and incorporating the social constructions of gender.   Queen Hera is utilised to broach the intolerable woman's utterance in the text, the question of women's sexual pleasure. Her statements subvert gendered ideas of desire as her 'sacrilegious lips reveal'. (35) The blanched recognition of Hera's inquisition is embodied in her blood drained/deathly pale face

> "In marriage who hath more delight?"
> She asks; then quivers and grows white,

---

[370] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, (London: Duke University Press, 2014), p.11.

As sacrilegious lips reveal
What woman in herself must feel – (33-36)[371]

Tiresias is genderqueered[372] but also identified as a non-queer woman having sexual relationships with men. Tiresias as a figure has had a prolonged influence on gender and sexual dissidence in nineteenth and twentieth-century writing, as Ed Madden, notes, 'Tiresias has come to function as a cultural shorthand for queer sexualities.'[373] The final response to Hera's question concerning gender and sexual pleasure implies a knowingness, but also a decorous coyness when transformed back into a male figure where he cannot speak: 'Thou needs't not to unlock thine eyes, / Thy slow ironic smile replies:' (62-63). Thus the part male Tiresias in the poem retains part-behavioural, performative femininity, being part new woman and new man, who is interpreted by a woman and prevented from speaking. Hera imposes her own interpretation of Tiresias' body language here, before Tiresias can speak. One of the most remarkable features of the poem is its narration of Tiresias' transition The fourth and fifth stanzas deconstruct assigned gender role and characteristics, unravelling and mixing stereotypical gender traits in the process: 'goddess smite,' /(49) 'Medea's penetrative charm'/ (53), 'Heroes to mould and subjugate?'/ (56), 'Apollo to thy blossoming/ As Daphne;'/ (58-59) where qualities are frequently swapped and inverted to subvert social expectations. Despite the retention of knowledge, there is a desperate edge to the rhythmic, repeated assertion of 'Thou hast been woman' (65, 70, 72), by

---

[371] Ibid., p.73.
[372] Ed Madden, *Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sexuality, Voice 1888-2001* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses 2008), P.13.

Hera's voice, which is trying to show and assert the power of femininity. However, the

gifts of second sight and prophecy are ironically bestowed upon a man/woman with a

broken staff (pen) who cannot fully see or speak. Notably Queen Hera's voice is the only

direct speech in the poem. 'Thou hast been woman' is chanted as a plea to remembrance

and understanding, (thou has been changed forever), but also a warning against

forgetting the special insight that has been bestowed:

> Thou hast been woman, and her deep,
> Magnetic mystery dost keep;
> Thou hast been woman, and can'st see
> Therefore into futurity; (71-74)

Sentimental coatings and subversive layers – Michael Field's *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* (1914)

Mystery, with all its devotional and religious connotations finds a place in Michael Field's

later work. Worship is expressed in many ways and inhabits many guises in Michael

Field's poetics. As Michael Field's wider poetic oeuvre has been recovered, or

rediscovered, contemporary academics have faced serious challenges in reading works

which combine the uncomfortable bedfellows of worship, excessive sentiment, religion

and eroticism. Most of this difficulty has centred on, or around, Field's 'dog-God' poems

Whym Chow: Flame of Love. This challenge has largely produced ambivalent responses

with Field scholars are caught between acknowledging the intensity of the poems

themselves, and the extreme oddity that envelops them. Thain and Vadillo highlight this

problematic dynamic in their introduction to the poems in the recent Broadview edition:

> The question of the book's 'campness' must be addressed if we are consider
> Michael Field's work seriously. Many of the poems not included here were left
> out because of their ludicrous sentimentality. Yet in the volume as a whole, there

is a hint of self-awareness that suggests Bradley and Cooper were treading a fine line between genuine sentiment and a self-conscious, quasi-post-modern parody of a long tradition of Victorian pet elegies.[374]

Sentimentality is a major issue for twentieth and twenty-first century academics working on long nineteenth-century writing. The term itself is generally used in a highly pejorative way, with an accusatory tone. However, some researchers are attempting a rehabilitation of sentimental writing, and its unhelpful connection to limiting notions of hysteria and extreme affect for women writers in the nineteenth century. Peaches Henry, writing on Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children,' outlines the landscape of negative attitudes to sentimental writing in contemporary criticism:

> Modern critical assessments of 'good' literature tend to denigrate poetry which appeals to people's emotion or invokes religion as sentimental…Unwilling to apply aesthetic evaluation to the poem's sentimentality, critics say such writing is beneath aesthetic consideration. By acceding to the twentieth-century bias against sentimentality, they perpetuate an uncritical and, in its own way, quite ideologically repressive view of aesthetic experience.[375]

Thain and Vadillo do raise an interesting point about modern or post-modern readers here: is some of the excluded poetry in *Whym Chow* ludicrous because of changes in cultural tastes, or would it still have been considered too mawkish for a wider readership at the beginning of the twentieth century? In certain quarters, sentimentality is still considered a poetic affliction, required to be in its own closet of retrospective shame, leading to a dismissive or destructive place, and to long lasting damage. Procter's poetic oeuvre is another obvious victim. The basis for inclusion seems to be knowingness, or the lack of it, concerning excessive affect. A comparison of excluded and included poems and varying levels or degrees of sentimentality would be enlightening if beyond the

---

[374] Thain and Vadillo, p184.
[375] Peaches Henry, 'The Sentimental Artistry of Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children,"' *Victorian Poetry* 49.4 (2011), 1-15 (p.1).

scope of this project. Interestingly, Henry argues that sentimental texts attached to a social cause are easier to justify than those with a focus on the domestic or interiority: 'With 'The Cry of the Children' Barrett Browning demonstrates that when wielded effectively, sentimentality can be socially and aesthetically powerful.'[376] Isobel Armstrong has also worked on the challenging connections between poetry, gender, and sentimentality in the nineteenth century.[377]

The tension between Bradley/Cooper/Field's constant bids for critical recognition, their desire to retain a private poetics and an uncanny talent for choosing outmoded styles, arguably reaches its zenith in *Whym Chow,* as does the bifurcation of outwardly normative poetics and deeply subversive content. Even Roden, who has produced some highly sensitive and complex readings of the *Whym Chow* poems occasionally struggles with this unresolved oddity or campness (queer odd as against queer same-sex):

> If these poems on a canine seem odd, it is nevertheless possible to find within them a complex theology of redemption and sacrifice. They also contain a sublimated lesbian sexuality. This Christian eroticism can be discovered without benefit of dog in Katharine's volume *Mystic Trees* and Edith's contemporary *Poems of Adoration*.[378]

'Without benefit of dog' amusingly suggests the difficulty in working with this oddity, and at the same time recognises its potential humour.   *Whym Chow* is the queerest of Field's works because of this combination of elegy/non-elegy, passionate worship,

---

[376] Ibid., p.10.
[377] See Isobel Armstrong, 'The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women's Poetry of the Romantic Period?' Within *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley, eds. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), pp.13-33.
[378] Roden, p.205.

complex theology, eroticism and an alternative familial aesthetic, wrapped up within an awkward cloak or coat of high Victorian sentiment.

Discussions of *Whym Chow's* oddity also reflect a formal instability. While Whym Chow appears as a figure in *Wild Honey and Various Thyme* (an obvious sonnet sequence) *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* deconstructs sonnet form. The collection plays with ideas of the muse, poetic devotion, love and worship to produce doubled and tripled, subject and object positions. As Sarah Kersh notes in her recent paper, 'Michael Field's radical departure from the strict composition of the sonnet presses not only against the boundaries of the amatory poetic but also asks what counts as intimacy.'[379] This departure from strict composition produces non-binary positions and queer spaces as the barriers between subject positions break down into a mess of bodies and fur. The doubled double of *Long Ago* becomes tripled in the trinity of Michael, Field, Chow, Bradley, Cooper, Chow, or even God the aunt, God the niece and Chow the Holy Ghost (child/guardian). In the poem 'V. Trinity,'[380] Whym Chow emerges as both muse and proxy figure, melding Michael and Field together but also as a source of anxiety:

> I did not love him for myself alone:
> I loved him that he loved my dearest love.
> O God, no blasphemy
> It is to feel we loved in trinity, (1-4)

In this poem Whym Chow's presence is gifted and used as a trope of domestic and sexual ownership, highlighted by the opening line of the second stanza, 'So I possess this creature of Love's flame,' (10). The text explicitly marks Chow's place as a central mechanism of exchange between the speaking voice and its 'dearest love.' (2) Michael

---

[379] Sarah Kersh, 'The Amatory Sonnet Tradition and *Whym Chow: Flame of Love*,' Michael Field Centenary Conference Abstract 2014.
[380] Thain and Vadillo, p185.

Field, appear to introduce a code of capital and non-capital letters to distinguish between human and dog even though its application is inconsistent. Whym Chow acts as a go-between, as a sign of marriage, and as a poetic sign, mirroring the triple aspect of the text, 'O symbol of our perfect union, strange/ Unconscious Bearer of Love's interchange.' (17-18) 'Love's flame' (10) reflects both religious mysticism, desire and colouring simultaneously. As Thain and Vadillo have noted, Michael Field work with this flame-coated aspect to ignite and aestheticize these poems and their visual aspect: 'Why else would the book be covered in russet suede to mimic the dog's coat? There is, at some level, a certain whimsicality about this textual Whym Chow that aestheticises the loss [...]'[381] The use of tentative enjambment adds to the oddity of the poem so that the stress seems to fall at the visual rather than linguistic line ends, splitting the rhythmic flow of the text in the process.

In poem, IX[382] Whym Chow acts as a comforter assuaging the grief of the poetic voice's loss of the absent object, 'My loved one is away from me' (1), and is a line which repeats and develops through the stanzas as both a kind of lullaby and a rhythmic chant. In touching Chow, the poetic I seeks union with the absent beloved through a process of extension, association and substitution so that human and animal parts become melded and intertwined, 'For her we loved in absence and together,/ My feet, thine eager paws, questioning whether/The loved One would come back to us (11-13). Whym Chow acts as a stand in and proxy for the absent loved one is sharing gaze and sighs,

My loved One is away from me.
O Chow, no more we twain
My lovely fellow-lover, hear and see
And breathe for her again! (36-39)

---

[381] Thain and Vadillo, p.184.
[382] Ibid. pp.188-189.

Chow acts as a kind of queer life support breathing for, and in the place of, the absent loved one, 'fellow' suggests both masculinity, solidarity and intimacy with both human and dog-lover.

As a volume *Whym Chow* emphasises fetishized touch (direct and indirect), where the touching of a pet also offers simultaneous touch with another who has left a trace of their touch, or touched the same places.   Michael Field cleverly find a way to convert prohibited touch into appropriate touch by using a canine trope in combination with existing homoerotic aspects of Catholic theology, and iconography, for example, the Trinity. As Mark Knight and Emma Mason suggest:

> One of the most distinctive theological ideas informing Michael Field's poetry is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which claims an eternal unity, integrity and relationality between Father, Son and Holy Spirit…Field found in the Trinity a thoroughly Christian way of thinking about love and the interrelatedness of living beings (human and non-human).[383]

 The poems layer their sentimental coatings over their human and animal bodies offering a pet closet, which paradoxically aids the expression of sexual love and religious fervour. This pet closet also allows the possibility of proxy touch as a way of obviating Catholic guilt in the use of an intermediary figure. Chow dogs are known for being quite nervous and aggressive with outsiders/strangers; the touch that Whym Chow offers biographically and textually is only for his owners. Whym Chow stands guard protecting the inner sanctum of Michael Field's poetics and relationship.   Whym Chow also offers a sense of being a child or poetic offspring through his connection and resemblance to the muse. This particular combination of intimacy and prohibition may seem unique to Michael Field but it also appears in other unexpected *fin-de-siècle* spaces.   Freud

---

[383] Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*: *An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.197.

famously instructed H.D not to touch his pet chow Yofi during analysis, '"Do not touch her…she snaps - she is very difficult with strangers,"'[384] a request, which H.D wilfully ignores. *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* embodies an invitation into tactile poetics but also excludes potential readers/strangers. As poem IX reiterates Whym Chow is guard dog, guardian angel and Holy Spirit, corporeal and incorporeal: 'O Chow, my little Love, you watch above her; /Watch still beside me, be with me her Lover!' (46-47). However, it also instructs the dog to join in the desiring of the poem's muse, 'be with me her lover' can be read as be beside me, but also as if the desiring is being doubled and shared between the human and canine subjects. This shared desire is suggested throughout the poems, which often propose varying forms of triangulation, in addition to Trinitarianism.

In XXIX, the final poem of the Broadview selection, the themes of mortality, pain and absence threaten the transcendent trinity. Whym Chow becomes the last hope of salvation for the absent, suffering muse:

> Nor die! Unless thy ruddy flambeau leaps,
> Naught can assuage her grief,
> No mortal nor immortal give relief (18-20)

Chow becomes the only form of opiate available to alleviate grief and pain and is commanded to be present after (biographical) death. Poem XXIX attempts a resolution of Field's pagan, classical and Christian motifs through the use of 'Bacchic resin' (8) and dog-God flame (I am the way, the truth and the light). The poetic voice offers training in supplication and obedience, instructing the dog comforter and family member, but also

---

[384] Sarah Jackson, 'Touching Freud's Dog: H.D's tactile poetics,' *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 15.2, August 2010, 187-201 (p.187).

worships Chow as the keeper and sustainer of the flame-flambeau coat, 'Light her, as

with torch of *fir*,' (fur) (5). These sentimental coatings have proved their poetic worth

elegiacally by offering a form of pet salvation, if not resurrection. Ultimately, *Whym*

Chow provides a more serious rebuttal of ridicule than might be expected. John Ruskin

was particularly scathing about Michael Field's dog worship, writing to Katharine

Bradley:

> December 1877
>
> Dear Katharine
> Your letter telling me you have lost God and found a Skye Terrier is a great grief
> and amazement to me – I thought so [<] much [>] better of you – What do you
> mean? That you are resolved to receive only good at God's hands and not evil?
> Send me word clearly what has happened to you – then perhaps I'll let you talk
> of your dogs and books.
> Ever faithfully yours
> JR.[385]

Michael Field whimsically and Whymsically put Ruskin (posthumously) in his place

by combining warp (queer/bent) and woof (canine) in poetic form to weave their own

gently biting response.

Poems from the Edge – Amy Levy's *A Minor Poet and other Verse, A London Plane-Tree*

and other Verse

If Michael Field are keen to explore ways of constructing a new form of closer marriage

through their classical poetics, Amy Levy's work offers an alternative approach. Amy

Levy was born on 10 November 1861 in London into a middle-class Jewish family. Levy's

---

[385] Thain and Vadillo, p.306.

experiences of London, academic environments such as Cambridge University and her involvement in women's issues are reflected in her work alongside complex reworkings of Jewish identity and unrequited same-sex desires.   Levy was friends with a number of influential women campaigners, such as Eleanor Marx and Clementina Black, and writers, most obviously Vernon Lee, Dorothy Blomfield and Bertha Thomas. Levy also struggled with mental health issues throughout her life as her entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* notes:

> She may have had unusual difficulty dealing with such stress because she struggled with what Richard Garnett calls 'constitutional melancholy'. In a letter of 1884 she referred to such bouts as 'the devil that lyeth ever in wait in the recesses of my heart'.   Her story 'Sokratics in the Strand', her essay 'James Thomson: a minor poet', and her poem, 'A Minor Poet' (all 1884) show her willingness to write about despondency and suicide.[386]

 Levy's writing is now receiving considerable interest from feminist and queer feminist scholars, particularly because of its combination of urban aesthetics and intersectional poetics that confront a matrix of oppressive judgements based on race, class, gender, religion and alternative desire. Levy's oeuvre and biography offer considerable scope for researchers interested in Jewish writing, New Woman and feminist and queer/lesbian poetics. A high level of critical divergence on the issue of Levy's queerness, or potential queerness, and the way in which her work articulates queer poetics makes the area of sexuality particularly challenging.   However, there is a growing interest in how her ambiguous personae fit within frameworks of non-normative desire. As Alex Goody notes, research on the outing of this covered area is ongoing:

---

[386] Linda Hunt Beckman, 'Levy, Amy Judith (1861-1889),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) via http://www.Oxforddnb.com/view/article/16559.

The queer poetic that can be unearthed, particularly in *A London Plane-Tree*, attempts to express a desire that has no social, legal, or linguistic status, but this volume also explores the impossibility of the full enunciation of 'lesbian poetry' and the impossible identifications that it produces.[387]

However, it is possible to dispute both the impossibility of this supposition and the lack of available techniques for deconstructing this area. Levy's work actually stretches the boundaries of what we understand as queerness in a late nineteenth-century context, as well as reworking notions of shame, silencing and closeting across othered categories throughout her writing, not just in her later work.

Levy explores these intersectional positions in Hellenist discourse through her reconstruction of excluded and betrayed femininity, of wives and mothers, in 'Xantippe' and 'Medea'. These poetic personae are confronted with hostile and dismissive masculine authority figures who hold, and fall from, positions of power, who are challenged by silent women finding a voice. If Michael Field's *Long Ago* offers examples of alternative epithalamium then Levy's work provides examples of texts which challenge the possibility of supportive marriages, often replacing these with estrangement, separation, and death for which there is no obvious counterpart in Greek language and literary form. However, Levy's Hellenic texts do offer a creative feminist response to contemporary discussions concerning the role and function of marriage and its usefulness to educated women.[388] Through her use of 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' Levy confronts patriarchal figures and institutions head on, in a highly political manner.

---

[387] Alex Goody, 'Murder in Mile End, Amy Levy, Jewishness and the City,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006), 461-479 (p.464).
[388] See Mona Caird, 'Marriage' (1888), Ella Hepworth Dixon 'Why Women are Ceasing to Marry' (1899) within, Ledger, Sally, and Roger, Luckhurst ed. *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History C.1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), pp. 77-80 and pp.83-87 respectively.

'Xantippe' published in *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* in 1884 is a text which focusses on the little known wife of the philosopher Socrates. [389] Xantippe and Medea's inclusion in a volume of poetry entitled *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* sets up an intriguing tension between epic and minor voices/texts in the volume and the attribution of these labels. 'Xantippe' also previously appears in the title of Levy's first volume of poetry in 1881.[390] 'Xantippe' runs to twelve pages and 'Medea' twenty-three pages, alongside poems of two or three sides; ironically the other longer poem in the collection, 'A Minor Poet' extends to ten pages. Levy cleverly plays with multiple connotations of the word 'minor', moving from elegy, through texts of exclusion, social fall and melancholy (in a minor key). *A Minor Poet* starts and ends with memento mori, 'Epitaph', and 'A Farewell.' By setting up notions of minority the collection forces readers to ask what a minor poet is, and why a writer would choose to look at that label and related ideas of neglect, lesser status, or exclusion, both canonical and social. Conversely, is Levy's self-attributed minority status paradoxically taking control away from her potential readers in an aesthetic first strike? Either way, as Parejo Vadillo has noted, the idea of Levy's minority unfortunately proved prophetic, in that her work was overlooked for most of the twentieth century:

> After a century of critical demotion, it would not be an exaggeration to state that Amy Levy (1861-1889) has been elevated back into the literary canon. Since the publication in 1993 of Melvyn New's critical edition of *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, scholars have not stopped paying critical attention to her poetry, prose and literary theory.[391]

---

[389] Amy *Levy, A Minor Poet and other Verse*, Cameo Series, 2nd ed (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884) from The Victorian Women Writers Project http:www//http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/VAB7106www.and *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889).
[390] Amy Levy, *Xantippe and Other Verse*, (Cambridge: E Johnson and Company, 1881).
[391] Ana, Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.38 e-book.

What has often been read as perverse self-demotion has partly added to the ambivalence of Levy's critical recovery and reception. The re-publishing of 'Xantippe' in a later poetic volume also offers a strange parallel process affecting the text within Levy's publication history. What links the texts in *A Minor Poet* is a concern for the finding of voice, or giving a voice to those deemed to be living and creating on the margins of cultural history, affected by misogyny, racism and pathology. These marginal figures become central in Levy's handling of neglected muses. As Tracey Olverson notes, the link between critical recognition and personal loss is significantly foregrounded in Levy's work and acknowledged in her essay writing:

> In 1883, Amy Levy published an essay on one of her favourite poets, the recently deceased James Thomson. This essay is not only an attempt to secure Thomson's posthumous reputation as a meritorious, "minor poet" but also a strong endorsement of Thomson's philosophical passion. Levy clearly identified with Thomson.[392]

Levy subtitles 'Xantippe' (A FRAGMENT)[393] in a clear reference to cultural recovery, but to the cultural recovery of a text that never existed. By adding this subtitle Levy suggests that the whole story has not been told and that the poem is concerned with a poetic persona which is broken, damaged or incomplete. This subtitle is particularly poignant given Xantippe's problematic history as a figure of ridicule, and a focus for misogyny in literature and classical iconography. Levy's referencing of fragmentation also obliquely gestures to the only known positive portrayal of Xantippe in classical writing in Plato's *Phaedo.*[394] It is extremely difficult to find any literature apart from Plato and Levy's

---

[392] T.D Olverson, Chapter 5, '''Such Are Not Woman's Thoughts": Amy Levy's ;'Xantippe' and 'Medea,' within *Amy Levy Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington, and Nadia, Valman (Athens: 2010, Ohio University Press), pp.110-134 (p.118).
[393] Levy, p.23.
[394] Plato, *Phaedo,* ebook, via : http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1658/1658-h/1658-h.htm [accessed 2 December 2015].

work, which shows Xantippe in a sympathetic light.   Levy is attempting both to identify

negative projection and to override it in her use of a fragmentary subtitle, rescuing a tiny

piece of untainted subjectivity from the unread, palimpsest figure that Xantippe has

become over time.   By utilising Xantippe as a central persona Levy also inverts traditional

power dynamics and offers Xantippe a voice, rather than identifying her as a harridan-

like figure who is only interested in silencing and controlling others, and most obviously

Socrates.   The use of Greek spellings in the text also sits alongside this process of minute

cultural recovery.   There are other threads in the poem that suggest that this

fragmentary usage is highly important.   Xantippe's search for a relationship based on

intellectual and educational equality marks it as one of Levy's most explicitly feminist

texts, as does her use of dramatic monologue.   The poem also sets up an interesting

dynamic between domestic and public space, which Levy would later explore in relation

to evolving urban, New Woman aesthetics.

As Cynthia Scheinberg has suggested, women poets' use of dramatic monologue

to stage feminist interventions has often been overlooked because of the forms

historical association with male writers and their control of the (gendered) gaze:

> The exclusion of women writers in the discourse on Victorian poetics – and in particular studies of the dramatic monologue – is so pervasive that it has gone unquestioned. …I do want to draw attention to the generic neglect of writers like Felicia Hemans, Charlotte Brontë, Mary A.F. Robinson, Adelaide Procter, Augusta Webster, Mathilde Blind, and Amy Levy from most theoretical work on the dramatic monologue.[395]

---

[395] Cynthia Scheinberg, 'Recasting ''sympathy and judgment'': Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue,' *Victorian Poetry*, 35. 2 (1997), 173-191 (p.174).

This is despite Armstrong's famous assertion that female poets actually invented the dramatic monologue.[396] The recovery of Levy's poetry has therefore a potentially significant role for new work on the uses of nineteenth-century poetic form, together with discussions on the links between her oeuvre and proto-modernist writing in the *Fin de Siecle*. Readings of Levy's 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' therefore offer an opportunity to develop discourse on gender, Hellenism and the dramatic monologue and to assess the differences between declarative positions in dramatic and non-dramatic texts.

The first stanza of 'Xantippe' sets a frustrated tone, full of flat, muted language and burdened physicality, 'dull,' 'low', 'still,' and 'All weighted down with a passive wonderment.' (6) Levy's use of the words 'passive' with 'wonderment' hints at Xantippe's confusion and turmoil.   There is a linguistic play on 'weighted' and 'waited,' "Waitheth and watcheth, waiteth for the dawn," (7) and the lack of energy is palpable, 'The lamp burns low, low burns the lamp of life' (4) emphasised by the repetition of low. Xantippe's call to maidenly support is ambiguous, it is not clear in the text whether these maidens are a physical presence, or a metaphorical chorus. 'Maids' also suggests a dual connotation of virginity and servant/serving maid, which runs throughout the text:

> What cared I for the merry mockeries
> Of other maidens sitting at the loom?
> Or for sharp voices, bidding me return
> To maiden labour? Were we not apart –
> I and my high thoughts, and my golden dreams,
> My soul which yearned for knowledge, for a tongue
> That should proclaim the stately mysteries (33-39)

The sense of something being at odds with itself is also supported by the use of blank verse, inconsistent rhythm, and oxymoronic phrasing. These ambiguities are continued

---

[396] See Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poets and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.253.

throughout the poem where conventional, classical, and nineteenth-century tropes for appropriate femininity are distorted and twisted out of shape, becoming alien and defamiliarised, mirroring the position of Xantippe herself.   Some of the maidens become 'stranger' in the poem as a precursor to Xantippe's confrontation with Sokrates 'yet many gathered round to hear his words, / Tall youths and stranger-maidens –Sokrates-' (57-58).   Textually 'stranger' here seems to imply not known, but it can also be read subtextually as odder.   Xantippe's account of the market is a forewarning of the social judgement which is to follow her thirst for intellectual knowledge. 'Stranger' also invites a comparison between potential queerness and foreignness, which features throughout Levy's oeuvre, in a textual construction, or part construction, of what some critics have labelled a self-reflexive treatment of anti-Semitism, but which could also be read as an internalised form of homophobia.[397]   As Alex Goody notes, Levy's work sits more comfortably within a queer, rather than lesbian framework, partly because of its date but also because of its highly complex relationship to identity and identification:

> A recognition of the multiplicities of identification and desires that can be textually inscribed and a rejection of a simple assumption of *a* 'lesbian' position which would be anachronistic as well as reductive, is crucial for a nuanced reading of Levy's work.[398]

 1881, the initial publication date of 'Xantippe', marks a significant point in the history of Jewish immigration into Britain, and Jews from Eastern Europe were often

---

[397] See Richa Dwor, 'The Racial Romance of Amy Levy's *Reuben Sachs, English Literature in Translation*, 1880-1920, 55.4, (2012) 460-478 and Nadia Valman, *From Domestic Paragon to Rebellious Daughter: Victorian Jewish Women 1830-1910*, (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2012).
[398] Goody, p.464.

expelled as a result of pogroms, which were supported by the existing, "assimilated" Anglo-Jewish population, as Adam Severin Hochberg notes:

> From the start of the mass migration in 1881, repatriation was one of the pillars of communal policy for an Anglo-Jewish community opposed in principle to the settling of foreign Jews in Great Britain. The attitude towards immigration was clearly stated in 1881 by *The Jewish Chronicle*, the community's leading newspaper. An editorial stressed that Russian Jews ought to remain in Russia and await better times.[399]

Ideas of foreignness and integration mirror the complexity of Levy's wider social and political context as well as debates about the split between tribal liberal and Orthodox Judaism. When passages of Levy's life writing are cited as evidence of self-hating anti-Semitism the complexity of the historical context needs to be acknowledged. Hochberg argues that the British Anglo-Jewish pogroms of the 1880s were partly based on the fear that non-assimilated Jews would threaten the status quo causing a general rise in anti-Semitism and hate crime. Levy's Hellenic texts can also read as reflecting upon *fin-de-siecle* ideas concerning degeneration and eugenics. Both 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' are labelled as ethnically other in their darkness.

 Levy's engagement with her Jewish roots has been characterised as occurring only in later work in Luke Devine's recent journal article, despite her experimentation with veiled Jewish religious themes in earlier work. As Devine notes, 'In sum, scholars, regardless of perspective, generally agree that it was not until 1886 that Levy chose to seriously reengage with her Jewish spiritual and communal identity.'[400] However, this critical argument is dependent upon a narrow definition of engagement which reduces

---

[399] Adam Severin Hochberg, 'The Repatriation of Eastern European Jews from Great Britain: 1881-1914' *Jewish Social Studies*, 50. 1/2, (Winter, 1988 – Spring, 1992), 49-62 (pp. 49-50).
[400] Luke Devine, '"The Ghetto at Florence": Reading Jewish Identity in Amy Levy's Early Poetry, 1880-86' *Prooftexts*, 31. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2011) 21-30 (p.2).

the potential for sub-textual readings of Levy's poetry, and which excludes work, which

is not obviously on a Jewish theme.   Devine does go on to develop an argument which

supports the inclusion of Levy's earlier work in a broader framework of Jewish writing,

although he acknowledges the obtuse nature of many of Levy's religious references:

'Levy's early poetry, while eisegetical, negotiates the numinous to develop classically

Reformist and traditional perspectives, decipherable only to those able to detect the

crypto-Jewish subtexts.'[401]   The most obvious counterpoint to this argument is Levy's

retention of her surname, which identifies her as Jewish, or by extension as a Jewish

writer, whatever the cultural content of her work. This is most obviously illustrated by

the regular reviews of Levy's secular writing in *The Jewish Chronicle*.

Being on the edge, sharing an ambivalent relation to community and notions of

belonging, are themes and positions which extend throughout Levys' oeuvre.   Levy's

work is often concerned with the effect of misogyny and anti-Semitism at the same time

that it produces cultural texts from an integrated standpoint of a middle-class educated,

woman.   As Iveta Jusova suggests, Levy's imposed marginality is a product of her

complex class and faith positions, an 'Anglo-Jewish, middle-class woman living in the

increasingly anti-Semitic London of the 1880s […] Levy's' life and work illustrates the

ruthless splitting of 'the outsiders' from the self-declared privileged insiders.'[402]

Scheinberg develops this further by proposing a reading of Levy's poetry that focuses on

strategies for dealing with her own complex identity:

> In particular, Levy addresses the reception and interpretation of the Jewish voice
> in a Christian literary culture, and she attempts to reconstruct the notion of a
> poet as prophet in order to dislodge English literary identity from its foundations
> in Christian theology… Her literary theory, that is, helps explain some of the

---

[401] Ibid.

[402] Iveta Jusova, *The New Woman and the Empire* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 2005), p.131.

cultural tensions 'minor[ity] poets' faced in Victorian England when they sought to be included in some version of a literary canon.[403]

This is explored in 'Xantippe' in a scene situated within a market place. In this scenario, the poetic maidens cross the threshold of both knowledge and by association sexuality with Xantippe, by entering the public sphere the maidens become deflowered commodities as well as sacrificial entities. Here 'Xantippe' offers a suggestive counterpart to later New Woman narratives of social purity and "forced" marriage, for example Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* and wider social/literary debates.[404] The tension between power, opportunity and threat is evoked by energised language. 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' both feature examples of problematic, heterosexual marriages. The idea of marriage and closer marriage is intensely challenging in Levy's poetics, even in texts, which place queer or homonormative poetic personae at their centre. Levy's best known work on this theme, 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage' produces a resolution which breaks apart the opposition between coupled and single in a wistful prophesy of queer, alternative relationship structures:

> Grant in a million years at most,
> Folk shall neither be pairs nor odd-
> Alas! We sha'nt be there to boast
> "Marriage has gone the way of God!" (25-28) [405]

---

[403] Cynthia Scheinberg, 'Canonizing the Jew: Amy Levy's Challenge to Victorian Poetic Identity,' *Victorian Studies*, 39.2 (1996) 173-200 (p.178).
[404] See footnote 52.
[405] Amy Levy, 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage, (undated), via Indiana University, Victorian Women Writers' Project: http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/VWWP/VAB7093. P.1.

In the marketplace Xantippe becomes identified with the maidens so that her initial 'I' becomes 'We' which is silenced by the use of sibilant 'S' sounds, 'We grasp the shining shells which strew the shore,' (63) the hands have been raised to the lips to create a 'sh' sound. The shell imagery traditionally associated with the feminine is rapidly thrown away in favour of the singular, masculine gem as if the poem moves from the space of chora to a monolithic, patriarchal space. Xantippe's voice tries to justify the throwing away of feminine multiplicity and sensual shining:

> Great voice, whose cunning modulations seemed
> Like to the notes of some sweet instrument.
> So did I reach and strain, until at last
> I caught the soul athwart the grosser flesh. (83-86)

Xantippe does not so much desire Sokrates in Levy's version as the access that he has to public discourse and places of learning. Levy also omits any mention of Sokrates/Xantippe's children in the poem, or the possibility of an orthodox family environment, Xantippe is not rejecting maidenhood here, but the stultifying lack of intellectual stimulation attached to it. In this wilful assertion, she places herself into a space of limbo, outside the domestic, and excluded from the masculine spaces of public discourse. Xantippe is forced to create space where there is none. Xantippe is unconvinced by her own earlier argument:

> Then followed days of sadness, as I grew
> To learn my woman-mind had gone astray,
> And I was sinning in those very thoughts-
> For maidens, mark, such are not woman's thoughts-
> (And yet 'tis strange, the gods who fashion us
> Have given us such promptings).... (41-46)

Xantippe's earlier statement is already being undermined by this rogue curiosity and wilfulness. These patterns of avowal and disavowal continue throughout the poem. Xantippe's lack of emotional congruence is apparent in the first half of the poem. She is judged by maidenly public opinion and constantly undermines her own argument by showing her uncontrollable thoughts. Levy skilfully brings into play connotations of learning here, to hear, confront, be made aware of, and moral learning. In stating 'Were we not apart – I and my high thoughts' (36) the alienation of Xantippe's position is hinted at, and her true marriage is with parts of her own split subjectivity. Apart can be read as, one, singular, divided, or both, here. Xantippe's use of Sokrates as muse and loved object is doomed to failure as she is rejected from Sokrates' homosocial world of male bonding and debate.

Levy recreates an alternative Platonic Symposium within 'Xantippe', which acts as the setting for the impassioned confrontation between Xantippe and Sokrates. This moment of epiphany illustrates the extent of the challenge for women trying to engage with Sokratic dialogue and intellectual discourse. From the outset, Xantippe is excluded from this gathering and forced to view the events as a voyeur, through a chink in the door, 'As I stood/ Ling'ring upon the threshold, half concealed/By tender foliage' (146-148). Xantippe's exclusion and yearning for knowledge provides an obvious parallel with the position of many women in the Victorian and *Fin de Siècle* periods (despite changes which allowed a small number of women like Levy, Bradley and Cooper to access courses in the classics), as Olverson notes:

> Xantippe's appetite for knowledge and access to the 'mysterious' language of advanced learning echoes the aspirations of a growing number of Victorian

women who longed to learn Greek, the language of scholarship and the ubiquitous signifier of knowledge. [406]

However, Xantippe also intriguingly sets up an opposition between two same-sex communities, stranger-maidens and male philosophers, to show the limits of potential queer collaboration between men and women where Platonic social structures supported by patriarchal ideology prevail. In 'Xantippe', these communities cannot work together in the way that some of the masculine figures do in Field's poetics. Queer solidarity is limited in 'Xantippe' in a way that excludes women regardless of their sexuality. Levy uses the example of Platonic community to highlight the potential misogyny at the heart of Ancient Greek society. As Sarah Pomeroy suggests of Ancient Greece, "Vulgar love could be either heterosexual or homosexual, but intellectual love could be found only in a relationship between two males."[407] The poem offers an obvious example of feminised masculinity in the figure of Alkibiades, but Alkibiades' male femininity/effeminacy is shown to be accepted above femininity in a female body, and is arguably seen as more desirable. The extent of male usurpation of power in 'Xantippe' is such that even the imagery of the symposium scene is gender inverted so that traditional sources of female power are taken over by patriarchal discourse. The thoughts of Sokrates are fecund, ripe and creative, and pregnant with possibility:

> Twas only that the high philosopher,
> Pregnant with noble theories and great thoughts,
> Deigned not to stoop to touch so slight a thing
> As the fine fabric of a woman's brain- (117-120)

---

[406] Olverson, p.116.
[407] Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wifes and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1975), p. 7.

Xantippe's humility belies a kind of poetic/monologic double talk where her empowered voice breaks through this orthodox speech at regular intervals. Xantippe reaches a poetic tipping point where speech and gesture are violently ruptured by her enraged intervention in the scene where the female mind and body are brought back into the centre of the frame. Xantippe's intervention combines verbal power with loaded, physical gestures, reigniting the dull flame of the poem's first stanza, 'eyes and cheeks aflame, /Lit by a fury and a thought,' (178-179). The text subversively reiterates the sibilant S, as a precursor to Xantippe's declarative act, 'Then sudden stepping from my leafy screen' (176)…/Lit by a fury and a thought I spake:' (179). Xantippe's declarative act marks the breaking free from the submissive voice of orthodox femininity, and potentially heterosexuality, in this text, and outing herself as a powerful voice, which refuses to be shamed into silence. The use of the word 'spake' is important here it is obviously the usual convention to mark speech to the reader through speech marks, but the potentially tautological use of the word stresses the importance of the act itself. As both Annamarie Jagose and Lisa Fletcher have noted the issues of silencing and conflicting patterns of avowal and disavowal mirrors the stages and processes inherent in forms of social and literary closeting. Jagose writes of Dickens' Miss Wade's disavowal of her own closeted awareness: 'Whatever miseries the self-tormentor subjects herself to, her attempts to erect a retrospective explanatory framework about herself confirm her placement within that conceptual paradigm into which her circumlocution delivers her.'[408] Fletcher stresses the importance of confessional discourse in her analysis of Sedgwick's work and the distinction between signifying silence and confession:

---

[408] Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.55.

It is important to remember that Sedgwick's formulation of the closet and its speech acts relies not just upon Miller's formulation of the 'open secret' but also upon her readers and their culturally inherited familiarity with open secrecy and its narrative operations. If closetedness describes a speech act of silence, then 'coming out' might be said to name a speech act of 'confession,' the revelation of a private or inner truth.[409]

Xantippe steps out of the shadows into the light, literally and metaphorically. Xantippe's linguistic act has obvious resonances with trans-historical coming out rituals as Sedgwick has noted:

My sense is that, in a span of thought that arches from Plato to Foucault, there are some distinctive linkages to be traced between linguistic performativity and histories of same-sex desire. I want to go further with an implicit in *Epistemology of the Closet*, that both the act of coming out and closetedness itself, can be taken as dramatizing certain features of linguistic performativity in ways that have broadly applicable frameworks.[410]

Levy uses this scene of confrontation as a forum for the metaphorical exploration of *fin-de-siècle* ideas concerning mind/body, desire, biological determinism, sacrifice, worship, and marriage. By confronting these issues a space is created for reflections on the influence of codifying discourses such as, psychoanalysis, sexology and associated phenomena such as hysteria.

Xantippe's positioning of her serving vessel embodies in one poetic act a myriad of ideas concerning the female body and the influence of womb-like spaces, 'Holding the swelling wine-skin o'er my head,' (177). Here Xantippe's metaphorical womb is raised above her head (or by association intellect). Xantippe's blood is up, literally and metaphorically and violently expressed through the throwing of the wine upon the floor.

---

[409] Lisa Fletcher, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) p.44

[410] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p.11.

However, Xantippe's speech is a plea for rationality, which is set against gender stereotyping. The potential anguish of Xantippe's position is emphasised by the series of repetitive rhetorical questions and the repetition of 'to bleed and quiver' (188). This repetition conveys an increasing sense of desperation and is ultimately seen to be falling on deaf ears and cool 'marble walls' 189). Xantippe tries to initiate dialogue but is met by ridicule and contemptuous silence, 'Then stood I straight and silent for a breath, / Dumb crushed with all that weight of cold contempt;' (214-215). Xantippe and Sokrates are nominally speaking the same language but without listening or understanding. Xantippe's speech has an echoing presence, which is somehow simultaneously an absence. Xantippe's fully material presence is diluted by the dismissal of her immaterial argument. Her words take on a largely sonic rather than semantic quality, at the least in the eyes of her symposium audience. The text's emphasis on 'bleeding and quivering' suggests not only a physical expression of distress but also the possibility of reading this phrase as a trope of sound, vibrating through the air and echoing off the walls of patriarchal, homosocial culture.

Xantippe's flinging of the blood-wine is both a powerful act of rebellion, and an admission of defeat. Xantippe crosses the threshold into the male-dominated chamber of debate, weirdly deflowering and defiling the space in the process through the throwing of quasi-menstrual blood. In many cultures, menstrual blood has been, and is still considered unclean. The poem may be making an oblique reference to orthodox Jewish culture here which dictates that women have to be removed from male company to attend a ritual bath or Mikvah to clean themselves. Through this bodily act, Xantippe tries to make another statement, (you will not accept me but I will transform this space by marking my presence, by leaving a mark on the white), 'with both angry hands I flung/

The skin upon the marble' (218-219). Xantippe's last act is to reconfigure the scene and the social and philosophical body by showing where her hysteria stems from: in other words, you think me only a womb therefore I will show you a womb: 'He wished a household vessel – well twas good,/ For he should have it' (241-242).

The *Fin de Siècle*, while characterised partly as a period of female emancipation, was also still preoccupied with concepts of hysteria. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst's collection of key *Fin de Siècle* primary sources includes several pieces by Dorkin, Brewer and Freud on this topic.[411] These sections ironically sit alongside those on the New Woman. Post-symposium, Xantippe has been brought down, if not fallen, but she takes Sokrates down with her and he is finally removed from his position as intellectual mentor and muse. The poem also emphasizes the support which Sokrates gains from male homosocial bonding, which is an aspect of this story often omitted from nineteenth-century versions.

The final two stanzas of the poem complete the narrative and skilfully combine ideas of audience and readership in the ambiguous 'you.' 'You all that stand here....' (280), (and possibly you the reader) ...'Why stand ye so in silence?' (283). The text ends with this rallying cry for action from within a maidenly space, which takes in speech, discourse and energy from the public sphere: 'Why tarry? – give me air –/ O fling it wide, I say and give me light!' (284-285).

A distinctive feature of *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* is its explicit combination of classical and contemporary themed poems, where texts such as 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' sit alongside *fin-de-siècle* settings. 'Medea', the volume's other classical text,

---

[411] Ledger, and Luckhurst, p.X.

privileges both performance and the performative, by labelling the text as a hybrid verse drama, a form which was also utilised by Michael Field. Shanyn Fiske has argued that women writers and academics were able to use Hellenic figures to bridge the gap between high and popular culture combining Hellenic figures with tropes superficially borrowed from sensation fiction and tabloid journalism to deconstruct attitudes to femininity and the maternal:

> The evolving tradition of women's closet drama united with late-century Hellenism in Augusta Webster's dramatic monologue 'Medea in Athens' (1870) and Amy Levy's *Medea: A Play in Fragments* (1884). Composed by women with prominent voices in academic as well as popular circles, these two works culminate in Medea's transformation from sensational object to a voice for the nascent feminist movement of the century's second half.[412]

Euripides' play is explicitly acknowledged in the title note. 'Medea's inclusion in a volume of poetry raises a number of questions about the performative aspects of both poetry and drama and challenges the reader to think about the effect of context on reading. In combining verse and drama the texts also raise questions about how poetic voices are dramatic and dramatic voices poetic. The text contains stage directions which are never going to be performed. Again, Levy uses the term fragment to invoke the notion of cultural recovery in a classical, *fin-de-siècle* text. This attribution also gives the text an archaeology and lineage, as well as the Greek language itself, which hints at Levy's understanding of texts in the original.

Philosophical discussions of nature, naturalness, the unnatural and artificial abound in *fin-de-siècle* literature, the most obvious example being Joris Karl Huysmans' *À rebours (Against Nature)*. However, unnatural, decadent aesthetics do not sit easily in classical morality tales. 'Medea' has historically been considered a play which concerns

---

[412] Shanyn Fiske, *Women Writers, Ancient Greece, and the Victorian Popular imagination* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p.26.

the horror of a woman who commits the ultimate act 'against nature' in killing her own

children. In Levy's version of the drama it is made clear that Medea is being read as

abject, and possibly racially other from the first scene; note the repetition of 'creature.'

Medea is labelled as a potential threat but also as a victim of prejudice:

> This strong, fair people, marble-cold and smooth
> As modelled marble. I, an alien here,
> That well can speak the language of their lips,
> The language of their souls may never learn.
> And in their hands, I, that did know myself
> Ere now, a *creature* in whose veins ran blood
> Redder, more rapid, than flows round most hearts,
> Do seem a *creature* reft of life and soul.
> If they would only teach the subtle trick (22-30) [my italics.]

'Medea' sets up an opposition between cultural and biological maternity and tropes of

frustrated creativity. Nikias says of Medea, 'She is a pregnant horror as she stands.' (198).

Medea's feelings are unspeakable: "Almost, for fear, I dare not give it tongue." (93),

hinting at the unspeakable acts which are to follow. Medea is constructed as a femme

fatale by Jason and Nikias, 'dark-thoughted sorceress.' (107). She is shown to be both

creator and destroyer, but also a victim of circumstances and an outsider in Levy's

version.   Medea is accused of being unnatural and less than human in a discourse, which

reiterates late nineteenth-century racial and ethnic stereotyping concerning Jewishness.

Ultimately, Medea is dehumanised in much the same way as Shakespeare's Shylock.

Second-hand reports of the moments before her child's murder, are linked with

unnatural, potential incest and obsession:

> Turn suddenly and, stooping, catch and strain
> One tender infant to her breast. She held
> Her lips to his and looked into his eyes,
> Not gladly, as a mother with her child,
> But stirred by some strange passion; then the boy

Cried out with terror and Medea wept. (291-296)

Medea on fleeing is forced to look back at her own city of dreadful night, 'Here let me rest; beyond men's eyes, beyond/ the city's hissing hate. Why am I here?' (379-380). The repetition of 'beyond' emphasises the effect of Medea's actions, beyond the pale, and the 'hissing' force of judgement.

Levy's drama emphasises Medea's victimhood. Medea is not a wilful subject in the same vein as Xantippe. Medea is reified and othered as a monster on grounds of gender and ethnicity, who then delivers a monstrous act. Olverson stresses Levy's sympathy for her character in her reading of the text, and the importance of Levy's contribution to feminist revisions of Hellenic sources:

> If James Thomson lacked "the classical trick", Amy Levy had classical trickery in abundance. Levy's trick was to combine classical erudition with subversive intent [...] Levy's Hellenic poems can therefore be read not only as cautionary tales concerning the disavowed and disenfranchised but also as forward-looking contributions in revisionist mythmaking.[413]

Scholars have argued that Levy's *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* has little obvious connection with Levy's later 'symbolist' work but the tropes of alienation, marginality and periphery are already present, even if the texts are largely removed from specifically urban settings, incorporating traditional poetic forms. 'Xantippe's' enigmatically queer, 'stranger-maidens' arguably reappear in *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse* in New Woman guises to confront the city. The trope of being on the edge still stands despite the paradox of socially marginalised poetic personae, who become poetically central, enabling them to speak and view the majority from 'minority' positions. The

---

[413] Olverson, p. 130.

connections between these two forms and parts of Levy's work are often segregated and the maiden threads or positions, ignored.

One of these *fin-de-siècle* poems provides an interesting bridge between the two classical texts and two volumes of Levy's poetry: *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* and *A London Plane-Tree.* 'To Lallie (Outside the British Museum.)' includes many of the diverse aspects found in the collection and rolls them up together to provide a patchwork of cultural references within an awkward street encounter. Confusingly 'To Lallie' is described as unpublished in Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman's recent collection of critical work,[414]although it is clearly included in the T. Fisher Unwin edition[415]. This may partly explain why the poem is rarely referenced or written about; however, Kate Flint does offer a brief reading of the beginning of the poem in a recent journal article.[416] Intriguingly, 'To Lallie' also picks up on the title of an earlier unpublished work, *Lallie: a Cambridge Sketch.*[417] 'To Lallie' combines a feeling of oddity and unease with potentially queer desire. Levy uses monosyllabic vocabulary throughout the poem to create a flat and strangely nihilistic tone together with a strange erotically charged encounter. The child-like regular rhyme scheme combines oddly with overblown sentiment and indented third lines. Interestingly, the gender of the poetic persona is not made known, although there is a possible allusion to Levy herself in the use of 'this poet-heart' (10). The prevalence of poems dedicated to women in Levy's oeuvre can be read as a sign of queerness but not an unproblematic one. Gender ambiguity is as often a sign of queerness as obvious same-gender/sex correspondence.

---

[414] Hetherington and Valman, p.80.
[415] Amy Levy,'To Lallie', within *A Minor Poet and other Verse*, 1884.
[416] Kate Flint, '"The hour of pink twilight": Lesbian Poetics and Queer Encounters on the fin-de-siècle Street', *Victorian Studies*, 51.4 (2009), 687-712 (pp. 692-693)
[417] Amy Levy, *Lallie: a Cambridge Sketch*, (unpublished), via Carmellia, PLC, Linton Park, Kent, Carmellia Collection, Amy Levy Archive.

Additionally, queer poets and writers are as able to inhabit (nominal) heterosexual positions, as those based within, or writing from, a position of normative sexuality. The poem describes the interaction of a small group of women entering a space of learning and antiquity, towards the 'marble gods' of Apollo and Hermes while the poet (heart) is left outside. The British Museum clearly identifies the text as both an urban and metropolitan poem. The textual persona also marks itself as an observer of fashion and social movements and a reader of clothing,

> Your gown was grey, I recollect,
> I think you patronized the sect
> They call 'aesthetic.' (28-30)

Dress acts as a marker of belonging contained within aesthetic dress but also a potential sign of queerness or queer coding hidden within the guise of aestheticism or New Womanhood. The poem's persona is sounding out the affiliation of the mystery friend, to see if there is a romantic interest or the possibility of attraction here. The poem plays with normative stereotypes wrapped within Hellenistic discourse to produce a satire on forms of available femininity and coupled with projected emotional cruelty, 'That nonchalant small nod you gave,/(The tyrant's motion to the slave)/ Sole mark'd our meeting' (16-18). The poetic persona feels the coolness of its muse's indifference but the text also satirises the overreaction to this supposed slight.   This encounter takes place on the steps outside the Museum, on a threshold that the speaker of the poem cannot cross. It is not clear why they are left to fulfil the role of outsider. The poem leaves the reader with a feeling of discomfort, not knowing whether it is supposed to be read straight or interpreted partly as a pastiche or joke. The lack of self-awareness in the poem's speaking voice suggests that Levy's melancholy aspect is far more complex than might be assumed, and that the detachment and gap between writer and persona

provides the space for critical and creative construction, performance and reflection. Levy's work has arguably suffered because of a tendency to read biographically as a collection of symptoms contributing to a diagnosis of self-loathing, depression and suicidal ideation.

With 'To Lallie' and 'Xantippe's' enigmatically queer 'stranger-maidens' we see earlier forms of New Woman" guises which confront the city in *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse*. The trope of being on the edge still stands, despite the paradox of socially marginalised poetic personae who become poetically central. The connections between these two forms and parts of Levy's work are often segregated and the maiden threads or positions, ignored.

'A London Plane-Tree' and 'London in July' offer examples of this extended trope in Levy's work within *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse.*[418] Both poems situate a desire for an urban sanctuary, which is characterised as feminine. The vocabulary alternates between natural imagery and subtle links between physical features and emotional states. In 'A London Plane-Tree,' stages of growth are paralled by pathetic fallacy, 'They droop and pine for country air; /The plane tree loves the town.' (3-4) Here Levy combines organic and emotional metaphors, to conjoin the urban environment with states of yearning, for example, pine as tree and pine as longing. The poetic subject sits on the edge of both domestic and natural environments, through their viewing window, 'Here from my garret-pane, I mark/The plane-tree bud and blow,' (5-6). This invokes a feeling of being both inside and outside, in a similar fashion to 'To Lallie,' where the threshold of the British Museum acts as point of no entry and of exclusion. The text marks the passing of the seasons and the writing of the plane tree on the page. The

---

[418] Levy, pp. 17-18.

plane tree acts as source of comfort and healing for the poem's subject, 'shed her recuperative bark, /And spread her shade below.' (7-8) The subject of the poem takes on these attributes and is enveloped in an arboreal embrace. The sound of the city becomes the voice of fertile growth, 'But she has listened to the voice/on city breezes born' (15-16). The city becomes the voice of the indirect, feminine subject emitting soothing air and the city requites the passion of the liminal space between viewpoint, domestic closet and arbour, where the figure can gaze but not be gazed upon. The solitary plane tree gives life and thrives among the other trees pining for a rural sanctuary.

'London in July' takes up the solitary aspect of 'A London Plane-Tree' and inverts it by turning the generic throng into a single image: 'That all the people in the street/Should wear one woman's face' (3-4). The poem cleverly plays with ideas of anonymity and projection, and turns the ambiguity of the mystery woman into a manifestation of desiring obsession and generic merger. The text subtly interweaves the solitary figure with connotations of the plane tree through the duality of 'leaves' already set up in the previous poem, in a kind of cumulative intertextuality. The thrill of chance meeting under the cover of the urban 'maze' is conveyed through the alliterative tropes of expansive space, for example 'wide waste' (10), and the possibility of being lost and found and rescued from absence, 'Where missing through unnumbered days,/ We twain at last may meet!' (11-12) echoing Michael Field's use of twain and intertwining. The collapse of urban figuring and the desired muse object culminate in the city being exemplified as the love that dare not speak, or which cannot be named. The heart of the city mirrors and contains the loved object, the city as lover and the city as the home of the beloved. This patterning also reflects the wider sense of the poetic voice being

part of the feminised urban setting, and yet always one step removed from it, simultaneously mapping the urban space and emotional geography. The poetic subject views the scene as both lens and frustrated *flâneuse*. As Susan David Bernstein argues, Levy's writing is noted for its claiming of urban space and gaze:

> Levy's representations of London life suggest the field of vision of a *flâneuse*, the feminine version of the *flâneur*, an urban wanderer who observes the varieties of urban culture from a distance. Parisian poet Charles Baudelaire first introduced the idea of *flânerie*, while James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) is often regarded as the quintessential epic of the *flâneur* in Victorian London, Levy herself invoked the image of the *flâneuse* in her essay 'Women and Club Life,'[419]

Both poems play with doubly feminised forms of interchangeable human and natural femininity to suggest a potential queer subtext. A subtext which is supported by the two last lines of 'London in July' that, 'The summer in the city's heart – /That is enough for me' (15-16). Thus, the city becomes the proxy lover and the lover becomes part of the urban throng, a statement which is overdetermined, and which arguably fails to contain the litany of lost, hidden and absent states and an ailing poetic subject.

Tropes of liminal space are taken up by other less discussed poems in the volume such as 'The Dream' and 'On the Threshold'.[420]   Both texts wrestle with the restrictions of social convention and push at taboos of intimacy whilst framing these within patterns of imagery which focus on enclosure, restriction and prohibition.   The poems also articulate the pain of absence and not being able to hold onto bodily intimacy, the beloved muses are always ultimately inaccessible despite fleeting moments of consummation.   From the outset 'The Dream' confuses time scales and ideas of truth and deception, by using an intertextual dedication or reference 'Believe me, this was

---

[419] Susan David Bernstein, Introduction to Amy Levy's *The Romance of the Shop* (Plymouth: Broadview, 2006), p.28.
[420] Levy, pp.38-39.

true last night,/Tho' it is false to-day.' A.M.F. Robinson (-1-2). A. Mary F. Robinson was

a poetic contemporary of Amy Levy's, who was also the partner of Vernon Lee (Violet

Paget) for several years before marrying. It is not clear if this an oblique reference to a

potentially triangulated relationship between Levy, Lee, and Robinson. These two lines

are taken directly from the second stanza of Robinson's poem, 'Paradise Fancies',

although Levy alters Robinson's original 'though' to 'tho.' The collection contains a

number of interesting connecting titles and themes which are shared with Levy's work.
421

'The Dream' sets up a scene within a scene in order to allow the possibility of

reciprocal desire through mute body language:

> Calm and silent, spake no word.
> Only once you neared my place,
> And your hand one moment's space
> Sought the fingers of my hand;
> Your eyes flashed to mine; I knew
> All was well between us two. (5-10).

The scene 'speaks' of a desire without verbal declaration under the cover of closeted

darkness. Ultimately, though, the loved, hovering, angel/bird has disappeared leaving

the imprint of the body in the fading perfume of the empty 'chamber.' The lightness of

movement indicated by 'fluttering' and 'flew' has ruptured and darkened to a poignant,

clinging shadow, 'All about the chamber hung/Tender shade of twilight gloom;' in the

half-light, half-life of separation (16-17). Levy cleverly personifies night and day as

parted lovers and emphasizes the growing feeling of loss and heaviness through the use

of weighty language in 'hung,' 'gloom' and 'clung,' to emphasise a state of poignant loss

---

421 A. Mary. F Robinson, 'Paradise Fancies' within, *A Handful of Honeysuckle* (London: C. Kegan Paul &
Co., 1878), p.48.

and paralysis only alleviated by the residual scent of roses.   Even the reference to the 'pale string of amber' (22) hints at decaying, fossilised and dying materiality. The poem also combines tropes of comfort and inverts them to create a feeling of restriction and suffocation through the use of 'void flask,' implying a vacuum left by the fading of a perfumed vision and dream.   'The Dream' echoes Emily Brontë's 'Stars' by suggesting a tentative comfort provided by the cover of darkness but which is threatened by the cold light of day.   It also oddly reconstructs the feeling of Michael Field's encounters with a throng of parasitic female admirers, 'such a crowd of folk that stirred,/Jested fluttered' (2-3). Although the poetic subject is not clearly gendered the domestic detail and familiarity with the scents of the female body suggests the possibility of a feminine position. The poem also offers an intriguing use of form which mimics the stages of consciousness through the shortened middle stanza which collapses the time frame of the text solipsistically and which moves the perspective from present to retrospective tense by the use of passive voice and the bookending of 'past' and 'last.' Ultimately, 'The Dream' offers the possibility of a permissive space for the expression of non-normative desire, but also paradoxically illustrates how residual social restrictions are internalised and retained within the non-verbal expression of touch.

'On the Threshold' repeats the dream-like scenario but adds another layer of separation through the poetic death of the loved object. The poem re-constructs the idea of death and the afterlife being in the next room, but prohibited by a threshold that cannot be passed, in a similar vein to Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold.'[422] In Levy's poem imagined death is a bar which mirrors an existing separation, 'Death had not broken between us the old bar' (9), one which cannot be overcome even in a potential

---

[422] Christina Rossetti, 'The Convent Threshold' within *Poems and Prose*, ed. Simon Humphries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 85-89.

dream afterlife. The text contains a litany of bloodless metaphors, 'Whereon you lay all white and garlanded/with blooms of waxen whiteness' (3-4). The taboo of separation remains in both states alongside the further disturbing possibility of tentative necrophilia. The poem's subject is left on the outside gazing in, comfortless, unlike the figures in Levy's space of urban sanctuary in 'A London-Plane Tree,' and 'London in July' where the subjects are able to participate in the scene from a distance, rather than being excluded within the domestic, private sphere.

Levy's poetics, for all their ambiguities and potential ambivalence, do offer the possibility of poetic subjects occupying part-closeted rooms of their own, within touching distance of the elusive metropolitan embrace. She who controls the closet is empowered to stay with the perfume of urban desire, even if this power is shown to be transient and never fully knowable. Michael Field and Amy Levy's poetics employ opposite approaches to the management of queerness and encroaching contemporary pathology, but share a concern with both protective and permissive spaces, the tensions between *fin-de-siècle* urban anonymity, high cultural classicism and social periphery. In a sense, Field and Levy's creative projects become mirror images through their use of interior/exterior oppositions. For Bradley and Cooper, 'Michael Field' is a creative entity, an expression of love, intimacy and interiority, an attempt to avoid gender restrictions, to open up a space for genderqueerness, and a means of soliciting critical approval for their work, within a kind of shared, protective exoskeletal closet (failed though it becomes). Levy's poetics place outsider figures in the foreground of metropolitan space, but there is a sense of fragility in their use of the city as metropolitan sanctuary which is largely absent from Field's oeuvre. The city becomes the proxy beloved muse, the place of stranger maidens, and a partly permissive environment, but one which cannot be

266

situated within a lasting, stable, domestic sphere, unlike Michael Field's proxy, Whym Chow, happily ensconced in the parlour alongside their Sapphic maenads. Like the subject of 'To Lallie,' Levy's readers are left with a lingering feeling of awkward, poignant exclusion, or unresolvable, vortex-like queerness, which is often present but never quite included. It is as if Field and Levy produce opposite sides of a *fin-de-siècle* queer writing coin, each having what the other needs, and occupying the same metropolitan terrain but in very different ways. Michael Field ultimately lacked the literary recognition they craved in their own lifetime, following their forced removal from a protective closet. Amy Levy's work did receive critical praise and notice. Levy's work is mentioned posthumously in Michael Field's *Works and Days*: June 15 Sunday 1890:

> The mid day all spent with A. Symons at the river up & down – breeze and grey light. A long talk on the drama, its forms and future at a Café near the Palais Royal – a visit by ourselves to Mrs Moulton: she read some lines on Amy Levy, & some of Marston's poems with a deliberation of voice that gives strange emphasis to passion. [423]

(There is no historical record of Bradley, Cooper and Levy having met). However, the lack of requital and requited relationships foregrounded in her poetics, produces an almost unbearable feeling of longing for a reciprocated, non-closeted space, which is beyond reach.

---

[423] Thain and Vadillo, p.244.

Conclusion

This thesis has set out to illustrate how a queer feminist approach to the reading of nineteenth-century women's poetry and life writing can offer new insights on the links between literary and social closets, queer identification, subjectivity and desire through the development of existing theoretical positions, new readings, and epistemology.   In the process, it argues that nineteenth-century literature occupies a key position in the relation to discourses of sexuality and the resistance of pathology and prejudice against same-sex identification and relationships, before and after the coining of the term 'homosexual'.   I argue that the texts written by the women writers discussed in this thesis exhibit highly complex strategies in facilitating the claiming and reclaiming of outsider status, the development of self-determination and psychological processing. I address the question of where the closet is in women's writing and with women writers before the development of the classification of homosexual identity in the late nineteenth-century, and how it is possible to understand diverse forms of queerness and queer personae across the nineteenth century, outside of lesbian continuum models of female sexuality.

This research uses examples taken from the writing of eight women writers to propose new and distinctive theories about the function of closeting within writing and the function of writing as part of uncloseted 'free' space, offering protective cover, as well as interior spaces for the development of voice and identification.   Using texts written between 1806 and 1914, I map the development of desiring, obscured and vocalised aspects of selected oeuvres. I support my arguments with analyses of Anne Lister's alternative and parallel *Diary* world, Emily Brontë's escapable poetic prisons, Christina Rossetti and Adelaide Anne Procter's refuges, and sacred closets of reserve

together with Amy Levy and Michael Field's classical, urban and Trinitarian spaces, making them available to queer and non-queer readers. I challenge existing scholarship concerning the function of implicit and explicit coding in nineteenth-century texts, and its role in the construction of literary and social closets, most obviously in Lister's diaries. As Janes has recently noted, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's initial models of the closet are now being reinterpreted to offer the possibility of positive as well as negative aspects, defining them as, 'Sites not just of oppression but also, at times, of creative opportunity.'[424] Sedgwick herself notes the resilience and pervasiveness of the closet in a contemporary context, whilst simultaneously deconstructing it:

> The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however, courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence.[425]

I reposition Sedgwick's conceptualising of the closet as 'The defining structure for gay oppression in this century,' by mapping ways in which forms of this structure exist in an earlier historical context.'[426]   I also argue that it is possible to acknowledge the omission and exclusion of women from Sedgwick and Michel Foucault's critical praxis, without rejecting vital aspects of their useful scholarship, and throwing the baby out with the theoretical bath water.   This research differs from Foucault and Sedgwick's positions on one fundamental point however, breaking the link between closeted states and the late nineteenth-century codification of homosexuality.   I argue that the closet

---

[424] Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.12.
[425] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (1990) 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008),p.68.
[426] Ibid., p.71.

exists as a multi-functional and diverse entity well before identity politics, taking its place as a sophisticated survival mechanism, as well as a symptom of oppression. By deconstructing the language of poetry and life writing, I propose an alternative place for the closet before the common use of the term, offering new and original readings and analysis based on this distinctive position. I stress the connection between literary and social closets precisely because the two are interrelated and not subject to strict disciplinary boundaries Literary works and writing not only reflect the material conditions of their production, but in the process, provide distancing mechanisms for the exploration of social and psychological states.

As part of my research I have investigated ways in which new critical and social language, established in the last five years, such as 'gender fluid,' 'genderqueer' and 'non-binary,' can be applied to historical texts and terms. I illustrate how this new vocabulary allows access to the subtle, non-fixed positions of both poetic and life writing personae and formal innovation. I also illustrate how new concepts of the queer familial and queer temporality can be utilised to shed light on underexplored elements of nineteenth-century texts. By engaging with neglected texts and authors, most obviously Procter's oeuvre, I suggest possible new inclusions for a growing and evolving queer canon. The choice of multiple forms of writing is deliberate and unusual, offering new readings by contrasting and comparing different kinds of 'queer' writing, and layers and levels of intimacy. The nineteenth century is bookended by the life writing of Anne Lister and Michael Field which have rarely been considered together. Similarly, situating poetry alongside life writing produces novel epistemologies for the study of performative subjectivity and aims to provoke further scholarship on the relationship between literary forms and self-construction.

The literary subjects and personae that people this thesis are constructed, and they exhibit queerness, in myriad ways and forms: split, autoerotic, absent, performative, genderqueer, non-binary, human/animal, vampiric, singular, doubled and tripled. Their characteristics are often couched in terms of the strange, odd, eccentric, freakish, awkward and contrary. Similarly, the closets read and revealed in this project occupy a vast range of textual and social positions. Many of these closets are linked through the complex, intertwining threads of nineteenth-century religious movements: Anglican, High-Anglican, Tractarian and Marian/Catholic. These alternative spaces and liturgies operate in texts which focus on the incorporation of queer subjects into female and feminine social bodies, most obviously the same-sex, salvific refuges of Procter's 'A Legend of Provence', Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' and 'Goblin Market,' and contextually within same-sex creative and political communities of women's journal publishing and metropolitan subcultures. Classical referencing frequently sits in tandem with these discourses. It provides a means of gauging and identifying other queer parties, and potential readership, for example, Lister's use of Juvenal as an intertextual touchstone, through the use of dual normative- and non-normative Sappho, Sapphic and maenadic signifiers in Rossetti, and Field's oeuvres, and Levy's appropriation of Xantippe and Medea and her missing stranger maidens.

Inevitably, there are topics that are muted, or touched upon in this thesis that are too wide in scope to be fully explored, or which appeared too belatedly to feature in great depth. Material culture, and thing theory are two such areas which queer scholars have only recently started to explore, although this work has been present in other parts of the academy for some time. Janes' study on eighteenth-century constructions of secrecy and male homosexuality is an explicit example, published after the bulk of this

thesis had been completed.[427]   The nineteenth-century's fascination with oddity and

strangeness, often in confined or covered spaces, developed via the long-eighteenth-

century's cabinet of curiosities, is arguably still ripe for further analysis by feminist, queer

and postcolonial scholars. Freak shows, circuses, (photographic) dark rooms and séance

cabinets occupied and offer liminal, performative and transgressive spaces ripe for queer

reinterpretation, as well as paradoxically supporting traditional ideas of domesticity,

physical capacity and image. As this thesis illustrates, non-normative desire is exhibited

in and covered by a vast range of states and positions: queer and non-queer (sometimes

both simultaneously), requited and unrequited, indirectly consummated, and delivered

through the erotic charge of proxy objects, or fetishized through intimate,

overdetermined, and repetitive touch which sits happily within material discourses.

The link between the cult of spiritualism, nineteenth-century women's writing

and notions of female creativity and their radical potential is still underexplored,

particularly in its relationship to female queerness.   Spiritualism and (largely) female

mediumship in the nineteenth-century provided a powerful repository for the projection

of ideas about the female body, together with curious spatial alignments and tropes of

creativity. Links between female spirit mediums and women writers at first glance may

seem unlikely but on closer examination there are a number of highly suggestive links,

including the possibility of speaking from beyond the grave and the resurrection of

subjectivity. If fallenness is often represented as social and literal death for women in

nineteenth-century poetry and prose, then the summoning of the dead suggests the

possibility of recovery through the channelling of a (usually) female body.   In the act of

the séance notions of the performative and the taking of personae are intertwined with

---

[427] Janes, p.13.

the oppositions of embodied/disembodied, powerful/submissive. The links to women's

writing are provocative if these notions of the performative are invoked. The similarities

between the idea of poetic personae and spiritualist mediums are striking, both exist as

subjects, as I but not I, and suggest the same questions of who is speaking, whose voice

is used, and how is subjectivity sacrificed in order to cross barriers and conventions of

social respectability. The flexibility of séance personae, cutting across class, gender and

bodily states illustrates their radical potential and its potential link to shifting and

mutating poetic voices.

This bodily confusion resonates strongly with the idea of sacrificial substitution

discussed in this project in relation to Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and Procter's 'A Legend

of Provence.' If a spirit medium brought forth the voice of a male subject, did that

feminise the subject or masculinise the body of the woman expressing it? Similarly, if a

female poet uses a gender-neutral or masculine persona, does that automatically

feminise the poetic voice? The blurring of gender identity boundaries in spiritualist

settings also allowed the possibility of touch outside the realm of social norms, neither

the medium nor the audience member could be held accountable for inappropriate

touching. Mesmerism therefore offered an example of the ways in which restrictions

on women's lives were ameliorated through the use of unconventional means; to

provide a nineteenth-century equivalent of thinking outside the box. As Catherine

Wynne has suggested the subversive potential of female mesmerism and the redemptive

power of the female body cannot be underestimated: 'Women's aptitude for trance-

states and mediumship emerged at a time of incredible female domesticity and

containment. Female mesmeric knowledge offered then, a potential if unconscious,

273

response to entrapped creativity and desire.'[428] It also provided a means of challenging gender norms by performing both masculinity and femininity. Similarly, the connections between fetishism and closet displacement are also ripe for further development. Other scholarship will inevitably be advanced by very recent archival discoveries, such as the appearance of new fragments of Sappho's poetry, and the evolution of new critical areas, for example, shame studies, which seeks to recover and reclaim the role of 'owned' shame in queer culture.[429] Shame studies situates itself as one of the counter-cultural movements within queer theory which seeks to retain aspects of abjection as a source of empowerment, and as a way of avoiding the mainstreaming of queer lives and lifestyles.

Another area which is broached in this project in Chapter One, but not fully elucidated, is that of the function of oblique dedication and paratexts in nineteenth-century queer writing, often used in conjunction with pseudonyms. Brontë, Rossetti, Procter, and Levy all used anonymised, or part anonymised dedications in their work. For example, Brontë's Gondal poems, 'A.G.A to A.E.: Lord of Elbe, on Elbe Hill,' 'Rosina: Weeks of wild delirium past,' 'Song to A.A.: 'This shall be thy lullaby,'[430] Rossetti's 'Jessie Cameron,' 'L.E.L,' 'Enrica, 1865,'[431] Procter's 'To M.M.H,' (published as 'A Retrospect'), and a whole volume dedicated to Matilda Hays.[432] Additonally Levy's 'To Lallie,' 'To

---

[428] Catherine Wynne, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's Domestic Desires: Mesmerism, Mediumship and Femmes Fatales,' in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (New York: Rodopi B.V 2006), pp. 277-238 (p.238).

[429] See Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania, 2008), David M.Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds.,*Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (London: Routledge, 2009), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, E. K. Sedgwick & A. Frank eds., (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995).

[430] Emily Brontë, *The Complete* Poems, Janet Gezari ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 50, 134, 67.

[431] Christina Rossetti, *Poems and Prose*, Simon, Humphries. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 153, 101, 193.

[432] Adelaide Anne Procter, *The Complete Poetical Works of Adelaide Anne Procter* (New York: Thomas Y, Crowell & Co. Publishers, 1903), frontispiece and p.159.

Sylvia,' 'To Clementina Black,' and 'To Vernon Lee' (not Violet Paget).[433]   Katharine

Bradley and Edith Cooper dedicate their whole oeuvre to each to each other through the

use of their shared masculine pen name.   Many questions are raised by this form of

writing in poetic texts when biographical or extra-textual referencing is used as a means

of accessing or protecting social and biographical closets.   If Tennyson's *In Memoriam*

has become a key queer text in this regard then there is surely space for these lesser-

known texts to be brought forward in the academy.

This thesis aims to open up new areas of research for queer and feminist scholars,

through the recovery and repositioning of queer subjects, closets and desire. It offers

the possibility of a platform for further scholarship based on previously excluded and

neglected areas in nineteenth-century women's poetry and life writing. It also explores

techniques for the retrospective deconstruction of historical queer texts, innovative

strategies for the decoding of latency and latent spaces, and the use of emerging

discourse, theory and language. It asserts the right of queer reception and control, re-

asserts the importance of empowered marginality, and finally, the possibility of creative

and critical thinking both inside and outside of alternative boxes.

---

[433] Amy Levy, *A Minor Poet and other Verse* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1884), pp. 80-83, 62-65, and *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1889), pp. frontispiece and 75-77.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Boucherett, Jessie, *The English Woman's Journal* XIII (1864), taken from:

<http://www.ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html> [accessed 3 December 2015]

Bowden, John William, Richard Hurrell, Froude, John Keble, John Henry Newman, Robert

Isaac Wilberforce, Isaac Williams, *Lyra Apostolica* (London: Methuen & Co, 1901)

Brontë, Anne, *Diary Paper*, July 30, 1841

 _. *Diary Paper*, July 31, 1845

Brontë, Charlotte (Currer Bell), 'Biographical Notice' to the combined edition of

Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey (London: Smith Elder and Co, 1850)

Brontë, Emily, *Complete Poems* ed., Janet Gezari, (London: Penguin, 1992)

_. *Diary Paper*, November 24, 1834

_. *Diary Paper,* June 26, 1837

_. *Drawing*, (1837) [pencil] London: British Library, accessed via the British Library

website <http://www.bl.uk/collections-items/emily-brontës-diary-1837>

_. *Birthday Paper*, July 30, 1841

_. *Diary Paper* July 30, 1845

All *Diary Papers* via City University, New York website,

<http:www//academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/diary_

papers>

_. Gondal Notebooks via British Library website, via <http://www.bl.uk/collection-

<items/manuscript-of-emily-brontës-gondal-poetry#sthash.tJ6RFOYD.dpuf > [accessed

5 November 2105]

—. *Wuthering Heights* (1847) (London: Penguin, 2003)

Dickens, Charles, *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) (London: Penguin, 1986)

—. *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) (London: Penguin, 2002)

Michael, Field, Thain, Marion and Ana Parejo Vadillo, eds., *Michael Field: The Poet Published and Manuscript Materials* (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2009)

Levy, Amy, *A Minor Poet and other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884), second edition reprint

—. *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), ed., Susan David Bernstein (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2006)

—. *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889)

Taken from: < http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/welcome.do>

[Accessed 2 December 2015]

_. *Lallie: a Cambridge Sketch* (unpublished) available via the Amy Levy Archive, Kent

Lister, Anne, Diaries, Letter, Travel Notes, West Yorkshire Archive Service, University of Huddersfield, History to Herstory Project - <http://historytoherstory.hud.ac.uk/>

[accessed 2 December 2015]

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

—. *No Priest But Love: Excerpts from the Diaries of Anne Lister, 1824-1826* (Ilkley: Smith Settle, 1992)

Procter, Adelaide Anne, *The Complete Poetical Works of Adelaide Anne Procter* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1903)

Robinson, A. Mary. F., *A Handful of Honeysuckle* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), taken from: <https://ia800303.us.archive.org/25/items/handfulofhoneysu00robirich/handfulofhoneysu00robirich.pdf> [accessed 2 December 2015]

Rossetti, Christina, *Poems and Prose*, ed., Simon Humphries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Unknown, C. 1850 (Ambrotype photograph) Haworth Parsonage

Via <http://www.brontësisters.co.uk/images/dag.brontë.museum.photo.front.m.JPG>

Secondary Sources

Anonymous, *Examiner,* 8 January, 1848 via <http://www.wuthering-heights.co.uk/reviews.php> [accessed 1 December 2015]

Anonymous, *Graham's Lady's Magazine*, USA, July 1848, via <http://www.wuthering-heights.co.uk/reviews.php> [accessed 1 December 2015]

Ahmed, Sara, *Willful Subjects*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014)

Arcara, Stefania, 'Hellenic Transgressions, Homosexual Politics: Wilde, Symonds and Sicily,' *Studies in Travel Writing,* 16.2 (2012), 135-147

Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993)

_.'The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women's Poetry of the Romantic Period?' Within *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley, eds. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 13-33

Atkinson, Diane, *Love & Dirt: The Marriage of Arthur Munby & Hannah Culwick* (London: Macmillan, 2003)

Barbin, Herculine, Michel, Foucault, *Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980)

Barker, Juliet, *The Brontës* (London: Phoenix, Orion 1995)

_. *Sixty Treasures* (Keighley: Brontë Society, 1988)

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-149

_. *S/Z* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

Bauer, Heike, 'Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the *Fin de Siècle,' Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 18.1 (2009), 84-162

Beckman, Linda, Hunt, 'Leaving "The tribal Duckpond": Amy Levy, Jewish Self-Hatred, and Jewish identity*,' Victorian Literature and Culture,* 27.1 (1999), 185-201

_. 'Levy, Amy Judith (1861-1889),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) via <http://www.Oxforddnb.com/view/article/16559.>

Behrendt, Stephen, C., *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture: Elegies and Memorials of Princess Charlotte* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997)

Beynon, John C. and Caroline Gonda, eds., *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the London Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Bickle, Sharon, ed., *The Fowl and The Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008)

Blain, Virginia, 'Sexual Politics of the (Victorian) Closet; *or,* No Sex Please, - We're Poets,' in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, eds. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 135-63

─. 'Period Pains: The Changing Body of Victorian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry,* 42.1 (2004), 71-79

─. '"The two-headed nightingale": lesbian text as palimpsest,' *Women's History Review*, 5.2 (2006), 239-257

Boa, Ana de Freitas and Abby Coykendall, eds., *Heteronormativity in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)

Botting, Fred, second edition, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2014)

Boyd, Kelly and Rohan McWilliam, eds., *The Victorian Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007)

Briefel, Aviva, 'The Victorian Literature of Fear,' *Literature Compass*, 4.2 (2007), 508-523

Bristow, Joseph, ed., *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing,* (London: Routledge, 1992)

─. With Cath Sharrock ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

– . ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

– . ed. *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005)

Bronfen, Elizabeth, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992)

Burrus, Virginia, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

Butler, Judith, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

_. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006)

–. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011)

–. 'Critically Queer' in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader,* Hall, Donald E. Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 18-31

Byron, Glenys, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003)

Castricano, Jodey, *Cryptomimesis*: *The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001)

Castle, Terry, *The Apparitional Lesbian*: *Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

_. 'Always the Bridesmaid,' in *London Review of Books*, 19th September 1999, 18-21

Chapman, Raymond, *The Doctrine of Reserve*, Faith of Our Fathers website, http://trushare.com/13JUN96/JN96FAFA.htm [Accessed 1 December 2015]

Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' *Signs* 1.4 (1976), 875-893

Clark, Anna, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian identity, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7.1 (1996), 23-50

Carolyn Conroy, 'Solomon's Life after 1873' – Simeon Solomon Research Archive: Via <http://www.simeonsolomon.com/simeon-solomon-biography.html.> [Accessed 1 November 2015]

Cook, Daniel and Amy Culley, eds., *Women's Life Writing 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Crisafulli, Lilla Maria, Cecilia Pietropoli*, Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007)

Cronin, Richard, Alison Chapman, Antony H.Harrison, eds., *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002)

Culley, Amy, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840: Friendship, Community and Collaboration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

D'amico, Diane, David. A. Kent, 'Rossetti and the Tractarians,' *Victorian Poetry,* 44. 1 (2006), 93-103

Dau, Duc, 'Perfect Chastity: Celibacy and Virgin Marriage in Tractarian Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 44.1 (2006), 77-92

– . And Shale Preston, eds. *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (London: Routledge, 2015)

Davies, Stevie, *The Artist As a Free Woman* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984)

–. *Emily Brontë – Heretic* (London: Women's Press, 1994)

Davies, Helen, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Deese, Helen, R. ed., *Daughter of Boston: The Extraordinary Diary of a Nineteenth-Century Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005)

Delamont, Sara and Lorna Duffin, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World* (London: Croom Helm, 1978)

De (de) Lauretis, Teresa, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 1994)

Delafield, Catherine, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)

Dellamora, Richard, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990)

–. Review of *Epistemology of the Closet* in *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* 2.4 (April 1992), 667-670

–. *Victorian Sexual Dissidence, ed.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Dempster, Sarah *The Guardian*, Tuesday1ˢᵗJune2010, http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/jun/01/secret-diary-miss-anne-lister> [accessed 1 December 2015]

Devine, Luke, '"The Ghetto at Florence": Reading Jewish Identity in Amy Levy's Early Poetry, 1880-86,', *Prooftexts*, 31. 1 (Winter-Spring 2011), 21-30

Dickinson, Emily, ed. by R.W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (Cambridge: Massachussetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999)

Dieleman, Karen, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Religious Poetics: Congregationalist Models of Hymnist and Preacher', *Victorian Poetry* 45.2 (2007), 135-137

Doan, Laura, 'Topsy-Turvydom, Gender Inversion, Sapphism and the Great War,' *GLQ*, 12.4 (2006), 517-542

Dollimore, Jonathan, *Sexual Dissidence*: *Augustine to Wilde Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Donoghue, Emma, *We are Michael Field* (New York: Stuart Tabori and Chang, 1998)

Dowling, Linda, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1994)

Richa Dwor, 'The Racial Romance of Amy Levy's *Reuben Sachs*, *English Literature in Translation*, 1880-1920, 55.4, (2012) 460-478

Dyce, Rev. Alexander, *Specimens of British Poetesses; selected and chronologically arranged* (London: T. Rodd. 1827)

Easley, Alexis, *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830-70* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004)

Eco, Umberto, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)

Ehnenn, Jill. R, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness and Late Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

Eisner, Caroline. L, 'Shifting the Focus: Anne Lister as Pillar of Conservatism'. *Alb: Autobiography Studies*, 17.1 (Summer 2002), 28-42

Elfenbein, Andrew, Review of *Sexual Dissidence*, in *Victorian Studies*, 43. 3 (Spring 2001), 509-511

Ellis, Havelock, and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition* (1897) ed. Victor Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

_. *Sexual Inversion: Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 1* (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897)

Erkilla, Betsy, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History and Discord* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Evans, Juliet, *Lacanian Works* <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=222.-> [accessed 1 December 2015]

Faderman, Lilian, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981)

Feldman, Paula, R., and Theresa M, Kelley, *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*   (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995)

Fiske, Shanyn, *Heretical Hellenism: Women Writers, Ancient Greece and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2008)

Flannery, Dennis, *On Sibling Love, Queer Subjectivity and American Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007)

Flegel, Monica, *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture: Animality, Queer Relations, and the Victorian Family* (London: Routledge, 2015)

Fletcher, Lisa, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

Flint, Kate, 'The "hour of pink twilight": Lesbian Poetics and Queer Encounters on the *Fin-de-siècle* Street,' *Victorian Studies,* 51.4 (2009), 687-712

Ford, Jane, Kim Edwards Keates and Patricia Pulham, eds., *Economies of Desire at the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Libidinal Lives* (London: Routledge, 2015)

Foucault, Michel, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1998)

Freccero, Carla, *Queer/Early/Modern* eds., Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)

Freud, Sigmund, *Totem and Taboo* (1913) (London: Routledge Classics, 2001)

_. *Introductory Lectures on Psycheinbbergho-Analysis, XV-XV1* (London: Penguin, 1991)

Friedman, Geraldine, 'Pseudonymity, Passing and Queer Biography: The Case of Mary Diana Dods,' *Romanticism and Sexuality,* 23 (2001), 1-25

Furneaux, Holly, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009)

Galvin, E. Mary, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999)

Garber, Marjorie, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2008)

Gavin, Adrienne. E and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, eds., *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle: Authors of Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Genette, Gerard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Gezari, Janet, *Last Things: Emily Brontë Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007)

Giffney, Noreen, and Michael O'Rourke, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)

Gill, Jo, *Women's Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

Ginsberg, K. Elaine, ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press: 1996)

Glen, Heather, ed., *The Cambridge Companion To The Brontës* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschafen*) (Berlin: J. G. Cottaische Buchandlung, 1809)

Goldberg, Jonathan and Madhavi, Menon, 'Queering History', *PMLA*, 120. 5 (2005), 1608-1617

Grand, Sarah, *The Beth Book*, Jenny Bourne Taylor ed. (Brighton: Victorian Secrets Ltd, 2013)

Stephen, Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology English Literature – The Victorian Age Vol. 1* (London: W.W. Norton and Co, 2012)

Gregory, Gill, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1998)

Goody, Alex, 'Murder in Mile End, Amy Levy, Jewishness and the City,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006), 461-479

Grosz, Elizabeth and Elspeth Probyn, eds., *The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Gould, Jenny, 'Women's Military Services in First World War Britain' in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven: CT, Yale University Press, 1987) , pp. 114-125

Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012)

Hall, Donald E., Annamaria Jagose, eds., Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter, contributors, *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2012)

Halberstam, Judith, Jack, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998)

—. *In a Queer Time and Place*: *Transgender Bodies/Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005)

—. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012)

Halperin, David.M., *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990)

–. *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

_. With Traub, Valerie, ed., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

Heiland, Donna, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley, 2004)

Henry, Peaches, 'The Sentimental Artistry of Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children," *Victorian Poetry,* 49.4 (2011), 1-15

Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman*, eds., Amy Levy: Critical Essays (Athens: Ohio* University Press, 2010)

Hochberg, Adam Severin, 'The Repatriation of Eastern European Jews from Great Britain: 1881-1914,' *Jewish Social Studies*, 50. 1/2 (Winter 1988 – Spring 1992), 49-62

Horner, Joshua C (1830) *Anne Lister*, [Oil on canvas] Shibden Hall, Halifax, via https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0a/Lister_anne.jpg/220px -Lister_anne.jpg see Appendix One

Homans, Margaret, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980)

Hughes, Linda. K., *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Hughes, Patricia, *The Early Life of Miss Anne Lister and the Curious Tale of Miss Eliza Raine* (self-published: 2014)

Humble, Nicola, and Kimberley Reynolds *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art* (Harlow: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993)

Hurst, Isobel, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Hsiung, Valerie, 'Dramatization within Symbolic Soundscapes: William Morris' 'The Blue Closet,' via <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/morris/hsiung.html> [accessed 30 November 2015]

Huysman, Joris-Karl, *Against Nature* (London: Penguin, 2003)

Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985)

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

_. Kristeva, Julia and Arthur Goldhammer, 'The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives, *STABAT MATER' Poetics Today,* 6.1 (1985), 133-152

Jagose, Annamarie, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996)

–. *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002)

Jankowski, Theodora. A., *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)

Janes, Dominic, *Picturing The Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015)

Johnston, Georgia, *The Formation of 20th- Century Queer Autobiography: Reading Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, Hilda Doolittle and Gertrude Stein* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Mark Jordan, *Review* taken from< http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/samesex-desire-in-victorian-religious-culture-frederick-s-roden/?isb=9780333986431> [accessed 24 November 2015]

Jusova, Iveta, *The New Woman and the Empire* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 2005)

Juvenal, *The Satyrs of Decimus Junius Juvenalis and of Aulus Persius Flaccus* (New York: AMS Press, 1979)

Kennard, Jean.E, 'Lesbianism and the Censoring of *Wuthering Heights*,' *NWSA Journal*, 8.2 (1996), 17-36

Kersh, Sarah, 'The Amatory Sonnet Tradition and *Whym Chow: Flame of Love'*, Michael Field Centenary Conference Abstracts 2014 taken from:

<http://michaelfield2014.wordpress.com/speakers-abstracts-and-biographies/> [Accessed 15 November 2015]

Knight, Mark, and Emma, Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Krafft-Ebing, Richard, von, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, (taken from Harvard University library collections website:

<https://archive.org/details/PsychopathiaSexualis1000006945> [accessed 3 December 2015]

Kuzniar, Alice. A, *Outing Goethe and his Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996)

Lacan, Jacques, Jacques Alain-Miller, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Freud's Papers on Technique: Freud's Papers on Technique* 1953-1954 (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991)

_. Le Séminaire *XXIII, Le Sinthome*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005)

Lauritsen, John, 'Hellenism and Homoeroticism in Shelley and his Circle,' *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49.3 (2005), 357-376

Ledger, Sally and Roger Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History*, *c.1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

—. 'Wilde, Women and *The Yellow Book*: The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and Decadence,' *English Literature in Transition*, *1880-1920*, 50. 1 (2007), 5-26

Lee, Michelle, 'Inventing Michael Field: Can Two Women Write Like One Man?' *Poetry Foundation*, web article, published January 27, 2010, http://www.poetryfoundation .org/article/238584

Leighton, Angela, '"When I am dead, my dearest": The Secret of Christina Rossetti,' *Modern Philology*, 87 (1990), 373-388

—. *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992)

—. '"Because Men Made the Laws": The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet,' in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed. Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp.215-34

Levinas, Emmanuel and Michael B. Smith, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

Liddington, Jill 'Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax (1791-1840): Her Diaries and the Historians,' *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), 45-77

Liggins, Emma, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction, 1850-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)

Logan, Deborah Anna, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse (*Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1998)

Lutz, Deborah, *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2015)

Lysack, Krista, 'Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.4 (2010), 538-541

Madden, Ed, *Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sexuality, Voice 1888-2001* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2008)

Mansfield, Nick, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: NYU Press, 2000)

Marcus, Sharon, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

Marcus, Steven, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1966)

Marsden, Simon, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Mason, Emma, '"Some God of Wild Enthusiast's Dreams": Emily Brontë's Religious Enthusiasm,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.1 (2003), 263-277

—. *Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 2006)

Maxwell, Catherine, *The Female Sublime From Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009)

McAdam, Gloria, 'Willing women and the rise of convents in nineteenth-century England,' *Women's History Review* 8.3 (1999), 411-441

Mellor, Anne K., *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

Mengin, Charles Auguste, (1877) *Sappho,* Manchester: Art Gallery via

<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1884.5>

Michie, Elsie B. *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry Jame*s (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011)

Miles, Rosie, *Victorian Poetry in Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Miller, Lucasta, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Vintage, 2002)

Montefiore, Jan, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing* (London: Pandora, 1987)

Morris, William, 'The Blue Closet' within *Collected Works, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.111-113.

Mulvey, Laura, **'**Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen,* 16.3 (1975), 6-18 <http://www.jahsonic.com/VPNC.html> [accessed 3 November 2015]

Munt, Sally R., *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (London: Routledge, 2009)

Nead, Lynda, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 1990)

Neu, Jerome, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Nochlin, Linda, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row 1989)

Oh, Jea Suk, 'A Study of Kristeva and Irigaray's Critiques on Phallogocentrism: An Interdisciplinary Research of Theology and Psychoanalysis', Yale Conference paper, 2005: <www.http://www.cerebration.org/jeasukoh.htm>l [accessed 1 December 2015]

Olverson, T.D., '"Such Are Not Woman's Thoughts": Amy Levy's 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays,* ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010) pp. 110-134

Oulton, De. La, Carolyn W., *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Oram, Alison, 'Sexuality in Heterotopia: Time, Space and Love Between Women in the Historic House,' *Women's History Review*, 21.4 (2012), 533-551

Orr, Danielle, '"I Tell Myself to Myself": Homosexual Agency in the Journals of Anne Lister (1791-1840),' *Women's Writing*, 11.2 (2004), 201-22

O'Leary, Joseph, 'Sex and Gender in *Albert Nobbs*,' *Journal of Irish Studies*, 26. 5 (2011), 88-96

Ostriker, Alicia, Suskin, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: Women's Press, 1987)

Ana, Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Parker, Alan Michael, and Mark Willhardt, *The Routledge Anthology of Cross-Gendered Verse* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Patmore, Coventry, *The Angel In The House, Volume 1* (London: Macmillan, 1863)

Pearsall, Cornelia. D.J, 'The dramatic monologue,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.67-88

Pollock, Griselda, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, third edition, 2003)

Pomeroy, Sarah, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1975)

Prins, Yopie, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

—. 'The Voice Inverse,' *Victorian Poetry,* 42. 1 (2004), 1-17

Prosser, Jay, 'Judith Butler, queer feminism, transgender, and the transubstantiation of sex' within Hall, Jagose, Bebell, and Potter, *The Routledge Queer Studies* Reader (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp.32-59

Pykett, Lyn, *Emily Brontë*, (New York: Rowan and Little Publications, 1989)

Rappaport, Jill, 'Review' of Elsie. B Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry Jame*s (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011) in *Victorian Studies,* 55. 3 (Spring 2013), 1-2

Raymond, Claire, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006).

Rich, Adrienne, *‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,’ Signs,* Women: Sex and Sexuality, 5.4 Summer (1980), 631-660

Rich, Jennnifer, *Modern Feminist Theory: An Introduction* (Penrith: Humanities Ebook LLP, 2014)

Ready, Barry, *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily Defamation in Victorian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002)

Reeves, Nancee, 'Vampires and Goblins: Coleridge's Influence on Christina Rossetti,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 21 (Spring 2011), 63-72

Roden, Frederick, *Same-Sex Desire and Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

Roulston, Chris, 'The Revolting Anne Lister: The UK's First Modern Lesbian,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 17.3 (2013), 267-278

Rowanchild, Anira, '"Everything done for effect:" Georgic Gothic and Picturesque in Anne Lister's Self-Production,' in *Women's Writing; The Elizabethan to Victorian Period*, 7.1 (2000), 89-104

Ruskin, John, *Of Queens' Gardens* (London: HardPress, 2012)

Saville, F. Julia, 'The Poetic Imaging of Michael Field' in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s,* ed. by Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. 178-206

Schafer, Talia, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000)

—. *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, reprint edition, 2014)

Scheinberg, Cynthia, 'Canonizing the Jew: Amy Levy's Challenge to Victorian Poetic Identity,' *Victorian Studies*, 39.2 (1996), 173-200

—. 'Recasting "sympathy and judgment": Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue,' *Victorian Poetry*, 35. 2 (1997), 173-191

Sedgwick, Eve, Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

—. *Epistemology of the Closet*, (1990) 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

—. *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994)

—. And Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)

Shahani, Nishant, *Queer Retrosexualities: The Politics of Reparative Return* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2011)

Silver, Anna Kruguvoy, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Sinfield, Alan, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977)

Solomon, Simeon (1864) *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene* [Watercolour], London: Tate Gallery via <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/solomon-sappho-and-erinna-in-a-garden-at-mytilene-t03063>

_. (1865) *Erinna taken from Sappho* [Pen and black ink on paper], Canada: Private Collection, Via Simeon Solomon Archive <http://www.simeonsolomon.com/artwork-1861-1865.html>

Spooner, Catherine, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)

Stein, Edward, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

Steinitz, Rebecca, 'Diaries and Displacement in *Wuthering Heights, Studies in the Novel*, 32.4 (2000), 407-419

Stetz, D. Margaret, Cheryl A. Wilson, eds., *Michael Field and Their World* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2007)

Stone, Alison, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2012)

Stoneman, Patsy *'Catherine Earnshaw's Journey to her Home Among the Dead: Fresh Thoughts on *Wuthering Heights* and 'Epipsychidion,' *The Review of English Studies*, 47 (1996), 521-533

Stuart, Jamie, *Performing Queer Female Identity on Screen: A Critical Analysis of Five Recent Films* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2008)

Styler, Rebecca, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Sutphin, Christine, 'Human Tigresses, Fractious Angels, and Nursery Saints: Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and Victorian Discourses on Prostitution and Women's Sexuality,' *Victorian Poetry*, 38 (2002), 511-532

Tallon, Russell, Helene, *Irigaray and Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009)

Tayler, Irene, *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)

Taylor, Lou, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: Routledge, 2010)

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The Newcomes* (1855) (London: Penguin, 1996)

Thain, Marion, *Michael Field: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Thomas, Kate '"What Time We Kiss": Michael Field's Queer Temporalities,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12 (2007), 327-35

Trapenard, Augustin, 'Auctorial (Im)Postures in Emily Brontë's Diary Papers,' *Brontë Studies*, 34.2 (2009), 93-106

Traub, Valerie, 'The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies,' *PMLA*, 128.1 (2013), 21-39

_. *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)

Valman, Nadia, *From Domestic Paragon to Rebellious Daughter: Victorian Jewish Women 1830-1910* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2012)

Vanita, Ruth, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)

Van Remoortel, Marianne, *Lives of the Sonnets 1787-1895: Genre, Gender and Criticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011)

Wang, Lisa, 'The Holy Spirit in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Poetry,' *Literature and Theology*, 14.2 (2000), 160-173

Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of The Virgin Mary* (London: Vintage, 2000)

Weeks, Jeffrey, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977)

Weintraub, Stanley, *The Yellow Book: Quintessence of the Nineties* (New York: Doubleday 1964)

White, Chris, '"Poets and lovers evermore" in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp.26-43

Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads,* (1798) (London: Penguin, 2006)

Wu, Duncan, ed. *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)

Deborah, Wynne and Amber, Regis, 'Miss Havisham's Dress: Materialising Dickens in Film Adaptations of *Great Expectations,' Neo-Victorian Studies*, 5.2 (2012), 35-58 via < http://www.neovictorianstudies.com/issues/NVS%205-2-3%20A-Regis%20+%20D-Wynne.pdf> [accessed 15 November 2015]

Joshua Horner C (1830)

Anne Lister

[Oil on canvas]

Halifax: Shibden Hall Collection

Appendix Two

Photographer unknown C. (1850)

Haworth Parsonage

[Ambrotype photograph]

Haworth: Brontë Parsonage Museum, Yorkshire

Appendix Three

Emily Brontë

Diary Paper (1837)

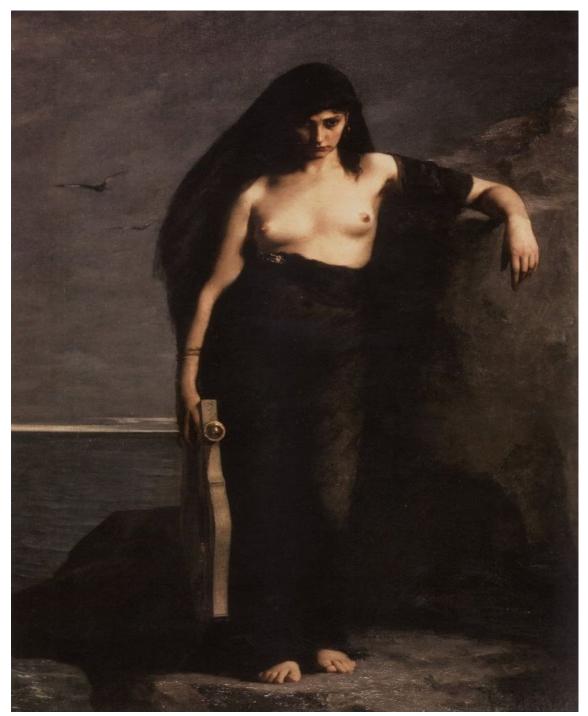[Pencil sketch]

London: British Library

Appendix Four

Charles Auguste Mengin (1877)

Sappho

[Oil on canvas]

Manchester: Art Gallery

Appendix Five

Simeon Solomon (1864)

Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene

[Watercolour]

London: Tate Gallery

Appendix Six

Simeon Solomon (1865)

Erinna taken from Sappho

[Pen and black ink on paper]

Private collection: Canada/Simeon Solomon Research Archive