

Performance Script

[HELENA walks in, sits on chair, gets comfortable and opens book]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Good day, my name is Helena Whitbread. I have worked for years translating and reading Miss Lister's coded diaries to make it possible for the public to share in her extraordinary life. As I'm sure you can tell, I've got quite a fascination with the woman: she repelled societal gender barriers (dressing on the masculine side of fashion and dating women) and near the end of her life, she independently owned Shibden Hall. So today I am proud to present this plaque to the extraordinary Miss Lister of Shibden Hall, as a commemoration of her life as a lesbian diarist, who sealed her union with her significant other here today 186 years ago. [unveils plaque on wall, turns back around and smiles] Now, let's travel back to 19th century England to a town called Halifax where her story began.

Anne Lister was born on the 3rd of April 1791 to her parents Jeremy Lister and Rebecca Battle.

[ANNE LISTER enters holding her diary and sits down in the chair she opens it and starts to write in it]

HELENA WHITBREAD CONT:

She had four brothers and one sister but only Anne and her sister Marian survived past 20 years of age. This left Anne being the eldest child in the family.

Anne started writing diaries in 1806 when she was 15 years old. In them we learn that this was the year after she was sent to boarding school where she met her first love, Eliza Raine. As I told you before, Anne wrote about her love life in a secret code, she called it crypthand. Her crypthand was a code devised of Greek letters and Algebraic symbols.

[Someone raises their hand, Helena calls on them]

HELENA WHITBREAD CONT:

Yes! You there! (pauses to listen) Well one of the most impactful people in Anne's life was Miss Mariana Belcombe. The two met in 1812 and held a close relationship until 1816, when something came between them. I believe that day her diary entry that day had gone something like this:

HELENA WHITBREAD & ANNE LISTER:

This afternoon at three and a quarter I went down to the library to check out some more books.

But the librarian said I couldn't check out anymore until I turned in my older ones. I tried to persuade him with 2 shillings to let me have more, but he still declined.

[LETTER CARRIER knocks on the door from backstage interrupting ANNE LISTER and HELENA WHITBREAD midsentence]

ANNE LISTER:

What is it?

LETTER CARRIER:

A letter for Miss Anne Lister from Miss Mariana Belcombe.

ANNE LISTER:

Come in.

[When ANNE LISTER hears Mariana's name a small but visible smirk crosses her face. ANNE LISTER holds out her hand and the LETTER CARRIER puts the letter in it]

ANNE LISTER:

Thank you.

[LETTER CARRIER walks back out of the door. ANNE LISTER starts to read the letter]

ANNE LISTER:

My Dearest Anne, I regret to inform you that I shall be married to Charles Lawton in March of 1816. I hope we shall still be together even though I will be married. Sincerely, your love,
Mariana Belcombe.

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Even though Anne felt crushed and betrayed that Mariana had chosen Charles over herself, their relationship endured for a little while longer. But Anne no longer believed that Mariana was hers. After they sopped seeing each other, and Anne fell into a mourning so deep that she vowed to always wear black.

[ANNE LISTER starts to write in her diary]

ANNE LISTER:

Spent the whole of the morning in vamping up a pair of old black 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.

[Angrily, loudly slams book and sits on edge of chair]

ANNE LISTER CONT:

People never cease to ridicule me about my clothing. I ought not to let the comments get to my head, but they still do sometimes. When I walk down the street people always look at me strangely and say to me 'you look like a man' 'why are you wearing man's clothing'. Why must people feel the need to criticize my clothing.

[ANNE LISTER sighs heavily and sinks back into the back of the chair]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Anne was frequently ridiculed for her choice of clothing, but confident. She never stopped wearing what she wanted. In 1822 Anne had an argument with her father over the construction of a new archway that would be built after her Uncle James' death. She disagreed with this plan heavily and went to her Uncle to protect her future inheritance of the estate. Back then it was very unusual for a woman to own her own land, let alone a whole estate, so if Anne was to get the estate it would be of the utmost importance. In 1826 her Uncle died.

[AUNT ANNE knocks on the door]

AUNT ANNE:

Anne? May I come in? I have some news to share with you.

ANNE LISTER:

Of course, Aunt Anne. What's wrong?

AUNT ANNE:

I'm sorry that I have to be the one to inform you, but your Uncle James has passed away.

[ANNE LISTER's face falls]

AUNT ANNE CONT:

The executor shall be arriving this Friday at three and a quarter.

[AUNT ANNE starts to say something but stops herself and quietly leaves the room]

[ANNE LISTER get up walks to fake window and pretends to gaze into the horizon. She walks back, sits back down and puts chair on the other side of the table]

[EXECUTOR knocks on the door]

ANNE LISTER:

Who is it?

EXECUTOR:

I'm the executor here to talk to you about your Uncle James' estate.

ANNE LISTER:

Oh, please do come in.

EXECUTOR:

Good afternoon, Miss Lister. How has your day been?

ANNE LISTER:

I'm doing quite well today. Thank you. And yourself?

EXECUTOR

Quite uneventful I'm afraid.

ANNE LISTER:

Please, sit down.

EXECUTOR:

So... [looks at UNCLE JAMES'S will] I see that you have been left Shibden Hall. I must also inform you that you won't gain full ownership until your aunt and father have passed on. You will have power over the tenants and the remodeling of the house. However, the money will go to your father and your aunt.

[ANNE LISTER looks disappointed]

ANNE LISTER:

I see...

EXECUTOR:

Any further questions?

ANNE LISTER:

No, but thank you for time.

EXECUTOR:

Then I must be going.

[ANNE LISTER and the EXECUTOR get up and shake hands across the table. Then ANNE LISTER walks the EXECUTOR to the door. Once he leaves ANNE LISTER walks back over and sits down with a huff]

[ANNE opens diary]

ANNE LISTER:

I adore Shibden Hall, but I do find the place quite dreary a times, I long to remodel Shibden into something far grander.

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Over the years she was forced to depend on her family for money. Whenever she wanted to improve parts of Shibden she had to ask her father for the funds to do so.

[ANNE opens diary]

ANNE LISTER:

Today I asked my father for money to replace a window in the dining hall. He was reluctant to lend it to me but in the end, I received it. How I long to have such money at my disposal as my good friend Ms. Walker.

[ANN WALKER enters stage with tea set on tray and sets the teacups, a letter, and letter opener out for ANNE LISTER and her. Then she uses kettle to pour tea in cups and she sits down]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Ann Walker was a wealthy heiress, she lived in Crow Nest, which was a neighboring estate to Shibden Hall. They had met as neighbors over tea years ago, and when Ms. Walker was 28, Anne returned to Shibden after being in Hastings for many months and they began to be great friends. Over time that friendship grew into something more.

ANNE LISTER (cheerfully):

Thank you for the tea Ann.

ANN WALKER (also cheerfully):

You're welcome Anne.

[ANNE LISTER attempts to open letter with knife but it breaks when she pulls it out]

ANNE LISTER:

Oh my! I'm so sorry!

ANN WALKER:

It's no problem, really. I have more.

ANNE LISTER:

No, this is such a special knife from your cousin. I will bring you a new one from Paris on my next visit that I hope you will cherish it as much as you did this one.

ANNE WALKER:

Oh, Anne, I will treasure the knife you will give me more than the one you have broken.

[both stare at each other longingly]

[Once HELENA starts talking, both get up, clear the table and put the props outside, then come back inside to sit down]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

A local businessman named Christopher Rawson soon took an interest in Anne Lister's coal. He thought that the price for Anne's coal was too high and tried to persuade her to lower it. When she wouldn't, he got upset. This led to him stealing her coal behind her back. When Miss. Lister learned about this she decided that the best solution was to sink her coal pits so that no one could use them. This was a very expensive endeavor that she couldn't achieve on her own.

ANNE LISTER:

I was wondering...

ANN WALKER:

Yes?

ANNE LISTER:

Would you mind if I can have a small loan of... 500 hundred pounds?

ANN WALKER:

Umm... why?

ANNE LISTER:

I need it to sink my coal pits. I learned recently that Christopher Rawson has been stealing my coal from me. I can't let that happen anymore. I would pay you back with interest of course.

ANN WALKER:

Of course, you can dear, anything for you.

[ANN WALKER gets nervous]

ANN WALKER CONT:

Also, someone keeps asking to marry me. I think that next time he asks I should say yes. We could still be together though. It would be like a cover up to what we've been doing.

[ANNE LISTER starts to look angry and upset]

ANNE LISTER:

No we wouldn't Ann, If you married someone else we could no longer be together.

ANN WALKER:

But why not?

ANNE LISTER:

Because I want you to be my wife. Not someone else's.

[Awkward silence]

ANN WALKER:

What do you think I should do Anne?

ANNE LISTER:

Do you like this man?

ANN WALKER:

No Anne I love you and only you.

ANNE LISTER:

Well, then there's your answer.

[ANNE LISTER storms off stage angrily. Leaving ANN WALKER to sit there sadly and contemplate what just happened.]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Although this occurrence in their relationship hurt them both they were still able to work things out. In 1834 they got married at the Holy Trinity Church in York. However, it was not a traditional marriage. Instead they took the sacrament and exchanged vows in the church, and called that their marriage.

[ANNE LISTER stares out the window longingly and upset. ANN WALKER walks in and sees ANNE LISTER looking forlorn]

ANN WALKER:

Anne?

[ANNE LISTER turns around but still looks sad.]

ANN WALKER CONT:

If you asked me to marry you again.... I wouldn't say no.

ANNE LISTER:

Really?

ANN WALKER:

Yes really.

[Both walk off the stage holding hands]

HELENA WHITBREAD:

Miss. Lister and Miss. Walker took the sacrament together, the closest thing they could get to a marriage. The two lived in a happy companionship for the next six years. But while traveling, Miss. Lister contracted a fever and died. Without anyone to talk to, Ann Walker presumably went insane and was put in a mental institute by her family. Miss Lister always wanted to be a writer and she wrote about 26 volumes of her diaries. This is the end of her story, so let's leave the last words to her;

[ANNE LISTER walks back on stage and breaks the fourth wall speaking to the judges]

ANNE LISTER:

With all my faults, Heaven grant me still the virtue of sincerity; and though I walk through many a darksome shade of folly and remorse, still let there be one light, the light of truth to guide me right at last.

Performance Photo/Illustration #1 (optional)

