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Publication Date

2021

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

CONSTELLATIONS OF SAPPHO: TEXTS, TRANSLATION AND SEXUALITY

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Rebekkah R. Dilts

June 2021

The Dissertation of Rebekkah Dilts is approved:

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2021

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Abstract

“Constellations of Sappho: Texts, Translations and Sexuality”

Rebekkah Dilts

“Constellations of Sappho: Texts, Translations and Sexuality,” is centered on a group of writers based in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century who comprised the literary and erotic movement, “Sappho 1900.” The group took the Greek poet Sappho as their literary and personal exemplar, producing unconventional translations of Sappho’s poetry in French, as well as memoirs, novels, and manifestos variously dedicated to Sappho’s perceived homosexuality and freedom of literary expression. While much of their work remains unpublished, unknown, and understudied, my research forwards that their experimental literary contributions prefigure contemporary conversations and debates about queerness, sexuality and the body by linking together social, scientific and spiritual concerns resonant in the present.

Chapter I of my dissertation, “(Un)veiling Sappho: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien’s Radical Translation Projects,” argues that Barney’s and Vivien’s unconventional translations and literary representations of Sappho are part of a feminist intervention that aligns with theorist Luce Irigaray’s rewriting of the ancient Greek canon to destabilize phallogentrism. Indeed, the Sappho 1900 writers enlist Sappho in the forging of a spiritual practice that could transcend patriarchal fantasies by fashioning of a “third sex.”

In Chapter II, “Sappho l’*androgynie*: Queerness and Spirituality,” I examine the way Vivien and Barney harken back to Aristotelian conceptions of the French *androgynie* to offer emancipatory renderings of queer bodies as a response to

nineteenth-century French medico-legal debates about adding the *hermaphrodite* as a legal “third-sex” category. I argue that these renderings anticipate contemporary conversations about queerness advanced by scholars like Amber Musser.

Yet not all radical nineteenth-century female writers viewed Sappho as a liberatory figure. Rachilde rebukes the Sapphic movement in her censored, “anti-feminist” novel *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), and articulates other radical sexuality and gender alternatives that have found resonance in the twenty-first century. The final chapter of my dissertation, “‘Être Sapho, ce serait être tout le monde !’: Rachilde and Textual Afterlives,” analyzes how the female characters in *Monsieur Vénus* and the lesser-known *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) assume the roles of sadist and masochist to offer an alternative *fin-de-siècle* feminism. *Monsieur Vénus*’s recent popularity, and the persistent interest in the biographies of Rachilde, Barney, Vivien and Sappho, reveal the complex relationship between feminist politics and female authorship – both in the late nineteenth-century and in the present.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

The path to this PhD has been a long and winding one which I could not have navigated without the support, encouragement, love and care from the beautiful community of family, friends and academics that I am lucky enough to know.

Enormous thanks to Susan Gillman, whose enthusiasm, confidence and intelligence is evergreen, and which I can only hope to emulate. Much gratitude to Dorian Bell, who so willingly joined my committee, and whose masterful edits, counsel and assistance proved vital. My deepest thanks to Carla Freccero for her impeccability, brilliance, and friendship, and for her willingness to guide my dissertation to its completion. To Wlad Godzich, who I am humbled to have had the opportunity to know and to have been guided by. Thank you, Wlad, for giving me the foundation upon which to build this project, and for all of the magic and tales.

Many thanks to Dane Johnson, Christopher Weinberger, Shirin Khanmohamoudi, Ellen Peel, Anne Linton, and Kitty Millet, incredible faculty at San Francisco State University, who helped me to earn my Master's degree, and to enter the PhD program at UC Santa Cruz. To Carole Viers-Andronico, director of the UC Center Paris, for being such an extraordinary source of inspiration.

I am forever transformed by the friends and comrades I've made along this journey: Erin Ellison, Maya Gonzalez, Elana Margot, Jack Davies, Jane Komori, Sarah Mason, Martabel Wasserman, Jared Gampel, Stefan Yong, Emma Wood. To Janina Larenas, both friend and ever-patient guide. Thank you to Rachel Fabian, for initiating me into the UC Santa Cruz graduate student social world, and for being so much fun to live with. To Luling Osofsky, my fellow mama-wildcat. To Hannah Newburn and

Jeremy Gauges, fellow travelers, who made life in Santa Cruz so much more livable. To Katie Lally, my true partner in many crimes. To Laura Martin, who has been a guiding light on multiple paths.

Thank you to Mary Welty-Dapkus, who helped me to see the bridge I needed to cross from the very beginning, and who has steadfastly supported me the whole of this journey.

Last, but in no way least, I have the utmost gratitude for my beautiful family who has always helped me to walk my own path. Many thanks to Brian and Deborah, for helping make my many stays in Paris possible. To Aunt Anita and Aunt Mary, my second and third mamas. To my sisters, Arianne and Mara, for all their love and support, and especially to Arianne for her extraordinary help in putting the essential finishing touches on this dissertation. Thank you to my parents, Elanah and Michael, for instilling in me a profound love of literature.

Finally, thank you Dylan and Cyrus for being my heart.

Introduction

In 1894, a strange book titled *Les Chansons des Bilitis* [*The Songs of Bilitis*] was published by the popular French writer, Pierre Louÿs. A collection of erotic poetry, it began with an introduction that claimed the poems were found on the walls of a tomb in Cyprus and were written by an Ancient Greek woman named Bilitis, a courtesan and contemporary of the ancient Greek poet Sappho:

Bilitis [a connu] Sapphô, et elle nous parle d'elle sous le nom de Psappha quelle portait à Lesbos. Sans doute ce fut cette femme admirable qui apprit à la petite Pamphylienne l'art de chanter en phrases rythmées, et de conserver à la postérité le souvenir des êtres chers. Malheureusement Bilitis donne peu de détails sur cette figure aujourd'hui si mal connue, et il y a lieu de le regretter, tant le moindre mot eût été précieux touchant la grande Inspiratrice. (10)

[Bilitis knew Sappho, and she speaks to us of her using Psappha [Sappho], the name she held in Lesbos. This admirable woman without a doubt taught the young Pamphylienne the art of signing rhythmic phrases, and of preserving for posterity the memory of those most dear. Unfortunately, Bilitis left us very few details about this figure, about whom so little is known today, and it is regrettable, since even the slightest word would have been precious regarding the great Inspirer.)¹

In fact, Louÿs fabricated Bilitis and the majority of the poems in the collection. He cites some of Sappho's real verses, but credits them to his invented Bilitis. To lend authenticity to the forgery, he listed some of the poems as "untranslated" in the book's index, and included a bibliography with earlier translations of collections of Bilitis's poetry, which were, of course, also false:

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- I. — BILITIS' SAEMMTLICHE LIEDER zum ersten Male herausgegeben und mit einem Woerterbuche versehen, von G. Heim — Leipzig. 1894.
- II. — LES CHANSONS DE BILITIS, traduites du grec pour la première fois par P. L. (Pierre Louÿs). — Paris. 1895.
- III. — SIX CHANSONS DE BILITIS, traduites en vers par Mme Jean Bertheroy. — Revue pour les jeunes filles. Paris. Armand Colin. 1896. (46)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY

- I. — BILITIS' SAEMMTLICHE LIEDER zum ersten Male herausgegeben und mit einem Woerterbuche versehen, von G. Heim — Leipzig. 1894.
- II. — THE SONGS OF BILITIS, translated from Greek for the first time by P. L. (Pierre Louÿs). — Paris. 1895.
- III. SIX SONGS OF BILITIS, translated in verse by Mrs. Jean Bertheroy. — _Review for Young Girls. Paris. Armand Colin. 1896.]²

Yet upon publication, the fraud eluded even the most expert of scholars. Perhaps most surprisingly, even when the literary hoax was eventually exposed, it did little to diminish the book's popularity.

Les Chansons des Bilitis remains a fascinating literary experiment that mocks and celebrates the deviant sexual proclivities that the period projected onto ancient Greek civilization – those that offered access to erotic fantasy while under the guise of a historical project. The popularity of Louÿs's book also illustrates the ubiquitous presence of the Greek poet Sappho in the nineteenth-century French literary world; Louÿs even notes that there is a dearth of information about Sappho – “cette figure aujourd'hui si mal connue” [this figure whom today is so poorly known about] – but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he chooses not to falsify any, instead attributing Sappho's poetry to an entirely imagined female figure. Louÿs's choice, and the endeavor as a whole, challenges the ethics of “faithful” translation, and begs the question: why didn't readers care that Bilitis wasn't a real poetess?

Louÿs (whose real name was Pierre Félix Louis), began his career as a classical Greek scholar, but devoted the majority of his artistic life to re-writing canonical Greek narratives, exaggerating them with bawdy details. In 1890, he even changed the spelling of his name to "Louÿs," and began pronouncing the final "s" to playfully affiliate himself even more with classical Greek culture (the letter "Y" is transliterated *i grec* in French, or "Greek I"). His engagement with Sappho, and with other female Greek figures like Aphrodite (or Venus, which is her Latin name), eroticized them – in sharp contrast to the majority of male writers of the period, who invoked these figures to affirm Christian moralism, and warn that sexually liberated women were dangerous.³ In 1896, for example, Louÿs published his first novel, *Aphrodite — mœurs antiques* [*Aphrodite — Ancient Morals*], which cast Aphrodite as a courtesan. It was the best-selling work by any living French author of the time, even though the introduction criticized contemporary French morality, and claimed that ancient Greece had a more expansive conception of sexuality:

L'amour avec toutes ses conséquences, était pour les Grecs le sentiment le plus vertueux et le plus fécond, en grandeurs. Ils n'y attachèrent jamais les idées d'impudicité et d'immodestie que la tradition israélite a importées parmi nous avec la doctrine chrétienne...On voit que la vie des Anciens ne saurait être jugée d'après les idées morales qui nous viennent aujourd'hui de Genève. Pour moi, j'ai écrit ce livre avec la simplicité qu'un Athénien aurait mise à la relation des mêmes aventures. Je souhaite qu'on le lise dans le même esprit. (9)

[Love, with all its consequences, was by measure the most virtuous and the most fecund sentiment for the Greeks. They never attached to it the kind of ideas about indecency and immodesty that the Christian doctrine took from the Israelite tradition. The way in which the Ancients lived cannot be judged according to the contemporary notion of morality that

comes to us from Geneva. And so, I wrote this book with the kind of simplicity an Athenian would have put into such adventures. I hope that it can be read in the same spirit.]

The success of Louÿs's project and *Les Chansons des Bilitis* in particular is indicative of the veritable obsession with the Greek poet Sappho in the nineteenth-century French literary world. Because so much of the focus in this historical moment was on futurity and modernization, it may seem surprising that a female figure from antiquity would capture so much attention. Yet the nineteenth century paradoxically involved not only the development of new disciplines and discourses but also a nostalgic idealization of the past—the Hellenistic period in particular—because ancient Greece was considered the forerunner of Western European civilization. Sappho's prominence during this period fascinatingly supported its concerns and obsessions with nationalism, sexuality, and race, most especially because there was so little known about Sappho, and because her poetry survives only in fragments, allowing writers and translators to fill them in based on their ideological stakes. Louÿs even notes that there is a dearth of information about Sappho, “cette figure aujourd'hui si mal connue” [this figure about whom so little is known today], but, unlike many of his contemporaries who translated Sappho's poetry and invented biographical details, he chooses to attribute Sappho's poetry to an entirely imagined female figure.

The driving force of interest in Sappho and translations of her poetry has consistently coalesced around the desire to determine her sexual identity. In the landmark scholarly account, *Fictions of Sappho* (1989), Joan DeJean describes how the

image of Sappho underwent an incredible transformation during the nineteenth century – from a representation of chaste Christian virginity, to that of a deviant, erotic homosexual:

In the course of the nineteenth century in France, Sappho leaves behind the often modest and always timid heterosexuality in which she had been disguised for nearly a century to reemerge as a figure of highly charged sexuality, first a courtesan, later a (sometimes depraved, sometimes oversexed) lesbian. (13)

The history of Sappho and of female homosexuality in nineteenth-century France and Western Europe has been well-documented by scholars like DeJean, and by Nicole G. Albert in her book, *Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of Fin-de-Siècle France* (2016).⁴ For DeJean, Albert, and other feminist scholars, Sappho's importance during this period is an example of how a historical female figure became caught in a political battle over her sexuality, and defined the contemporary conception of lesbianism in Western discourse.⁵

While the majority of translations and invocations of Sappho over the first half of the nineteenth-century were penned by the hands of men, Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien, (American and English respectively), became two of most well-known female writers and translators of Sappho at the turn of the century. Inspired and encouraged by Louÿs, they initiated both a literary and an erotic movement now known as "Sappho 1900," a moniker that came from the French writer Paul Lorenz's twentieth-century book, *Sappho 1900: Renée Vivien* (1977).⁶ Lorenz gave attention to the nineteenth-century French female writers and translators of Sappho (Vivien specifically), because these women and their translations were largely unknown, and even to date, much of their work remains untranslated and unincorporated in the scholarly context of

Sappho's *œuvre*. Scholars like DeJean and Albert, who have written about Barney and Vivien's translations and invocations of Sappho, have rightfully noted that their interpretations sought a version of a lesbian Sappho that could be emancipatory for women, in opposition to the male visions and fantasies of her same-sex desire that predominated.

Because Western history has considered Sappho the first female lyric poet, and because her poetry survives only in fragments, her influence as a radical poet and sexual subject has persisted as a source of debate in contemporary Western literature. Literary scholars are interested in the material fragmentation of Sappho's poetry and the fragmented narratives about her life. DeJean, for example, details the translational history of Sappho's poetry from 1546 to the beginning of the twentieth century; in *Sappho is Burning* (1995), Page duBois argues that the fragmented state of Sappho's poetry can reveal the fragmented nature of history itself, rendering a holistic restoration of Sappho – or of any historical figure – impossible. Marguerite Yourcenar and Anne Carson, both as scholars and as literary authors, have produced markedly different but radical re-writings of Sappho and of her poetry that challenge a stable perception of her *œuvre*.⁷

Sappho's perceived status as the first female poet of Western tradition woman has made her poetry and biography available to be written and re-written by both male and female writers and translators, in ways both compelling and suspect.⁸ The very fact that Sappho's work is fragmented – and therefore cannot be translated or read holistically – is in large part what has allowed the extension and proliferation of her poetry. It has also led to the poetry, writing, and ideological movements of others via their respective

invocations of Sappho: the attempts to fill in the missing fragments reveal persistent and latent beliefs about sexuality in their respective historical moments.

The complicated history of the obsession with Sappho as subject, along with the complex history of her translations, offer a critical entry point for exploring the status of female authorship, translation, and the formation of sexuality in the nineteenth century. The purpose of this dissertation is therefore not to reexamine the history of Sappho or of lesbianism in nineteenth-century France, but is rather to propose the way in which invocations of Sappho aligned with questions of the body and androgyny that also obsessed France during this period, and allowed Vivien, Barney and other women artists in their circle, access to a spiritual conception of the body and of female intellectualism.

Sappho, in my readings, is not only a historical figure, but also a *figuration* that animates different translational approaches. My conception of figuration derives from the “*figura*” Erich Auerbach outlines in his essay of the same name; in the essay, he traces the etymology of the word *figura* to formulate a distinction between allegory and figuration, a pursuit he continues in his landmark text, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946).⁹ Arguing that its original meaning was “plastic form,” he writes that, “[f]igura often appears in the sense of ‘deeper meaning’ in reference to future things” (35). For Auerbach, *figura* is simultaneously divine and earthly. He uses the instantiations of Beatrice in Dante’s literature as an example:

It should also be borne in mind that from the first day of her appearance the earthly Beatrice was for Dante a miracle sent from Heaven, an incarnation of divine truth. Thus the reality of her earthly person is not, as in the case of Virgil or Cato, derived from the facts of a historic tradition, but from Dante’s own experience: this experience showed him the earthly Beatrice as a miracle. But an incarnation, a miracle are real happenings: miracles happen on earth, and

incarnation is flesh. The strangeness of the medieval view of reality has prevented modern scholars from distinguishing between figuration and allegory and led them for the most part to perceive only the latter... In the *Vita Nuova* then, Beatrice is a living woman from the reality of Dante's experience—and in the *Comedy* she is no *intellectus seperatus*, no angel, but a blessed human being who will rise again in the flesh at the Last Judgment... actually, there is no dogmatic concept that would wholly describe her... (75)

The ways in which Barney and Vivien interpret and position Sappho in their literary writing aligns with Auerbach's interpretation of Beatrice as *figura*. Sappho appears in their works as a character, but as a character who is endowed with a history that is capable of offering the characters she encounters transcendence. In this sense, Sappho as a figuration is not bound to phenomenological time or space, but instead becomes a part of the time or space she inhabits, while simultaneously bringing her past to bear on the present.

I conceive of Sappho as a figuration in part to address an ethical dilemma faced by literary figures, especially female ones: their writing is all too often conflated with their bodies and their sexual experiences. Translations of Sappho's poetry have been motivated by the belief that Sappho's status as a female author (and the "first" Western female poet) can be made visible by translating her poetry. Nancy K. Miller, who complicates Roland Barthes's assertion in *The Death of the Author*, argues that female authors cannot – and perhaps should not – be disappeared from the literary work they produce.¹⁰ Alternatively, Peggy Kamuf (who publicly debated with Miller on this subject in the 1980s), rejects a feminist approach to literature that attempts to recover the female author because such an approach supports the liberal humanism responsible for

establishing sexual difference in the first place. In *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (1988), she writes:

Whatever the stakes of a polemic about “death of the author,” however welcome may seem a return to the subject (even a “changed subject”) or to history, the loss is not to be remedied, just more or less buried beneath appeals to a radical break or to a return. (Kamuf, 11)

While my dissertation premises that Sappho exists as a figuration and not as a static female subject, I will also argue that the conception of Sappho as the first female poet of Western tradition is what has motivated the translations of her poetry and narratives about her life, allowing translators and critics the ability to express sexual anxieties and desires perhaps unavailable under their signatures alone.

The method I develop in my dissertation is most indebted to the re-reading project that Luce Irigaray has advocated in her feminist theories, drawn from the theoretical work of *écriture féminine* by French feminist scholars. They especially sought both to identify the ways women are inscribed by patriarchal language, and the ways women can undo this patriarchal inscription through their writing and manipulation of language. Irigaray’s approach to re-reading canonized Greek texts is an ideal entry point with which to read the different translations of Sappho’s work and the various iterations of her biography: what has the conception of Sappho offered her translators in their historical moment that was inexpressible otherwise?¹¹ Gayatri Spivak has written about how translation is capable of inscribing women and subaltern bodies, but that they can also resist such inscription by adopting ethical translation methods. The texts that

comprise the Sapphic constellation I construct are those that offer radical approaches to re-writing Sappho and to translation itself.

In Chapter I, “(Un)veiling Sappho: Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney’s Radical Translation Projects,” I consider how Barney’s and Vivien’s invocations of Sappho’s poetry, unlike even Louÿs’s unconventional attempt, represent a radical approach to translation that offer an alternative feminine experience of language. These are, for example, approaches that re-write Sappho’s biography into new literary projects, that intentionally attribute her poetry to other characters, or that refuse to fill in the missing pieces of her fragments in the translation altogether. Through formal, close-readings, I show how Barney and Vivien purposefully attempt to “veil” or render ambiguous narratives of Sappho in order to wrest her image from the dominant misogynistic versions. Their interest in invoking and translating Sappho is, I argue, a feminist intervention that aligns with Irigaray’s controversial approaches to re-writing the ancient Greek canon and to destabilizing phallogentrism.

While the nineteenth century saw a resurgence in “spiritualism” as an alternative to organized religion, Barney’s and Vivien’s interest in Sappho and in spirituality sought a set of practices that could connect them to an experience of their bodies and their sexuality that could transcend patriarchal fantasies, and potentially allow a “third sex” or alternative subjectivity to emerge. Indeed, in Barney’s and Vivien’s representations, Sappho is both androgynous and divine, capable of transcending a singular gender or sexuality. In Chapter II, “Sappho L’Androgyne: Queerness and Spirituality,” I extend Irigaray’s ethical belief that new forms of love and female self-affection can emerge from re-writing projects, and return to Michel Foucault’s lectures on religion and spirituality published as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-82), in order to argue

that Vivien's and Barney's figuration of Sappho allowed them access to a spiritual experience of the body and sexuality. I first consider how their representations of Sappho are a response to the nineteenth-century French medico-legal debates over adding a legal "third sex" category to the male-female binary – which would have ultimately served to further oppress those who did not identify as male or female.¹² The third sex characters that appear in Barney's and Vivien's writing, I then argue, are not the deviant figures that appear in the literature of many of their male contemporaries, but are rather transcendent beings who invent new languages and practices of love. These practices are aligned with the definition of spirituality that Foucault offers: a commitment to caring for the self that allows a subject access to truth.

Yet, not all radical female writers of the period viewed Sappho an emancipatory figure for exploring alternative conceptions of female sexuality. The French writer Rachilde, a contemporary and colleague of Barney's and Vivien's, rebukes the Sapphic movement in her gender-bending, censored novel *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), yet still articulates radical alternatives for female sexuality and queerness that have found resonance in the twenty-first century. In Chapter III, "Être Sappho, ce serait être tout le monde !": Rachilde and Textual Afterlives", I examine the sexual violence in *Monsieur Vénus*, and in Rachilde's much lesser-known *La Marquise de Sade* (1887). Based on the definition of sadomasochism Gilles Deleuze outlines in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1991), I argue that the use of sadism and masochism in both *Monsieur Vénus* and *La Marquise de Sade* places its female characters in the unlikely positions of masochist and sadist to offer a provocative critique of the decadent movement and its representations of sexuality, the body, and even nationalism. These controversial

novels, and *Monsieur Vénus*'s recent popularity, are revelatory of the way in which women authors, their perceived biographies, and their writing remain problematically conflated in the reception of their literary work.

While DeJean and Albert offer a comprehensive historical account of the translations and commentaries on Sappho in nineteenth-century Western Europe, I will briefly discuss several of the primary works of translation and interpretation that appeared during the period, specifically those that had the greatest influence on Vivien and Barney (some of which are cited directly in their writing and translations), and those that were most popular among late nineteenth-century French and Anglophone audiences. In nearly all of the translations, even when it is unintentional, fantasy is integrated with what its editors and translators considered to be historical accounts. In the cases of Charles Baudelaire and A.C. Swinburne, their writing was not primarily translational or scholarly in aim, but the appeal of their poetry in fact inspired historical analysis, scholarly pursuits, and the modern definition of the word “lesbian.”

Nearly half a decade before Louÿs's *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, there emerged the first fictional French account of Sappho in two centuries that posited her sexuality as unconventional. Authored by a left-wing writer and socialist, Émile Deschanel, the 1847 article, “Les Courtisanes Grecques: Sappho et les Lesbiennes” [Greek Courtesans: Sappho and the Lesbians] affirms, “notre Sappho, si grand poète...elle fut Lesbienne dans toute l'étendue de ce terme [our Sappho, the great poet...was a lesbian in every sense of the term] (343). The popularity of his interpretation and its sensational account of Sappho's sexuality is credited with reinvigorating the Sapphic tradition in late

nineteenth-century France; while DeJean makes clear that “[t]here is no great merit in Deschanel’s argument”, she emphasizes:

So powerful is Deschanel’s vision that it alters the entire course of Sappho’s history in nineteenth-century France...Immediately after its publication, the center of speculation shifts not only from chastity to sexuality but also from erudition to fiction. The first half of the century had produced almost no powerful fictions centered on Sappho. In Deschanel’s wake, however, writers from Baudelaire to Daudet, from Louÿs to Vivien, gave Sappho a hold on the French literary imagination more powerful than any she had exerted before...Deschanel touched the pulse of his century. (261)

The definitive nineteenth-century translation and commentary of Sappho’s poetry in Latin, *Anthologia lyrica* (1854), was published less than a decade after Deschanel’s article there appeared what would become by German philologist Theodor Bergk. Scholars credit Bergk’s translation with confirming Sappho’s nineteenth-century lesbian status because of his translation of “The Ode to Aphrodite” (the only complete surviving poem attributable to Sappho). In the poem, the speaker, named Sappho, calls out to Aphrodite to alleviate the scorn of an unrequited lover; Bergk used a female pronoun for Sappho’s lost lover, whereas previous versions had used a male pronoun. He did not, however, note the reason for this decision linguistically or otherwise. As DeJean writes, “scholars eulogized his edition, but almost no one maintained his [homosexual] reading [of ‘The Ode to Aphrodite’]” (252).

Baudelaire’s extremely popular and controversial book of poetry, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, was published in 1857, although most of the poems had already been appeared in journals throughout the decade prior to the collection’s publication. The original title was in fact *Les lesbiennes* because its most popular previously published poems, “Femmes

damnées (Delphine et Hippolyte)” and “Lesbos”, were about “deviant” ancient Greek female lovers. In “Lesbos”, Baudelaire portrays Sappho as an androgynous poet, more beautiful in her deathly pallor than Venus:

De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète,
Plus belle que Vénus par ses mornes pâleurs!
— L'oeil d'azur est vaincu par l'oeil noir que
tachète Le cercle ténébreux tracé par les douleurs
De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète! (67)

[Of her the man-like lover-poetess,
In her sad pallor more than Venus fair!
The azure eye yields to that black eye, where
The cloudy circle tells of the distress
Of her the man-like lover-poetess!] (Shepherd 16)¹³

These poems had an enormous influence on popularizing the decadent lesbian image of Sappho, inspiring a wide number of writers, artists, scholars and translators. Baudelaire was also famously put on trial following the book’s publication for “outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes mœurs” [outrage to public morality], largely attributable to the homosexual content in “Femmes damnées” and “Lesbos.”

English writer Algernon Charles Swinburne published his collection *Poems and Ballads* in 1866; like Baudelaire’s, Swinburne’s poetry was considered quite controversial due to his subversive and erotic invocation of Greek figures like Sappho. In his very popular poem “Sapphics,” he deems Sappho and her lover Anactoria “lesbians,” and depicts them kissing. Swinburne’s poems were his own inventions but attempted to mimic Sapphic verse. While the first documented use of the word “lesbian” to refer to female homosexuality was in 1870, four years after the publication of *Poems and*

Ballads, Swinburne is considered one of the first to popularize it as a term for same-sex love.¹⁴ Both Vivien and Barney were great fans of his, and cite from *Poems and Ballads* frequently in their writing.

The English scholar Henry Thornton Wharton is credited with bringing translations of Sappho's poetry to Anglophone audiences in 1885, when he published the first of three editions of *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation*. Unlike some of his French contemporaries, Wharton seemed more conscious of the challenge translating Sappho's fragments presented. In the preface he writes:

My aim in the present work is to familiarise English readers, whether they understand Greek or not, with every word of Sappho, by translating all the one hundred and seventy fragments that her latest German editor thinks may be ascribed to her. I have contented myself with a literal English prose translation, for Sappho is, perhaps above all other poets, untranslatable. The very difficulties in the way of translating her may be the reason why no Englishman has hitherto undertaken the task. (23)

Wharton's book was Barney's and Vivien's first exposure to Sappho's poetry, and the collaborative structure of his approach to translation was very influential to the one Vivien would take in hers: Wharton includes original Greek fragments, literal translations in English, other English translations that he deemed "worthy of such apposition" and "a note of the writer by whom, and the circumstances under which, each fragment has been preserved" (25). He even includes citations from Swinburne's poetry. Bergk's translations in Latin also appear frequently in Wharton's edition, and he maintains the homosexual interpretation of "Ode to Aphrodite". Yet, he avoids directly confronting the question of Sappho's homosexuality, leading DeJean to characterize his Sappho as "ambivalent" and "bisexual."¹⁵

André Lebey, a French writer, poet and editor of *La Revue socialiste* was one of the scholars who claimed that Baudelaire’s poem “Lesbos” was a motivating influence on his desire to translate Sappho’s poetry – which he did in his 1895 collection, *Les poésies de Sappho: traduites en entier pour la première fois* [*The Poems of Sappho: Translated in Entirety for the First Time*]. Lebey considered his approach to translation more accurate than those of others because he included all of Sappho’s fragments, and edited them very little, not taking the license many nineteenth-century translators did. In the introduction to his translations, he claims the merit of Sappho’s poetry matters more than her “*mœurs*” [morals] or controversial sexuality: “Sapphô n'a pas besoin de justification; ni la pudibonderie des petites bourgeoises de protester. Une nature vraiment puissante a le droit de se mettre hors des règles communes” [Sappho needs no justification, nor the prudish protestations of the petty bourgeoisie. A person with a truly powerful nature does not have to adhere to common standards of decency] (15). Yet Lebey seems to have taken inspiration from Louÿs (to whom he dedicated the book), by including bawdy, exotic descriptions of Sappho’s ancient Greece, rendering the introduction contradictory in tone. Lebey’s translation of “The Ode to Aphrodite” also broke with Bergk’s then-definitive one, refuting Sappho’s lesbian status by using a male pronoun for the lover:

Quel est-*il*, ô — Sapphô, celui dont tu te plains?

— Car, s’il fuit, bientôt il te recherchera, — et s’*il* refuse tes présents, *il* t’en donnera d’autres, — et s’*il* ne t’aime pas, bientôt *il* t’aimera — même si tu ne le veux pas. » — Viens à moi encore maintenant, délivre-moi d’une chagrine — pensée ; ce que je célèbre, — ce que mon cœur désire, achève-le! Toi-même — sois mon alliée ! (26)

[Who is *he*, O Sappho, the one you're complaining about?
For if *he* flees, *he* will soon search for you, and if *he* refuses your gifts, *he*
will give you others, and if *he* does not love you, soon *he* will love you -
even if you want it not. Come to me again now, deliver me from sadness,
thought; that which I celebrate – that which my heart desires, fulfill it!
You – be my ally!]

Lebey's book ultimately did not sell well, and there were just under 300 copies printed. DeJean praises his translations, however, claiming that "Lebey's 1895 volume is easily the best French edition of the century" because "he respected [the] fragmentary status" of Sappho's poetry, and resisted "the impulse to which almost all his precursors had succumbed, of sewing them together into ersatz units" (261). He also publicly denounced Vivien's book of translations when he heard that she was intending to publish one, prompting Vivien's publisher to respond publicly with a cutting reminder that Lebey's book was out-of-print.¹⁶

Salomon Reinach was also a scholar who made valuable archaeological discoveries in Greece and had an intimate friendship with Vivien, referring to her as "une fille de genie et le plus grand poète du XXeme siècle" [a girl genius and the greatest poet of the twentieth-century].¹⁷ Prior to his death, he gave the Bibliothèque Nationale de France a set of letters between himself and Vivien, but requested that they not be read until the year 2000. Since their opening, the letters have revealed much about how Vivien came to learn ancient Greek, and there has been recent scholarship considering Reinach's and Vivien's influence on one another each other.¹⁸

In 1911, the French archeologist and Hellenist scholar Théodore Reinach (Salomon Reinach's brother) first published his book of translations, *Alcée. Sappho*; the

revised 1937 version remains today one of the definitive French translations of Sappho's poetry.¹⁹ Reinach initially took great pains to argue that Sappho was chaste, changing his opinion by the second edition of the translations. In 1879, the first new Sapphic fragment since the early seventeenth century was discovered.²⁰ Reinach is credited with deciphering it for French audiences in the 1901 issue of the *Revue des Études Grecques* [*Review of Greek Studies*]. Prior to the 1911 publication of his first translations of Sappho's poetry, Reinach wrote to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres [Academy of Language and Literature], claiming that the newly recovered fragment definitively proved Sappho was chaste, and therefore "le procès de Sappho" [Sappho's trial] should be reopened.²¹

Nineteenth-century France would instigate changes in laws that affected the publication of literary works. These laws in some ways promoted freedom of speech, and allowed for a new wave of writers to explore anxieties about sexuality; one such law, *la loi sur la liberté de la presse*, was passed in 1881, and it sought to do away with the moralizing censorship that had affected Baudelaire. While these legal changes allowed female writers more visibility as authors, their work was often dismissed as non-literary if it offered representations of deviant sexuality, because of the problematic conflation among female author, her personal experiences, and her literary writing – the same kind of conflation that the image of Sappho and the translations of her poetry faced (and affected the author Rachilde, the subject of the final chapter).

Even the most avowedly historical editions of translations or publications about Sappho reflect misogynist and Orientalist representations of female sexuality and the body that were widely held during the period. Likely because disciplines like archaeology and philology were part of national and colonial projects, many of the

characterizations of Sappho and of the island of Lesbos are infused with nineteenth-century sexual and racial fantasies. For example, while Deschanel's portrayal of Sappho is radical in his claim that she is a lesbian, he was also, as the title of his article might suggest, interested in "Lesbians" as both a sexualized and racialized group with whom modern women could establish affinity:

Une institution très réelle, destinée à entretenir et à perfectionner la race, c'étaient le concours de beauté. Elles seules [les femmes de Lesbos], dans la société antique, pouvaient jouer le rôle de ce que l'on nomme les femmes du monde dans la société modern. (237)

[The beauty contest was a real institution, destined to maintain and perfect the race. (The women of Lesbos), they alone in ancient society played the role of what we might call worldly women in modern society.]

While this image of Lesbos and its inhabitants renders them sexually liberated, Deschanel's Lesbos is also an exotic place that reflects the colonial imaginary that would flourish in France and affect the translations and receptions of these works for years to follow.

Indeed, Baudelaire's and Louÿs's writing represent Lesbos as an exotic space of otherness where Sappho and Lesbians can engage in different kinds of sexual and erotic practices. Nearly every refrain of Baudelaire's poem, "Lesbos", begins with a description of an exotic Greek island: "Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses/ Qui font qu'à leurs miroirs, stérile volupté!/ Les filles aux yeux creux, de leur corps amoureuses/ Caressent les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité/ Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses" [Lesbos, Land of hot and languid nights / That gives but its mirrors

infertile pleasure! / The girls with hollow eyes, amorous bodies/caress the ripe fruit of their nubility/Lesbos, land of hot and languid nights] (67). In Louÿs's *Les Chansons des Bilitis*, he claims Lesbos was "le centre du monde" [the center of the world], and that its capital, Mytilene, was "une cité plus éclairée qu'Athènes et plus corrompue que Sarde, bâtie sur une presqu'île en vue des côtes d'Asie" [a city more enlightened than Athens and more corrupt than Sardinia, built on a peninsula, the shores of Asia in sight] (46).

In her scholarly account, *Sappho* (2015), Page Dubois suggests that because Lesbos is "facing East," (the island is on the Aegean Sea, closer to Turkey than to mainland Europe), it may explain differences that characterize Sappho's poetry and its reception from that of other classic Greek poetry:

Lesbos lies near the coast of Asia...and to understand [Sappho] better is to come to terms with the ways in which she faces eastwards, rather than towards the more familiar metropolis that was Athens in the classical period...For some, Sappho matters deeply because her work illuminates the position of the Aegean island of Lesbos, so close to Asia, and remote from the Greek mainland, and therefore turns our gaze on the ancient Greeks away from Athens and towards a wider, eastern landscape. (47)

Arguably, the conception that Sappho was closer to the "East" perpetuated the orientalism and exoticism of nineteenth-century Western Europe. There was even intentional conflation of Sappho with French female writers; the Haitian poet, Virginie Sampeur, for example, who was married to the famous Haitian poet and politician Oswald Durand (whom she ultimately divorced), lived in France during the late nineteenth century, and earned attention from the French literary world. Sampeur was dubbed the "Haitian Sappho," and her poetry and biography was interpreted through Sappho's:²²

Nouvelle Sappho abandonnée par son Phaon, elle tend toutes les cordes de son cœur pour crier musicalement son désespoir vrai... Elle fut délaissée par Oswald. C'est cette histoire qu'elle nous conte dans la pièce qu'elle a intitulée, "L'abandonnée." (Vaval, 88).

[The new Sappho abandoned by her Phaon, stretches the strings of her heart to musically cry out her true despair... She was deserted by Oswald. It is this story she recounts in the play she titled, "The Abandoned."]

I emphasize the characterization of writers like Sampeur, the exoticizing orientalism in the writing of male authors, to set the stage Barney and Vivien entered as women writers and translators. There were notably no published translations of Sappho's poetry by a woman in nineteenth-century France until Vivien; and, as Sampeur's characterization indicates, female writers frequently became themselves "Sapphos" or other characters the poets and historians were constructing, to which Barney fell victim.²³ Vivien's invocations and translations of Sappho have, even in contemporary scholarship, frequently been read through her biography.

Indeed, as of today, the work of Vivien and Barney remains largely unpublished and unknown, and their invocation of Sappho as a spiritual project that sought transcendent forms of love is a dimension understudied. Aside from *Monsieur Vénus*, most of Rachilde's prolific body of work also remains untranslated. In fact, much of the writing on Barney, Vivien and Rachilde is dominated by interest in their biographies and unconventional lives – like the fascination that has dominated writing attributed to Sappho. My dissertation considers this dilemma, and reconsiders the ways that these female writers sought, in their writing, articulations of sexuality and desire outside of the social order of their time. Uniquely inspired by Sappho, the experimental literary

contributions put forth by Renée Vivien, Natalie Clifford Barney, and Rachilde prefigure contemporary conversations and debates about queerness, sexuality and the body by linking together social, scientific and spiritual concerns resonant in the present.

Chapter I:

(Un)veiling Sappho:

Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney's Radical Translation Projects

Of Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien, Vivien was the only one to perform direct translations of Sappho's poetry.²⁴ Her desire to translate Sappho was likely of such great importance because there was a dearth of women writers in the translations, commentary, and poetry indebted to Sappho. As Barney confirms in her biography, *Souvenirs indiscrets* (1960), Vivien was inspired by Wharton's translations of Sappho's poetry and kept them at her bedside.²⁵ Born in London as Pauline Tarn, she had an English father and an American mother, permanently immigrating to Paris as an adult after inheriting her father's fortune. This inheritance allowed her the freedom to live independently, to travel extensively, and to write. Because she spent much time in France throughout her childhood, Vivien learned French from an early age, and all her literary writing was done in French. She identified as homosexual and had romantic relationships with women exclusively (hers with Barney being one of the most significant), although she had strong intellectual friendships with male writers and editors.²⁶ Yet she struggled with depression, alcoholism, and anorexia, and committed suicide in 1909 at the age of thirty-two after several unsuccessful attempts. She was, however, quite prolific in her short life, publishing close to a dozen works of poetry and prose. While there has been increased attention paid to Vivien's writing, most of it has not been translated into English or republished in French.²⁷

Her translation of fifty of Sappho's poems, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle avec le texte grec* [*Sappho: New Translation with the Greek Text*], was published in 1903. It was her second publication, but the first to bear her nom de plume, Renée Vivien.²⁸ The book includes a preface, a biography of Sappho, and three subsequent sections: "Odes,"

“Épithalames,” and “Fragments,” a structure that modeled Wharton’s, although Vivien makes clear in her introduction that Sappho loved women. In addition to printing the poems in ancient Greek, she attempts a literal prose translation, and often a fuller version that tries to mirror the structure of Greek verse. The translations and poems of others are frequently included as well, like those of English poet and writer Algernon Charles Swinburne:

Je t’aimais, Atthis, autrefois . . .

Le soir fleurir les voluptés fanées,

Le reflet des yeux et l’écho de la voix . . .

. . . Je t’aimais, au long des lointaines années,

Atthis, autrefois.

And they shall know me as ye who have known me here

Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year

When I love thee . . .

SWINBURNE: *Poems and Ballads, Anactoria*²⁹

Swinburne’s poem is a playful attempt to mimic Sapphic lyricism, and Vivien endeavors to do the same in her second, more extended translation³⁰. In an essay titled “Anne Dacier (1681), Renée Vivien (1903): Or What Does It Mean for a Woman to Translate Sappho?,” Jacqueline Fabre-Serris situates Vivien as the first major French female translator of Sappho since Anne Le Fèvre Dacier in the seventeenth century. Fabre-Serris believes Vivien’s translations and “poetic pairings”—her use of Swinburne’s and Catullus’s poems in Latin included alongside Sappho’s— so “remarkably successful” that the book “should be taken as [a] clue on how to read Sappho ‘today’” (100). Yet DeJean considers the liberty Vivien takes in “making the briefest of fragments into full-fledged poems” problematic, and an “important departure from her stance of scholarly

respectability, a departure which is largely responsible for her edition's notoriety."

DeJean continues:

[There is an] unsettling quality [to] these "translations." Because her expansions so greatly overburden the often fragile remains, Vivien seems to assume Sappho's voice, to try to replace the original. . . . Vivien's doubly Sapphic poetry ultimately seems designed only for an initiated public. . . . Even a sympathetic reader can hardly avoid the inevitable realization of Vivien's morbid identification with Sappho. . . . At the very least, this text is so violently different from other editions available to fin-de-siècle readers, that it must have been easy to dismiss it as an invention. The scholarly tradition, for example, remains prudently mute on the subject of Vivien.³¹

If DeJean interprets Vivien's characterization of Sappho "morbid" because of Vivien's own suicide, it is ironic, since Sappho's alleged suicide and the reasons for it have dominated the translations and interpretations of her poetry. DeJean is not the only one; other scholars have echoed the conclusion that Vivien's invocations of Sappho convey macabre undertones.³² To interpret Vivien's translations as an identification with Sappho's supposed suicide and as a harbinger of Vivien's is to ignore the larger implications of the project, and to, like Sappho, consign Vivien as a female author to her biography. Instead of a shrouded suicide note, these unconventional translations can be read as a feminist intervention that echoes those Luce Irigaray performs on the Greek canon.

A linguist, psychoanalyst, philosopher and gender theorist, Irigaray has devoted the majority of her academic career to exposing the patriarchy inherent to Western discourse, which has offered women neither a "feminine" language nor a female subjectivity. Because women have not had their own subjectivity or their own language, they have had to exist within masculine discourse, making them "multiple." In *Speculum de l'autre femme* [*Speculum of the Other Woman*] (1974), for example, Irigaray writes

that “[woman] is forced to serve many functions, torn apart, drawn and quartered in the service of the specific unit(y) of a field, a name, a sex, a gender, that are devoid of all possibility of touching again. . . . Never is she one, either male or female.”³³ Conversely, masculine subjectivity has been based on binary systems that privilege mastery and unity—“a logic of pairs of opposites: activity/passivity, love/hatred, nearness/distance, male/female and even I/other(s)”—excluding women as diffuse or as lack.³⁴ Instead of denouncing dominant masculine discourse, however, Irigaray mimics or reinterprets master narratives in order to articulate a possible feminine language from the diffuse and ambiguous representations of women. A new language, for Irigaray, can lead the way to a female subjectivity unbound to masculine subjectivity. While the way in which she defines the feminine is often characterized as essentialist—by Judith Butler notably—Drucilla Cornell articulates Irigaray’s feminine as “a kind of radical otherness to any conception of the real” and as a separate category to that of “female,” since Irigaray’s conception of the feminine subject can extend outside biological or anatomical identification.³⁵ I agree with Cornell that Irigaray’s conception of female subjectivity is not necessarily limited to “female” in its distinct biological or social sense; rather, it signifies a conditional subjectivity, one dependent on its relationship to masculinity.

Irigaray’s theoretical approaches are especially useful in the context of Barney’s and Vivien’s invocations of Sappho because Irigaray has also been invested in performing mimetic rereadings of canonical Greek texts in particular. As the nineteenth-century French obsession with antiquity affirms, ancient Greece has been the foundation for so much of contemporary Western discourse. In a collection of essays about her mimetic practices of rereading ancient Greek discourse, *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and “the Greeks”* (2010), Irigaray argues that Greek culture has, for the contemporary Western world, elicited “nostalgia for an impossible return.”³⁶ In their introduction, Elena Tzelepis and Athena Athanasiou explain:

Irigaray renders the archive of Western metaphysics available for a rereading. . . . [this] rereading does not seek to bring the disclosed aspects of the Greek text to the propriety of full presence and the mastery of interpretation. It is not a cognitive commentary but rather a performative engagement; one that, in bringing forth the internal production of difference and improper usage, works as an affirmation and reinvention of the dispersal. . . . [She] returns persistently to the founding discourses of Ancient Greek thought whose genealogical transmission through the ages has been too singularly generated through phallogocentric lines. She does so by deploying strategies of free-indirect citing, miming, specularizing, and displacing monologic classical Greek metaphysics with polylogic, pre-Hellenic genealogies.³⁷

Irigaray has performed mimetic rereadings of Plato's Cave, as well as Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*. In what has been called her "most thoroughly Greek text," *Amante marine: De Friedrich Nietzsche (Marine Lover, 1980)*, she takes the imaginary position of Nietzsche's lover and enters a textual dialogue with Nietzsche by citing his writing and then commenting on it with her own.³⁸ The section "Veiled Lips," in particular, "reads as a kind of 'Greek' rewriting" in which Irigaray proposes alternative feminist interpretations of the Greek goddesses Athena, Ariadne, and Persephone.³⁹ She suggests, for example, that Persephone's passage back and forth from the underworld can be interpreted as one of empowerment as opposed to one of objectification: "Persephone has experienced the two veils, the two masks/hiding places, the two edges, the two faults in the invisible."⁴⁰ Irigaray inserts images that she considers innately feminine into male discourse, like veils, and like lips. Lips are not only indicative of the mouth but also of the vulval lips, which Irigaray equates with the possibility of a feminine language because "[they] are always at least two—joined in an embrace—so women's language will be plural, autoerotic, diffuse and undefinable within the familiar

rules of (masculine) logic.”⁴¹ Sara Speidel, who has translated some of Irigaray’s writing into English, claims that “Irigaray unsettles the notions of meaning at work in any simple approach to translation:”

She evokes the possibility of a feminine writing, in a style which diverges radically from traditional syntactical forms. Fragments of sentences exist side by side, without subordination—parts which are whole and yet “without unity.” Words evoke multiple sense—simultaneously—setting in motion a continuous play in which no single, “proper” meaning can be identified. This plural, rhythmical, “non-unitary” mode of writing asks to be read “differently”—outside “the logic which dominates our most everyday statements,” and beyond the models of discursive coherence and closure which, according to Irigaray, amount to a “death” sentence for woman (always defined negatively in the theoretical discourse of Western philosophy—as man’s opposite, his “other,” not-man).⁴²

While Irigaray’s dialogue with Nietzsche in *Marine Lover*—and her mimetic rewritings of other canonical texts—are not translation in a strict sense, Vivien and Barney employ strategies that similarly “unsettle” the field of Sapphic translations to provide an alternative “performative engagement” with Sappho than the masculine translations and accounts of their generation. Like Irigaray’s approaches, theirs initiate dialogues with male writers, purposefully rewrite established biographies, and use images—like the veil—to conceive an alternative representation of Sappho, her fragments, and feminine language. While translation is typically grounded in determining a singular interpretation, Vivien chooses to juxtapose multiple translations and invocations of Sappho’s poetry, resisting a position of dominance taken by translators like Lebey, who pronounced his approach superior. A textual dialogue with other translators and writers emerges in Vivien’s version, one that in fact includes Lebey’s translation for what is considered

Fragment 30 (she does not number it or any of the fragments): “*Je ne sais que faire: j’ai deux pensées. Je ne sais pas ce qui me manque; mes pensées sont doubles.* Trad. André Lebezy” [*I don’t know what to do: I have two thoughts. I don’t know what I lack: my thoughts are double*].⁴³ Vivien then weaves markedly different translations of the same Sapphic fragment into a series of new translations; one translation reads that the speaker *slept* with a woman in a dream, for example, and the other reads that the speaker *spoke* to a woman in a dream (emphasis added):

Ζά δ’ ἐλιξίμαν ὄναρ Κυπρογενήα.

*Et certes j’ai couché dans un songe avec la fille de Kupros.*⁴⁴

Autre version du fragment:

Ἡράμαν μὲν ἔγω σίθεν, Ἄτθι, πάλαι πότα.

[*And certainly I slept in a dream with the daughter of Kupros.*

Other version of the fragment:

Ἡράμαν μὲν ἔγω σίθεν, Ἄτθι, πάλαι πότα.]

Albert believes that Vivien’s incorporation of these disparate translations is a form of reader response that “asks the reader to decide” among them; their inclusion also makes visible to readers the liberty taken by translators to suppress indication of Sappho’s possible homosexuality and to transform Sappho into their desired image.⁴⁵ Yet Vivien never interjects as a translator to privilege any particular version.

The extended translations Vivien offers—or the “amplifications” that DeJean thinks replace Sappho’s voice—are a purposeful blurring between Vivien and Sappho that seek obscurity. Vivien writes: “c’est en vain que la nuit de Lesbôs / M’appelle, et que l’or du paktis se prolonge . . . / Je t’ai possédée, ô fille de Kuprôs, / Dans l’ardeur d’un songe” (it is in vain that the night of Lesbôs / Calls me, and that the gold of paktis is prolonged . . . / I possessed you, O daughter of Kuprôs [Cyprus], / In the ardor of a

dream), and “Un clair souvenir se rythme et se prolonge / Comme un son de lyre indécis et voilé . . . / Fille de Kupròs, je t’ai jadis parlé / A travers un songe” [A clear memory is rhythmic and prolonged / Like the sound of a lyre undecided and veiled . . . / Girl of Kupròs, I spoke to you long ago / Through a dream].⁴⁶ While both versions are equally erotic in their interpretation of the source fragments, their eroticism does not provide certainty as to the relationship between the speaker and the female object of desire. Vivien excises the adverb *certes* [certainly] or a synonym; the call of night is “en vain,” or futile; her comparison of “un clair souvenir” [clear memory] to the “indécis et voilé” [undecided and veiled] sound of a lyre is a false comparison that renders memory unclear. Fabre-Serris characterizes Vivien’s word choice connoting ambiguity as intervention:

In her [version of Sappho’s] poems, it is the choice of vocabulary which creates an atmosphere that is different from the ancient original . . . a predilection for a background made up of immobility, of uncertainty, of the evanescence of things, and emotions in the past and in dreams.⁴⁷

Irigaray frequently invokes the image of the veil in her mimetic rewritings because it is a feminine image that signifies both a barrier and a partial opening. In the essay “Textiles That Matter: Irigaray and Veils” that appears in *Rewriting Difference*, Anne-Emmanuelle Berger finds the image of the veil essential to Irigaray and her rewritings of Greek discourse, even though it does not necessarily have any relationship to ancient Greece. Berger claims that “Irigaray tries to counter the veil of metaphysics with another kind of ‘veil,’ a material envelope that would delineate boundaries without closing borders, and that would neither veil the truth nor be subjected to cover-ups, whether philosophical or cultural.”⁴⁸ In her translation of Sappho’s fragments, Vivien uses the veil as a paradoxical symbol of female oppression and protection. Sappho has been veiled by the

many interpretations and translations of her, but Vivien’s version does not try to unveil her.

Instead of adding words when presenting some of the fragments, Vivien alternatively intersperses the text with watermarks, artistic symbols, and even brackets to intimate the missing fragments of Sappho’s poetry: a nonlinguistic approach to purposefully “veiling” Sappho’s corpus (Fig. 1). In Anne Carson’s unconventional but lauded translation of Sappho’s poetry, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2003), she, too, purposefully elects not to fill in Sappho’s fragments—either in their ancient Greek or in her English translation of them—to expose the desire for mastery and wholeness that has dominated translations of Sappho’s poetry and her biographies.⁴⁹ Like Vivien, Carson includes brackets to indicate the missing pieces of fragment. In her introduction, she explains:

When translating texts read from papyri, I have used a single square bracket to give an impression of missing matter, so that] or [indicates destroyed papyrus or the presence of letters not quite legible somewhere in the line. . . . Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it. . . . I emphasize the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it. Brackets are exciting. Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure.⁵⁰

The use of brackets is for Carson an “aesthetic gesture” that calls attention to the absence of an accurate record of Sappho and her poetry in its entirety. While the proliferation of formal and artistic symbols on the pages of Vivien’s are admittedly the opposite of the “free space” on Carson’s, they too invite “imaginal adventure,” signaling how little of

Sappho's fragments exist and the imagination—and literal images—required to fill them in. I include an image of a page from Vivien's book because these symbols have an effect on the experience of reading, but cannot be “translated” or reproduced in the citations I provide: they represent another kind of veil draped between Sappho and meaning.

Rather than a provocative proclamation that Sappho loved women, as it has often been interpreted, the “Biographie de Psappha” at the beginning of Vivien's book can be read as strategically miming the biographies that male translators like Lebey added at the beginning of their books, and of the overeroticized descriptions of Sappho and of Lesbos that appear in Baudelaire's and Deschanel's writing. In the introduction to his book, Lebey simultaneously avoided and renounced the question of Sappho's homosexuality, claiming that a truly great poet does not need justification—but he still affirms that Sappho was a great “beauté” [beauty]:

Vous savez ce que fut que Sapphô . . . Il est donc inutile que je le redise . . . au plaisir de me répéter à moi-même: Sapphô fut très belle. Sa peau était un peu brune. Ses yeux, bleu clair insondable, illuminaient le cercle d'ombre où ils apparaissaient enchâssés.⁵¹

[You know who Sappho was . . . It is therefore useless for me to restate it...It is with pleasure that I repeat to myself: Sappho was very beautiful. Her skin was somewhat brown. Her eyes, an unfathomably clear blue, illuminated the shadowed circle in which they seemed to be encased.]

In her biography, Vivien writes of Sappho:

De la femme qui atteignit jusqu'aux purs sommets de la gloire nous ne savons presque rien, les siècles ayant trop impénétrablement embrumé la splendeur de son lointain visage. . . . En face de l'insondable nuit qui enveloppe cette mystérieuse beauté, nous ne pouvons que l'entrevoir, la deviner à travers les strophes et les vers qui nous restent d'elle. Et nous

n'y trouvons point le moindre frisson tendre de son être vers un homme.⁵²

[Of the woman who reached the highest peaks of glory, we know almost nothing; the centuries having too impenetrably obscured the splendor of her distant face. . . In the face of the unfathomable night that envelops this mysterious beauty, we can only glimpse her, guess at who she is through the strophes and verses that remain. And in them, we find not the slightest tender shiver for a man.]

Vivien's characterization of Sappho, "cette mystérieuse beauté" [that mysterious beauty] whom we can only glimpse "[e]n l'insondable nuit" [in the unfathomable night], is an ironic recollection of Lebey's, Louÿs's and Baudelaire's depictions of Sappho, and the erotic scenarios they staged between women on humid nights in Lesbos. Vivien even uses the same adjective Lebey uses—"insondable" [unfathomable]—but in Lebey's description, it is Sappho's eyes that are unfathomable, whereas in Vivien's, it is the night. Instead of a time and space of deviant sexual possibility, the night is the uncertainty and obscurity that does not allow Sappho to be fully seen. In Vivien's translations, Sappho remains strategically veiled by the watermarks and symbols placed in between the Greek fragments and translations, and by the diverse translations and interpretations of her that Vivien cites. Yet Vivien's version still unleashes the eroticism of Sappho's fragments to convey forms of female desire that are not bound to the figure of Sappho. The "nous" (we) who will find no "frisson tendre vers un homme" [tender shiver for a man] is indeed an "uninitiated public," as DeJean surmises, to whom Vivien's translations offer a radically different encounter with Sappho's poetry.

While Vivien, even if criticized, has entered conversations on translations and commentaries of Sappho's poetry, the literary work Barney produced was not—and still is not—often analyzed or discussed in scholarly settings. When she was first published, Barney was considered a less serious or well-trained poet and writer than was Vivien, and interest in her was dominated by her spectacular life. Barney was born to an extremely wealthy American family in 1876, and her mother, Alice Barney, was a well-connected painter and artist. Natalie Clifford Barney grew up predominantly in the United States, but attended a boarding school in France. She was therefore fluent in French by the time she was an adult, and expatriated to France at the turn of the century, where she would remain until the end of her long life in 1972. She was introduced to Vivien through a mutual friend and was struck by Vivien's poetic talent. Their relationship was one of friendship, romance, and literary collaboration, although fraught; Vivien's suicide was its tragic end. As Barney details in *Souvenirs indiscrets* (1968), she was encouraged to publish her writing by Vivien, and the two women bonded over a mutual adoration for Sappho and for France: “Renée Vivien a joué un rôle considérable dans ma vie, et sans doute la réciproque fut-elle vraie. Nées toutes deux à la même époque, elle en Angleterre, moi aux Etats-Unis, nous fûmes, dès notre adolescence, attirées par ce même centre d'attraction: Paris” [Renée Vivien played a considerable role in my life, and no doubt the same was true for her. Both born at the same time, she in England, I in the United States, we were, from our adolescence onward, lured by the same center of attraction: Paris].⁵³ Barney also identified as a lesbian, and in addition to Vivien, she had well-publicized relationships with the famous French courtesan Liane de Pougy and with the painter Romaine Brooks, who provided illustrations for some of Barney's books. Yet Barney opposed monogamy, and valued friendship above all forms

of relationship, a belief fused with her connection to Sappho and with her pursuit to support other women writers.⁵⁴

Undeniably, the contribution she is most known for is her literary salon. It ran for almost sixty years at Barney's home on Paris's Left Bank, and had in its yard what she deemed "Le Temple d'Amitié" [The Temple of Friendship]. To her salon, she welcomed some of the most lauded French, American, and British writers and artists of the twentieth century: Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Marcel Proust, Rachilde, Paul Valéry, and Colette, for example. In a rare film interview with the BBC in 1966, Barney claimed that her initial motivation for establishing an international Anglo-French literary salon was in fact translation: "I thought that the French and the American and the English should meet and translate each other's work as much as possible, so I opened [the salon] in that view."⁵⁵ Translation for Barney was essential to formulating new encounters with language that could foster new kinds of relationships and erotic encounters. It may be precisely because French was not their first language that Vivien and Barney were so interested in translation and were more playful and poetic in their use of French. Barney's was, however, an unusual form of the language. In *Women of the Left Bank* (1986), Shari Benstock argues that Barney invoked an older form of French to articulate an alternative feminine perspective:

Barney consciously chose an outdated form of French prosody in which to declare her commitment to female eroticism. . . . Why would a woman so philosophically, sexually, and politically in advance of her time revert to older forms for poetic expression, especially when the subject matter might seem to call for an equally radical and unconventional form of expression? Barney's poetry addresses a subject that has been denied a literary tradition of its own. Although the external forms of this poetry were traditional, even clichéd, they enclosed a radical sentiment.⁵⁶

While I wish to avoid consigning Barney's linguistic choices with her personality or lifestyle, Vivien and Barney consciously elected to compose their literary writing in French—in contrast to other Anglophone feminist writers and ex-patriots, like Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes, who were also invested in constructing new forms of language and sexual identities. French, it seems, allowed both Vivien and Barney new ways to articulate their sexuality and eroticism.

While Barney did not attempt a literal translation of Sappho's poetry, and her literary style differs significantly from Vivien's, her invocations of Sappho take very different forms than those of her contemporaries and can be considered radical approaches to translation. In *Éparpillements* [*Scatterings* or *Fragmentations*] (1910), her best-selling book, Barney famously wrote, “Faire des fragments” [Make fragments]. Composed of aphoristic musings on feminism, art, and society, some scholars have claimed the call to “make fragments” and the structure of the text as a whole was directly influenced by Sappho and her poetry fragments.⁵⁷ Like Irigaray, Barney is interested in emphasizing forms of language—like linguistic fragmentation—that mimic the fragmented representation of the feminine in phallogocentric discourse.

While Barney began learning ancient Greek, she did not perform prototypical translations of Sappho's poetry and chose to nest the fragments within her fiction and in her nontraditional autobiographies.⁵⁸ The most direct invocation of Sappho's poetry is in the play “Équivoque,” which appears in Barney's 1910 book *Actes et entr'actes* [*Acts and Intermissions*]. The narrative is an alternative version of Sappho's life in which her friends Eranna and Gorgo (the names of Sappho's supposed disciples) discover that the reason for her suicide was not because of her unrequited love for Phaon but because of her love for her female student—and Phaon's fiancée—Timas. The title of the play,

“Équivoque,” translates to “equivocal” or “ambiguous” in English, and ambiguity extends to the play’s formal elements.⁵⁹ While the dialogue is Barney’s invention, it integrates sixteen lines of Sappho’s fragments into the speech of Sappho and into the speech of the other characters. The Sapphic fragments are printed in ancient Greek in a postscript that follows the play:

Eranna: Leurs regards nuptiaux sauront
t’humilier Si tu restes . . .

Sappho: Je reste.

Gorgo: Et tu crois oublier! Songeant au proche hymen, ton front penché se
trouble.

Sappho: Je ne sais que choisir car ma pensée est double. (1)

(1) *Les chiffres entre parenthèses se réfèrent aux fragments de Sappho utilisés et qui se trouvent à la fin de pièce.*⁶⁰

[Eranna: Their nuptial gazes will humiliate you
If you stay . . .

Sappho: I’m staying.

Gorgo: And you believe you can forget! Thinking of the marriage so
imminent, your inclined face is troubled.

Sappho: I do not know what to choose because my mind is double. (1)

(1) *The numbers correspond to Sappho’s fragments that have been used here and that can be found at the end of the play.]*

It is Vivien’s translation of the Sapphic fragment “je ne sais que choisir car ma pensée est double,” that Barney uses to convey Sappho’s ambivalence about whether to stay or flee after her lover marries. In *Performing Antiquity: Ancient Greek Music and Dance from Paris to Delphi* (2018), Samuel N. Dorf writes that the play’s “format is reminiscent of Louÿs’s faux scholarly apparatus in *Les chansons des Bilitis*, but instead of deceptively leading the reader to an imaginary fabricated Lesbos, Barney reverses the project. Her

footnotes root her fabricated imaginary Lesbos to the real shards of poetry.”⁶¹ Like Louÿs’s *Les chansons des Bilitis*, Barney’s play intentionally eludes accuracy and offers a purposeful fiction instead. Yet importantly, the fragments printed in the postscript of “Équivoque” are *not* translated, printed only in ancient Greek. By citing Vivien’s translation, Barney leads her audience to Vivien as well as to Sappho.

According to Barney, the play was intended to be acted by and for women only.⁶² It was first performed at the home Barney lived in prior to moving to her famous apartment in a town outside Paris; in fact, after the landlord discovered the play was about lesbianism, Barney was evicted and she moved to the Left Bank, where more renditions would be performed. Colette famously took part in these performances, as did other well-known female actresses of the period.⁶³ There have been a number of recent books and essays on the relationship between performance and queerness in the performances of Barney’s plays, which were accompanied by live music and dance.⁶⁴ It is especially significant that Barney elected to have only women perform and view “Équivoque” because, along with the numerous translations and literary publications about Sappho that emerged in nineteenth-century France, there were many popular plays that cast Sappho as a deviant femme fatale. Racine’s play *Phèdre* (1677), for example, was revived and performed to packed audiences.⁶⁵

In “Double Consciousness in Sappho’s Lyrics” (2002), J. J. Winkler suggests that there is a “double consciousness” or multiplicity of perspective inherent to Sappho’s poetry because, whoever Sappho might have been, she identified as a female subject and therefore had to ventriloquize the dominant male poetic voice in addition to offering a feminine perspective:

Sappho seems always to speak in many voices: her friends’, Homers’,
Aphrodites’, conscious of more than a single perspective and ready to detect the

fuller truth of many-sided desire. But she speaks as a woman to women: her eroticism is both subjectively and objectively woman-centered.⁶⁶

Sappho's ability to speak with to women as a woman, coupled with the fact that poetry was to be delivered as lyric song in public, stages an intimate female experience. Winkler writes:

Sappho often seems to be searching her soul in a very intimate way but this intimacy is in some measure formulaic and is certainly shared with some group of listeners. And yet, maintaining this thesis of the public character of lyric, we can still propose...senses in which such song may be "private": first, composed in the person of a woman (whose consciousness was socially defined as outside the public world of men); second, shared only with women (that is, other "private" persons: "and now I shall sing this beautiful song to delight the women who are my companions," frag. 160 L-P,10).⁶⁷

Barney's "Équivoque" cultivated public intimacy among women writers and artists not by simply invoking Sappho but by distilling the public intimacy Sappho's poetry evokes into a collective and performative feminine experience.⁶⁸ In *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988), Karla Jay claims that because of its lack of coherent plot, "Équivoque" "would probably baffle even the most sympathetic audience."⁶⁹ Like DeJean, who believes an "uninitiated public" could not comprehend Vivien's translations, Jay fails to interpret disorientation as one of the objectives of a radical project that intentionally deviated from other theatrical versions of Sappho that catered to mostly male audiences.

Barney's most unconventional invocation of Sappho is in *Pensées d'une Amazone* (1920), her answer to a feminist manifesto and the genre "pensées."⁷⁰ As with her *Éparpaillements*, the text is self-consciously fragmentary. In the section titled "Le

malentendu ou le procès de Sappho (fragments et témoignages)” (The Misunderstanding or the Trial of Sappho [Fragments and Testimonies]), Barney intersperses translations of Sappho’s poetry by the writers and translators of the period (including Vivien) with racial, sexual, and psychological discourse to question its authority on homosexuality:

Sappho songe peut-être aussi à arracher sa bien-aimée à celui qui la possède.
«Il me paraît l’égal des dieux, l’homme qui est assis en ta présence et qui entend de près ton doux langage et ton rire désirable, qui font battre mon cœur au fond de ma poitrine. Car lorsque je t’aperçois, ne fut-ce qu’un instant, je n’ai plus de paroles, ma langue est brisée, et soudain un feu subtil court sous ma peau, mes yeux ne voient plus, mes oreilles bourdonnent, la sueur m’inonde et un tremblement m’agite toute; je suis plus pâle que l’herbe et dans ma folie je semble presque une morte . . . Mais il faut oser tout». («Ode à une femme aimée»; Sappho, trad. Renée Vivien).

Et dans ses «Sapphiques»:

“Ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion! All the Loves wept, listening; sick with anguish, Stood the crowned nine Muses about Apollo; Fear was upon them, “While the tenth sang wonderful things they knew not. Ah the tenth, the Lesbian! . . .”⁷¹

Les livres de physiologie traitent d’exemples parfois moins poétiques, et autrement définis: «En naissant elle était très petite. Sur un portrait d’elle à 4 ans, le nez, la bouche et les oreilles sont d’une grandeur anormale et elle porte un petit chapeau de garçon . . .» (L’inversion sexuelle par Havelock Ellis. Cas. IV, etc):

Si j’ai choisi mes exemples plutôt dans la littérature, c’est que les êtres doués d’expression se racontent avec plus de subtilité et d’étendue, et dans une forme plus acceptable.⁷²

[Sappho is also perhaps thinking of wresting her beloved from he who possesses her.

“He seems to me the equal of the gods, the man who sits in your presence, hears your sweet words from nearby and your delightful laugh, which makes my heart beat in the depths of my chest. Because when I see you, even for a moment, I no longer have words, my tongue is broken, and suddenly a subtle fire runs under my skin, my eyes do not see, my ears buzz, I am flooded by sweat, and a trembling shakes my entire being; I am paler than grass and in my madness I seem almost dead . . . But we must dare it all.”
 (“Ode to a Beloved Woman,” Sappho, tran. Renee Vivien).

And in her “Sapphics”:

“Ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion! All the Loves wept, listening; sick with anguish, Stood the crowned nine Muses about Apollo; Fear was upon them, “While the tenth sang wonderful things they knew not. Ah the tenth, the Lesbian! . . .”

Physiology books often provide less poetic examples, and defined otherwise: “At birth she was very small. In a portrait taken at the age of 4 the nose, mouth and ears are abnormally large and she wears a little a boy’s hat . . .” (*Sexual Inversion*, by Havelock Ellis. Case IV).

If I take my examples from literature instead, it’s because beings who have been endowed with expressive skill tell their stories with more subtlety and range, and more in a more acceptable form.]

The section’s title, “Le malentendu ou le procès de Sappho,” is a reference to Théodore Reinach’s proclamation that the question of Sappho’s homosexuality be reconsidered after the discovery of the new papyrus fragment in 1879 that Reinach believed proved

Sappho was unquestionably chaste. Barney, however, reverses the “trial” and uses Sappho’s fragments to contemplate the limits imposed by the burgeoning fields of psychology, biology, and the medical sciences, to adequately address homosexual love and desire.

Arguing that literature is able to articulate the experience of sexuality in ways that other forms of discourse cannot, she constructs a textual dialogue with other literary writers, citing from the work of Montaigne, Voltaire, Chaucer, Whitman, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Oscar Wilde on love. In “Le Malentendu ou le Procès de Sappho,” Barney, like Irigaray in *Marine Lover*, creates an unconventional dialogue among a wide-ranging number of writers and authors, inserting – although never asserting – a radically different perspective on sexuality that seeks to transcend binary sexuality. Following her invocation of Ellis, Barney begins a rumination about how those who expressed same-sex desire in the nineteenth century were often considered a third- sex, or more specifically, a “*hermaphrodite*.” She writes:

Nous sommes presque tous d'un composé humain si complexe qu'il faut répéter que chacun de nous possède des principes masculins et féminins. Quelle femme n'est mâle en quelque sorte, quel homme n'a reçu quelque compréhension ou attributs féminins, qui nous rappelle au temps qui précédait la division des sexes.

L'hermaphrodite existe encore et de multiple façon.

Swinburne traite l'Hermaphrodite du Louvre comme l'apogée de l'être double, de façon plastique

«*Pour quel étrange but quelque étrange dieu a-t-il fait
belle «La double floraison de deux fleurs sans fruits?...
«A toi qui es la créature des heures stériles?*

(Trad. M. Gabriel Mourey).

Mais cette dualité, d'être généralement invisible n'en est pas moins réelle? (87)

[Almost all of us are of a human composition so complex that it bears repeating that we all possess male and female principles. What woman is not in some way male, what man has not had some understanding or feminine attributes that reminds us of a time that preceded the division of the sexes. The hermaphrodite exists still and in many ways.

Swinburne treats the Hermaphrodite of the Louvre like the apogee of the double being, in a plastic way

"For what strange purpose has some strange god made
beautiful "The double flowering of two flowers without fruit?..
"To you who are the creature of barren hours? ⁷³

(Trad. Mr. Gabriel Mourey).

But this duality of being generally invisible, is it no less real?]

Once referred to as an "*androgyn*e" in the burgeoning French medical literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a person who would now be defined as intersex came to be called a "*hermaphrodite*" in nineteenth-century France, a shift not only in terminology but also in ideology.

When Barney (and Vivien, as I will discuss in the next chapter) begin to formulate their literary characterizations of androgyny in the late nineteenth century, it had become a source of fascination and debate in France; androgynous characters filled the pages of much of the most popular French literature of the period. Swinburne's poem,

“Hermaphroditus”, which Barney references in the above citation, as well as Théophile Gautier’s poem, “Contralto”, were inspired by their mutual obsession with an androgynous statue, “Sleeping Hermaphroditus”, that stands in the Louvre.⁷⁴ Onlookers were so tantalized and befuddled by its ambiguous gender that they could not help but touch it. In the words of Anatole France, the statue was “a été usé par les caresses des visiteurs que l’administration des musées a dû protéger par une barrière la figure monstrueuse et charmante” [so worn out by visitors’ caresses that the monstrous and charming figure had to be protected by a barrier] (9).⁷⁵ Gautier’s incredibly popular novel *Mademoiselle Maupin* (1835) also details its narrator’s obsession with an androgynous figure.

In fact, Louÿs and Baudelaire both describe Sappho as androgynous in their writing, yet it was a characterization they use to confirm her sexual deviance. In Bilitis fragment 48, “Psappha”, devoted to Bilitis’s supposed encounter with Sappho, Louÿs writes:

Il fait déjà jour, je crois. Ah! qui est auprès de moi?... une femme?... Par la Paphia, j'avais oublié... Ô Charites! que je suis honteuse. Dans quel pays suis-je venue, et quelle est cette île-ci où l'on entend ainsi l'amour? Si je n'étais pas ainsi lassée, je croirais à quelque rêve... Est-il possible que ce soit là Psappha! Elle dort... Elle est certainement belle, bien que ses cheveux soient coupés comme ceux d'un athlète. Mais cet étrange visage, cette poitrine virile et ces hanches étroites...

(72)

[It’s already day, I think. Ah! Who is next to me?...a woman? By the Paphia, I forgot...Oh, Charites! I am so ashamed. From what country had I come, and what is this island where love can be heard thus? Had I not been so weary, I would’ve thought it a dream...Was it possible that it was the Psappha! She slept...She was certainly beautiful, even though her hair

was cut like an athlete's. But that strange face, that manly chest and those narrow hips...]

Psappha's feminine beauty is coupled with masculine physical traits to create a duality that intensifies the narrator's feelings of eroticism – a strategy Baudelaire similarly employs in his poem “Lesbos”:

De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète,
Plus belle que Vénus par ses mornes pâleurs!
— L'oeil d'azur est vaincu par l'oeil noir que tachète
Le cercle ténébreux tracé par les douleurs
De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète!
(67)

[Of the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers,
More beautiful than Venus by her woes.
The blue eye cannot match the black, where lingers
The shady circle that her grief bestows
Of the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers —]76

While Baudelaire does not explicitly call Sappho androgynous, he deems “mâle” a feminine word, conveying his own version of androgyny (and one that does not easily translate into English or languages without gendered nouns). Yet it is his interpretation of an androgynous Sappho in “Lesbos” that is largely credited with igniting the image of the deviant Sappho that sensationalized mid-nineteenth century France.⁷⁷

The fascination the literature of the period articulates over the erotic status of androgyny also commanded the French medical and legal world, which had become concerned with solidifying a set of social and legal codes that would govern bodies of indeterminate sex – a discourse that Barney directly challenges with Sappho's poetry in

Pensées d'une amazone. “As the popularity of the androgynous figure spread to France during the height of the romantic movement,” Weil writes in *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, “it moved out of the realm of pure ideas and entered practical treatises concerning the social order and social ‘progress’” (68). Central to the medico-legal debate became the question of terminology; while pre-modern medicine used the word *androyne* to describe an individual contemporary medical and legal discourse terms intersex, nineteenth-century medicine began to employ the word *hermaphrodite* instead, which, while still derived from antiquity, connotes a fallen or unnatural body with an excess of sexual organs.⁷⁸ As critics like Weil have noted, the shift in terminology from *androyne* to *hérmpahrodite* is representative of a broader ideological shift in nineteenth-century French society. “To distinguish between [*hermaphrodite* and *androyne*] is important,” Weil writes, “since *androyne* and *hermaphrodite* have different histories and different physical effects, having primarily to do with the status of the body” (10). The use of the word *androyne* denotes wholeness, whereas the use of the word *hérmpahrodite* evokes the much more sinister representation of the fallen body in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

Aristophanes’ myth identifies the *androyne* with an ideal, even an Edenic state of being, a state of wholeness in which nothing is lacking. Visually, his story represents androgyny as perfect symmetry between two united halves. Whereas for Aristophanes androgyny precedes the fall, Ovid’s hermaphrodite embodies the fallen state, because s/he blurs the distinction between male and female. Unlike Aristophanes’, Ovid’s account tells us that at the origin of desire is, not wholeness, but an unstable and frightening confusion from which there emerges, not ideal love, but a power struggle between the sexes, each trying to establish a wholeness it never had...The resulting union [in the myth] does not produce

wholeness; instead, it displaces the oppositions self/other and male/female between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. (Weil, 19)

Not only does the term used to describe a person of indeterminate sex shift from *androgyne* to *hermaphrodite* in the mid-nineteenth century, but a medical-legal debate ensued as to whether to add the *hermaphrodite* to the male-female binary as a legal third-sex category. In her essay, “Hermaphrodite Outlaws: Ambiguous Sex and the Civil Code in Nineteenth-Century France,” author Anne Linton describes the controversy:

Nineteenth-century France became obsessed with the legal ramifications of hermaphroditism. Both medical and legal experts clamored to write on the subject... Since no legal category existed at the time to describe individuals who were neither clearly female nor clearly male, hermaphrodites in France became ‘outlaws.’ Contrary to the codes in other European nations that possessed laws governing marriage, divorce, or annulment in cases of doubtful sex, in France a unique legal situation coupled with historical pressures fueled social anxieties and stoked the debate about sexual ambiguity. The rigorous Napoleonic Code required that all infants be sexed diamorphically (labeled “male” or “female”) and registered formally within three days of birth. Marriage sanctioned only binary sex...But there was also a vocal contingent advocating the addition of a third class of ‘neuter’ citizens to the Civil Code, while still others claimed that ‘true sex’ might be impossible to determine before death in certain individuals. To listen to their fervent prose, it becomes clear that what is at stake in these debates is the future not merely of a tiny fragment of the population but, rather, of the entire social structure and, equally important, of who would have the power to change it. (87-88)

The father and son Isidore and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the very same biological scientists who established categories of race and monstrosity, were the most vocal in support of legally adding another category of sexuality.⁷⁹ The *hermaphrodite* therefore became known as a “sexually inferior race or third sex,” and individuals deemed hermaphroditic

were subject to physically and emotionally painful forms of medical and legal examination and legislation.⁸⁰ In this sense, the medico-legal categorization of bodies as *hermaphrodites* – as part of a “sexually inferior race” underscores the ways in which sexuality became inextricable from racial discourse in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

In *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought* (1989), author Tzvetan Todorov, for example, argues that prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, human diversity posed little problem for Western countries like France. Yet as the nineteenth century came to a close, Humanism was subsumed by the development of the rationalistic sciences – Scientism in particular – which purported science to be the only reliable source for knowledge. Many of these theories, notably those of the medical doctor and scientist Arthur de Gobineau, contributed to racial determinism or what Todorov calls “racialism.” As he explains, “[r]acism is an ancient form of behavior that is probably found worldwide; racialism is a movement of ideas born in Western Europe whose period of flowering extends from the mid-eighteenth century to the to the mid-twentieth century” (91). Gobineau believed that the height of civilization – the nation – required a unification of disparate populations, resulting in racial evolution. Yet he did not find this evolution to be a positive effect of nationalism: it “mixed blood” and was therefore responsible for a *dégénérescence* or degeneration of the “superior” white European race. The fear of degeneration ultimately became a shared one among French citizens and scientists alike.

Much of the popular French literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is therefore demonstrative of a social and cultural obsession with the body under science, and with simultaneously defining the “natural” body and “super” natural and non-reproductive bodies. Vampires, angels and ghosts haunt the pages of many

French and many British novels and short stories; these non-human figures are almost always responsible for instigating a deviant sexual encounter, and are fetishized for their lack of humanity. As scholars like Sue-Ellen Case have noted, the presence of monstrous bodies – vampires in particular – can be read as a representation of the fear of “mixed blood” and social degeneration.⁸² The popular French literature of the *fin de siècle* also features non-European, colonized or subaltern figures as almost always female-bodied sites of sexual deviance (the various iterations of Salomé are perhaps the most well-known). Their bodies too are fetishized and dehumanized, offering characters and readers alike access to sexual pleasure, while also serving as examples of de-evolution or of the degeneration of a body. The fear of *dégénérescence* and of non-reproductive bodies underscores that the capitalist colonial expansion of England and France in the nineteenth century was dominated by fears about economic and sexual productivity.⁸³

Indeed, Barney concludes the chapter “Le malentendu ou le procès de Sapho” by citing from the literature of one of the most popular nineteenth-century French authors, Honoré de Balzac; yet she references one of Balzac’s most unusual and unpopular works of fiction, the novella *Séraphîta* (1834): “Balzac qui a touché à tout (Voir «La Fille aux yeux d’or») a effleuré ce sujet, le limitant sans le préciser, dans Seraphitus-Séraphita: l’Être double-l’Être complet.” [Balzac, who touched upon everything (see *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*), touched on this subject, pointing to it without specifying it, in Seraphitus-Seraphita: the double Being – the complete Being] (83). *Séraphîta*, which deviated notably from Balzac’s trademark realist style, recounts the story of a scientist named Emmanuel Swedenborg who is visited by Séraphîta, an androgynous angel who represents sexual and spiritual wholeness and can transcend the material world. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Barney’s engagement with this text offers a

reconsideration of the ways writers of the period turned toward spirituality in their lives and literary work in ways largely unrecognized by scholars.⁸⁴ In their continued writing on Sappho and their articulation of Sapphism, Barney and Vivien offer alternative and emancipatory renderings of androgynous bodies free from the biological definitions and social expectations of sexuality that they will refer to as of a third-sex. These representations harken back to earlier Aristotelian conceptions of the *androgynē*, and presage contemporary non-binary and queer identification.

Chapter II:

Sappho l'*androgynie*: Queerness and Spirituality

The reference to Honoré de Balzac's novella *Seraphîta* (1834) in the final line of Natalie Clifford Barney's chapter on Sappho in *Pensées d'une amazone* illuminates Barney's intervention in the sexual and spiritual politics of the moment. Uncharacteristic of Balzac's typical realist narratives, the story of *Seraphîta* was inspired by the supposed visions of Emmanuel Swedenborg, a seventeenth-century scientist who claimed to be given spiritual lessons by an angel. The titular character of Balzac's novel is a version of the angel Swedenborg described and is also an *androgynie*: *Séraphîta* is described as a celestial being that appears as either a man or a woman depending on the gender of the person s/he encounters. It is in fact the ambiguity of *Séraphîta*'s gender and sexuality that supposedly renders her/him a superior figure capable of satisfying the corporeal desires of humans, and of offering them access to new forms of knowledge. The two other primary characters in the novella – a man, Wilfrid, and a woman, Minna – both fall in love with *Séraphîta*, but s/he refuses their advances, ultimately uniting them as a couple. The character Wilfrid remarks: “‘*Séraphîta* exerce sur moi des pouvoirs si extraordinaires...que je ne sais aucune expression qui puisse en donner une idée. Elle m'a révélé des choses que moi je puis connaître” [‘*Séraphîta* exerts on me powers so extraordinary...I have no expression to explain it. She revealed to me things that I am capable of knowing’] (90-1).⁸⁵ The form of knowledge that *Séraphîta* imparts extends beyond language, according to Wilfrid: it is affective, and requires transcending the material world.

While *Séraphîta* remains a relatively unpopular text in the context of Balzac's *oeuvre*, it marks a critical turning point in the nineteenth-century debate between religion

and science over primacy of the body. By incorporating the dual fascination with mysticism and scientific progress in the nineteenth century, the book prefigures the rupture between religion and science, and the latter's investment in negating the body from the intellectual world. The descriptions of the scientist Swedenborg's visions of the angel Séraphîta, for example, reveal a growing tension between an interior, rational self, and an exterior, material body:

Pendant cette nuit, les yeux de son *homme intérieur* furent ouverts et disposé pour voir dans le ciel, dans le monde des esprits et dans les enfers... Dans cet état, dit Swedenborg en son *Traité de la sagesse angélique*, l'homme peut être élevé jusque dans la lumière céleste, parce que, les sens corporels étant abolis, l'influence du ciel agit sans obstacle sur l'homme intérieur.... (58)

[During that night, the eyes of his *inner man* were opened and able to see into the sky, into the spirit world and into the underworld ... In this state, says Swedenborg, in his *Treatise on Angelic Wisdom*, man can be raised to the heavenly light, because, when his bodily senses are abolished, heaven's influence can act unhindered on his inner man...]

Séraphîta's angelic presence allows Swedenborg transcendence from his physical body, which in turn allows him access to his "interior" body and therefore to new forms of knowledge and spirituality. Balzac articulates this transition both narratively and discursively; as author Kari Weil writes in *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (1992), Balzac "attempt[s] to reconcile" in *Séraphîta* what he terms the "'internal' and 'external' man" by attributing them to "the finite discourses of science and philosophy, identified as masculine, with the infinite languages of faith and the imagination, identified as feminine, in the effort to transcend their difference..." (82). The character Séraphîta therefore derives power from his/her physical androgyny: s/he can move

between a masculine and feminine body and can mediate between masculine and feminine forms of discourse – the rational and the spiritual. As Vivien and Barney extend their writing about Sappho beyond translations of her poetry and imaginings of her biography, they construct experimental narratives that also figure an angelic, androgynous being who, like *Séraphîta*, is capable of mediating between different forms of discourse and of transcending the confines of sexuality and the material world.

Balzac's representation of an androgynous figure in *Séraphîta* is therefore especially compelling because *Séraphîta*'s is a body resistant to sexual classification caught between the early-modern conception of Aristotelian wholeness and the burgeoning modern representation of sexual and racial inferiority. Weil in fact argues that the character *Séraphîta* should be read as both an *androgyn*e and as a *hermaphrodite*: as a figure of wholeness on the one hand, and on the other hand as a figure that reinforces the traditional gender binary by attempting to correct the other characters' conflation of masculinity and femininity. In Weil's view, *Séraphîta* becomes a definitively hermaphroditic figure at the novella's conclusion because s/he serves heteronormativity more than s/he serves to disrupt sex and gender codes.⁸⁶ The text's structure itself, Weil argues, in fact parallels *Séraphîta*'s hermaphroditic androgyny:

Séraphîta is not a realist novel, or rather it is a strange combination of realist and idealist modes of narrative and philosophical investigation. The androgynous, or more appropriately hermaphroditic combination, is Balzac's means of simultaneously giving in to the beautiful illusions of a mystical faith, while maintaining his distance from it...*Séraphîta* is exemplary of the nineteenth-century novel's effort to 'secularize'—and thus revivify—'the spiritual,' for a materialist age. (86)

Even though the novella concludes with a representation of the *hermaphrodite*, *Séraphîta* is indicative of the period's ambivalence about the status of the body and its relationship to knowledge and spirituality. While spiritual uncertainty is not typically associated with Balzac or his other writing, *Séraphîta*'s role as an androgynous figure who achieves transcendence, and who forges a relationship between sex and spirituality, is one that clearly influenced Barney and that she expands upon in her writing on Sappho. Instead of turning toward the deviance associated with the *hermaphrodite*, Barney and Vivien in their literary endeavors reify the *androgyne* into a figure of spiritual emancipation by constructing alternative embodiments of a third sex. These embodiments are angelic or divine, disrupt the boundaries of binary sexuality, transcend the material world, and offer other characters access to new forms of spiritual knowledge.

During a period when male decadents in particular returned to the materialism of Catholicism in their personal and artistic practices, Barney's and Vivien's writing cultivates an interest in spirituality that can be interpreted as a feminist and intellectual counterpoint.⁸⁷ In this sense, their particular interest in spirituality is aligned with the definition of spirituality that Michel Foucault offers in his lectures, compiled as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1982): a commitment to caring for the self that allows a subject access to truth. Foucault claims spirituality, "a pursuit, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. Access to the truth means that the effects of spirituality on the subject are such that his very being is fulfilled, transfigured, or saved." Foucault derives his definition, in fact, from his re-reading of Plato's *Symposium* and his interpretation of *eros*:

As he is, the subject is not capable of truth. I think that this is the simplest but most fundamental formula by which spirituality can be defined. It follows that from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject...Very roughly we can say...that this conversion may take place in the form of a movement that removes the subject from his current status and condition (either an ascending movement of the subject himself, or else movement by which the truth comes to him and enlightens him) let us call this movement, in either of its directions, the movement of *eros* (love)” (16).

The vision of Sapphic love Barney and Vivien propose is a version of *eros* that is both a spiritual practice and a pursuit of transcendent knowledge – precisely as Foucault describes. The “movement” of *eros* in their writing articulates novel representations of a third sex that can transcend heterosexuality and misogyny – social confines which had prevented women like Barney and Vivien alternative possibilities for love and creative freedom.

The spiritual and intellectual path Barney’s and Vivien’s writing cultivates has been as little discussed as have their literary contributions. Vivien’s relationship to spirituality and religion is in some ways more complicated than is Barney’s; it has been well-documented that Vivien converted to Catholicism at the end of her life, a conversion that has often been interpreted as a rejection of the alternative lifestyle to which she and Barney had committed.⁸⁸ While Vivien’s conversion will not figure into my discussion of her novellas, I suggest that her conversion to Catholicism can also be interpreted as a rejection of the social confines of having a female-sexed body.⁸⁹

In the essay, “Une Quête Mystique” [A Mystical Quest], author Nicolas Berger writes, “[l]orsqu’on pense à Vivien, on pense peu à la littérature...et encore moins au mysticisme !” [“when one thinks of Vivien, one thinks little of literature...and even less

of mysticism!”] (93). Yet as Berger details, careful readings of Vivien’s *oeuvre* and her interest in Sappho reveal what he terms a “mystical quest” and what I deem a spiritual one. As Berger identifies, such a quest is most defined in her novella, *Une femme m’apparut... [A Woman Appeared to Me]* (1904 and 1905). In the narrative, Lorély (a character supposedly based on Barney), is the priestess of a pagan cult devoted to cultivating love between women that takes Sappho as its leader.⁹⁰ Like all of Vivien’s and Barney’s literary writing, the plot of *Une femme m’apparut* is highly unconventional, and has frequently been interpreted as a *roman à clef* about Vivien’s and Barney’s tumultuous relationship.⁹¹ The fact that both editions of *Une femme m’apparut* are narrated by a first-person female character has likely contributed to critics’ conflation of the narrator with Vivien; yet the narrator’s name and identity are never revealed, allowing her to represent any woman reading the novella who is seeking an alternative spiritual affiliation and version of love.

In both the 1904 and 1905 version of *Une femme m’apparut*, the unnamed narrator receives spiritual guidance from an androgynous figure referred to alternatively as “L’Annonciatrice” [The Prophet] and San Giovanni.⁹² San Giovanni is a disembodied, transcendent figure who some critics have characterized as an angel; in the introduction to the English translation of Barney’s book, *Women Lovers, or The Third Woman* (2016), Melanie Hawthorne writes:⁹³

[Vivien’s] roman à clef novel *Une femme m’apparut... explores a third sex....[Vivien] created a sort of alter ego figure who borrows “his” appearance from Leonardo da Vinci’s androgynous John the Baptist figure. This wise person is not so much a blend of both sexes as disembodied sexless consciousness,*

anticipating the sexless figure of the angel who looks human but is above and beyond matters of the flesh. (11)

Regardless of the extent to which *Une femme m'apparut* is based on Vivien's actual life and love-affairs, the novella warrants analysis beyond biographical interpretation. Instead of interpreting San Giovanni to be Vivien's alter ego as Hawthorne and other critics have done, San Giovanni can be read as a figure that initiates transcendence for the narrator.⁹⁴

Indeed, the most compelling difference between the two editions of *Une femme m'apparut* is their radically different characterizations of the *androgyn*e San Giovanni. While the first edition of the book was published in 1904, a new edition of *Une femme m'apparut* emerged just a year later for reasons that remain unclear. Critics like Juliette Dade in her article, "La Décorporalisation de la femme dans les deux éditions d'*Une femme m'apparut*" (2009), presume that the first edition's articulations of lesbianism and misogyny were met with so much criticism that Vivien choose to rewrite the book a year later in order to excise its most controversial content.⁹⁵

Vivien évita, en outre, les déclarations relatives aux thèmes féministes et lesbiens qui avaient choqué les lecteurs et lectrices l'année précédente. Le rôle des femmes de lettres dans le monde littéraire, la 'prostitution' des hommes présentée comme plus vile encore que celle de femmes, les Principes Mâle (tout ce qui est laid et injuste) et Femelle (tout ce qui est beau et bien) d'une philosophie hermaphrodite du monde, une justification de la vie de Psappa, le mal que les hommes ont de tous temps fait subir aux femmes, sont quelques-uns des sujets controversés et soulevés uniquement par les personnages de la première version. La critique avait alors pris pour cible le style trop orné et symbolique du livre, d'une part, les énoncés anti-hommes et pro-saphistes, d'une autre part. Bien que les amies de Barney aient commencé dès le début du siècle à établir une communauté des lecteurs gagnés à la *cause* lesbienne, ses contemporains se situaient davantage, on s'en doute, du côté de la morale bourgeoise que des

positions révolutionnaires de Vivien. En éliminant ces sujets osés, la romancière se soumettait peut-être à l'opinion publique. (108-9)

[Furthermore, Vivien steered clear of making relative declarations about feminist and lesbian themes that had shocked readers the previous year. Some of the controversial subjects raised only by the characters of the first version are the role of female authors in the literary world, the 'prostitution' of men – which is presented as even more vile than that of women – the Male Principles (all that is ugly and unjust) and the Female Principles (all that is beautiful and good) of a hermaphroditic philosophy of the world, evidence of Psappha's life, and the evil to which men have always subjected women. Critics targeted both the overly ornate and symbolic style of the book and the anti-male and pro-Sapphist statements. While Barney's friends had begun at the turn of the century to establish a community of readers won over by the lesbian cause, it is likely that her contemporaries were more on the side of bourgeois morality than Vivien's revolutionary positions. By eliminating these provocative subjects, the novelist was perhaps submitting to public opinion.]

Since it first appeared, the 1904 edition of *Une femme m'apparut* has been difficult to acquire, and has only been republished twice since its initial inception.⁹⁶ In the 1904 version, San Giovanni is a prominent character who is described by the narrator as a poet, and whose philosophies on sexuality and love open the book:

Pareille à l'équivoque San Giovanni de Lionarado, à l'Androgyne dont le sourire italien éclaire si étrangement la galerie du Louvre... San Giovanni était poète. Ses strophes étaient aussi perverses que son sourire. Sa renommée ne s'étendait point au-delà d'un cercle très restreint de lettrés et d'artistes. En revanche, sa loyale impudeur scandalisait également les bourgeois et les écrivains. Seuls, quelques Ikônoklastes la vénéraient pour son audace. Ses volumes portaient des titres évocateurs de voluptés ambiguës : *Sur le Rythme Saphique*, *Bona Dea* et *Les Mystères de Cérès Éleusine*. (29)

[Like the ambiguous San Giovanni de Lionarado, the Androgyne whose Italian smile so strangely lights up the Louvre...San Giovanni was a poet. Her stanzas were as perverse as her smile. Her fame did not extend beyond a very limited circle of scholars and artists. On the other hand, her staunch indecency also scandalized the bourgeoisie and other writers. Only a few iconoclasts venerated her for her audacity. The volumes she wrote bore titles evocative of ambiguous pleasures: *On the Sapphic Rhythm*, *Bona Dea* and *The Mysteries of Ceres of Eleusis*.]

San Giovanni, who, according to the narrator, scandalized the bourgeoisie, was also “le personnage qui revendique les idées philosophiques sur le saphisme et le féminisme qui avaient choqué les lecteurs de l’édition de 1904” [the character who claims the philosophical ideas on sapphism and feminism that shocked readers of the 1904 edition] (Dade, 109). Yet ultimately, San Giovanni’s presence is minimal in the second edition of the novella, and s/he offers neither pronouncements about Sappho nor about philosophical ruminations on the differences between men and women. The second edition of *Une femme m’apparut* instead begins on “un soir indécis” [an indistinct evening] when San Giovanni tells the narrator that because she has not suffered, she cannot love. San Giovanni thus encourages the narrator to embark on a quest to meet Lorély, who is “[l]a prêtresse païenne d’un culte ressuscité, la prêtresse de l’amour sans époux et sans amant, ainsi que le fut jadis Psappa, que les profanes nomment Sapho” [‘the pagan priestess of a resurrected cult, the priestess of love who has no husband and no lover, just like Psappa, whom the profane call Sapho] (67). According to San Giovanni, Lorély will teach the narrator “l’immortel amour des amies” [‘the immortal love of female friendships’] (1). Punctuated by the change of seasons, the 1905 narrative follows the narrator’s year-long journey meeting, loving and being spurned by Lorély.

Yet throughout her journey, the narrator encounters many other women, all of whom are searching for love or spiritual connection, and several of whom are derived from religious and literary texts: Lilith, Vasthi, and Bethsabée from the Old Testament; Kâli, the Hindu goddess, Ophélie, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Morgane le Fey, the sorceress from the Arthurian legend, for example. The characters Éva and Dagmar, who likely represent women with whom Vivien herself was romantically involved, and who identify as Christian, attempt to convert the narrator to their Christian notions of love – an ideology which stands in sharp contrast to the one Lorély's Sapphic cult proposes.⁹⁷

Lorély claims the cult over which she presides is devoted to the legacy of Sappho's poetry as well as to inspiring new forms of love and poetic expression. She tells the narrator: “[Sappho] seule...est éternelle. Le culte des dieux a péri, mais le culte de ses poèmes ne périra point. Celle qui l'aime doit l'aimer à l'exclusion de tout autre amour” [‘Sappho alone is eternal. The worship of gods perished, but the worship of poems will never perish. She who loves her must love her to the exclusion of all other love’] (25). According to Lorély, love is “[c]omme l'art...complexe et malaisé...” [‘like art...complicated and unpleasant...’] and requires “[l]’immolation perpétuelle de soi-même” [‘the perpetual immolation of self’] (26). Yet the narrator finds herself unable to withstand this painful version of love and leaves Lorély, encountering the other women with whom she establishes powerful romantic and spiritual connections. Even though the narrator becomes seriously involved with Éva, who represents Christianity and female martyrdom, she cannot fully dispel her infatuation with Lorély. Unable to choose between Lorély and Éva and the divergent religious and spiritual paths they propose, the narrator calls out for help, and the androgynous San Giovanni returns:

Je crus que ces deux femmes étaient les deux archanges du destin : Lorély, l'archange pervers, Éva, l'archange rédempteur...Je prononçai tout haut, en invoquant je ne sais quelles invisibles présences : « Choisir...

— Ne choisis jamais, » interrompit une voix androgyne qui répondait à mon hésitation.

« On regrette toujours ce qu'on n'a pas choisi. Il faut préférer la violence à la tendresse et la passion à l'amour, » dit-elle.

— Mon doux San Giovanni, que me conseillez-vous en cette heure indécise ? » « Il est lâche d'estimer le bonheur plus haut que la radieuse souffrance.

— Je ne suis ni salamandre ni phénix, et je ne puis vivre de ce qui détruit et consume.

— Tant pis pour toi, tu ne seras jamais poète. Jamais un poète ne fut heureux. Nul n'est, d'ailleurs, ni poète ni saint de son vivant. Mais tu ne seras point poète dans la mort, puisque tu n'as point su aimer. (103)

[I believed that these two women were the two archangels of destiny: Lorely, the perverse archangel, Éva, the redemptive archangel...Invoking the invisible presence of I know not what I uttered aloud: "Choose ... "Never choose," interrupted an androgynous voice that answered my hesitation. "We always regret what we did not choose..." "My dear San Giovanni, what do you advise that I do in the hour of my indecision?" "We must choose violence over tenderness and passion over love," she says. "It is cowardly to privilege happiness over radiant suffering." "I am neither salamander nor phoenix, and I cannot survive off of that which destroys and consumes." "Too bad for you, you will never be a poet. Never was a poet happy. No one is, anyway, neither poet nor saint in his or her lifetime. But you will not be a poet in death, since you have not known how to love."]

San Giovanni, while minimized in the second version of Vivien's novella, functions much like Séraphîta in Balzac's novella: this figure provides the narrator spiritual

guidance and emancipation from the material world because of San Giovanni's transcendence from the confines of sexuality. Yet unlike Séraphîta, who ultimately joins together the respective male and female characters in a heteronormative union, San Giovanni does not unite the narrator of *La femme m'apparut* to a person or to a specific form of religion or spirituality. While less overtly provocative in its proclamations about sexuality and lesbianism, the 1905 version of *Une femme m'apparut* in fact offers a more transcendent vision of sexuality than does the first edition. San Giovanni does not, for example, appear to the narrator in the conclusion of the 1904 edition; instead, the narrator recalls the pronouncements San Giovanni makes about love in the opening of the earlier version of the book. In the 1905 edition, by contrast, San Giovanni comes to the narrator's side, and encourages her to continue on her journey for spiritual truth, affirming the suffering and pain of her experiences as necessary. It is therefore San Giovanni's embodied presence that offers the narrator of the second edition the ability to seek an alternative path. Taking San Giovanni's advice to "ne choisit jamais" [never choose], the narrator follows neither Lorély and the path of "perversity" her cult offers, nor the Christian Éva and the redemption her path promises.

Despite the narrator's refutation of Christianity and of Lorély's Sapphism in the conclusion of the 1905 novella, the second edition does in fact propose a form of spirituality that requires an experience of love or a version of *eros* that is not exclusive, and that instead seeks to integrate the totality of the narrator's experiences with the numerous women and spiritual paths she has encountered. As Patrizia Lo Verde writes in "'Une femme m'apparut...': ou de l'hybridation générique" (2009), "Vivien adhère, dans une perspective platonicienne...à l'idée d'une transcendance de l'humain par l'amour. Elle recherche l'unité perdue, la plénitude, d'où l'importance de la figure de l'androgyné"

[Vivien adheres to, from a Platonic perspective...the idea of human transcendence through love. She seeks lost unity, fulfillment, hence the importance of the *androgyne*] (96). San Giovanni is therefore not the text's only *androgyne*; like the narrative of Balzac's *Séraphîta*, the narrative of *Une femme m'apparut* does not distinguish a singular time or place, the text integrates and cites various forms of discourse – religious, spiritual, poetic – and therefore offers itself up as a textual hybrid or *androgyne*.

In her analysis, Weil in fact claims that *Séraphîta*'s integration of disparate forms of discourse and its indistinct literary style are its greatest representation of androgyny: "I...find the 'failure' of *Séraphîta* and the way the novel disappoints the reader to be significant...the ungainly jumble of genres can be related to a disorder of gender—a breakdown in the 'old dream of symmetry' between male and female in the very image of their symmetrical and harmonious fusion" (93). The hybridization and integration of genres in both the 1904 and 1905 versions of *Une femme m'apparut* also purposefully disrupt readerly expectations, which likely contributed to the novellas' unfavorable literary reception and the tendency by contemporary scholars to interpret them biographically. Unlike in *Séraphîta*, however, the hybridization and integration of genres is less "ungainly" in the 1905 *Une femme m'apparut*: hybridity is strategically woven into the narrator's journey so that she may find her own version of *eros* and spiritual transcendence. In "'Une femme m'apparut...' ou de l'hybridation générique," Lo Verde argues that Vivien's representation of love in the 1905 version is a dialectic:

[L'amour est] un jeu dialectique d'appropriation et de distanciation, le déjà-dit, c'est dire de manière fragmentaire et syncrétique tous les discours – du discours païen et chrétien au discours courtois – dans le but de réunir ce qui était éparé et de faire résonner à nouveau ce qui semblait oublié, selon un nouvel ordre opérant déjà dans la rédisposition. (121-2)

[Love is a dialectic game of appropriation and distancing, the already-said; in other words, all discourse, fragmentary and syncretic – from pagan and Christian discourse to every day speech – brings together what was scattered to echo that which seemed to be forgotten, but which is also already operating in a new order in this rearrangement.]

The way in which Vivien's weaves discordant forms of discourse into the same narrative recalls Irigaray's approach to transcending phallogocentric texts, and to the approach I have suggested both Vivien and Barney endeavored in their unconventional translations of Sappho's poetry.

Irigaray in fact also advocates that an androgynous spiritual figure is necessary to intervene in and ultimately transcend phallogocentric discourse. She identifies the absence of a female voice not only in language, but also a viable "feminine ideal" in Judeo-Christianity. In the essay "Divine Women," which appears in her book *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993), Irigaray claims:

Man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him to orient his finiteness by reference to infinity. The arrival of religious feeling can in fact be interpreted as the rampart man raises in defense of his very maleness. To posit a gender, a God is necessary: *guaranteeing the infinite*. (61)

Just as she attempts to transcend female oppression by re-writing and re-conceptualizing ideological and canonized discourses, so too does Irigaray seek to find space for women to "become divine" within its ideology. As Elizabeth Grosz writes in the essay, "Becoming Divine," "for Irigaray, the divine is not simply the reward for earthly virtue...it is the field or domain of what is new, what has not existed before, a mode of transcendence, a projection of the past into a future that gives a movement of and within

history; a movement of becoming without *telos*, a movement of love in its Empedoclean sense (Grosz 210). Grosz's summation can also encompass Sappho's power as a figuration.

The "sensible transcendental" is what Irigaray terms the process by which someone who is not represented by the patriarchal image of god "becomes divine" "Sensible transcendence," according to Irigaray, occurs via a dialectic between human and celestial experience, and between male and female identification, that fosters intermediation, opposes binary opposition, and produces a transcendent version of love or *eros*. For Irigaray, *eros* is an intrinsic "intermediary between pairs of opposites: poverty/plenty, ignorance/wisdom, ugliness/beauty" – a vision that echoes the form of love and the spiritual path San Giovanni encourages the narrator of *Une femme m'apparut* to embark upon (Irigaray 24).

Like Foucault, Barney, and Vivien, Irigaray returns to Plato's *Symposium* in her book *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993) to offer her own definition of *eros*, and to perform a mimetic re-reading of Diotima's speech that allows for the emergence of sensible transcendence. She notes that Diotima cannot, as a female philosopher, officially take the floor to speak during the symposium; instead, Socrates reports her thoughts and Diotima responds dialectically:

[Diotima]'s method is not a propaedeutic of the *destruction* or *destruction* of two terms in order to establish a synthesis that is neither one nor the other. She presents, uncovers, unveils the insistence of a third term that is already there and that permits progression. [B]etween knowledge and reality there is an intermediary that allows for the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between the two. (21)

In Irigaray's re-reading, Diotima cultivates uncertainty in the dialogue she holds with Socrates: "each time Socrates thinks he can take something as certain, [Diotima] undoes his certainty. His own, but also all kinds of certainty that are already set in language. All entities, substances, adverbs, sentences, are patiently, and joyously, called into question" (22). The dialogue Diotima holds with Socrates operates between binary categories, allowing an already existent "third term" between men and women to emerge.

Irigaray also emphasizes the role of the god Eros in her analysis of Diotima's dialectic as representative of an intermediary figure; Eros is neither human nor immortal, but "in a state," Irigaray writes, "that can be qualified as daimonic...His function is to transmit to the gods what comes from men and to men that comes from the gods...A being of middle nature is needed" (23). This intermediary figure produces an alternative version of love – a force that forges "a path between the condition of the mortal and that of the immortal" (31). As Irigaray's interpretation of Eros suggests, she believes the ideal representation of a mediator who can offer "sensible transcendence" is a figure positioned between the material and spiritual worlds. She ultimately identifies angels as the figures most capable of initiating transcendence from binary categories of sexuality. She is not, however, necessarily referring to specific angels in religious discourse. Rather, she is advocating for a re-interpretation of figures already present in discourse, those capable of moving between the boundaries of male and female sexuality, like Diotima or Eros; those who, by offering alternatives to the prejudices imposed by arbitrary binary oppositions, create more expansive possibilities for individual identification and for relationships between perceived others. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Irigaray writes:

Between God, as the perfectly immobile act, man, who is surrounded and enclosed by the world of his work, and woman, whose task would be to take care of nature and procreation, *angels* would circulate as mediators of that which has not yet happened...Endlessly re-opening the enclosure of the universe, of universes, identities, the unfolding of actions, of history...the angel [is] a representation of a sexuality that has never been incarnated. A light, divine gesture (or tale) of flesh that has not yet acted or flourished. (15-16)

Because Irigaray interprets “angels” to be figures unbound to ideological and social limitations, angels are capable of moving freely among identities and material experiences without becoming confined by the limitations of categorization – specifically the limitations imposed by sexuality and gender. Carolyn Tilghman, in “The Flesh Made Word: Luce Irigaray’s Rendering of the Sensible Transcendental”, identifies the connection between language and corporeality as one of the most powerful aspects of Irigaray’s angel:

Irigaray’s angels are related to women’s sexuality and to speech. Their gestures herald the embodiment of a multiplicity of ideas and figures that will never be contained by ordinary language or orthodox representation...Irigaray’s angels offer a means for verbally linking carnality and divinity because their gestures figure the word from and in kinship to the flesh...they offer a seductive example of how her ethics helps us to re-conceptualize lived reality with the language of the sensible transcendental. (47)

While Irigaray’s interpretation of the angel has been one of the most contentious aspects of her theoretical work, the angel she is articulating can be interpreted as a textual figuration, a version of which Balzac, Vivien and Barney all appear to have constructed in their literary representations of androgyny: a figure who forges a relationship between language and the body, and between knowledge and spirituality.⁹⁸

Barney in fact devoted two of her books to representations of androgynous angelic figures. In her only novel written in English, the highly experimental *The One Who is Legion or A.D.'s Afterlife* (1930), the titular figure A.D. is an androgynous angel; *Amants féminins, ou La troisième* [*Women Lovers or The Third Woman*] chronicles the romantic experiences of a character who claims to be a “troisième” or of a third sex. *Amants féminins* was, however, never published in Barney’s lifetime. Written in 1926, it was not published in France until 2013, and was subsequently translated into English in 2016. The book details the complicated relationships among three women identified only by their initials: L., M., and N. – initials believed to signify the living women Liane de Pougy, Mimi Franchetti, and Natalie Barney herself.⁹⁹ A third-person narrator opens the book with “portraits” of L., M., and N. that describe the women’s personalities and characteristics. N. is identified as “La troisième”, and according to the narrator, “appartient à une catégorie d’êtres dont l’espèce deviendra peut-être moins rare lorsque le vieux couple terrestre, définitivement discredité, permettra à chacun de garder ou de retrouver son entité” [belongs to a category of beings who will perhaps become less rare when the old terrestrial couple, definitively discredited, allows each person to keep or rediscover his or her wholeness] (36). Yet the narrator makes clear that N. “n’a rien de fictif...elle est plus qu’humaine” [is not at all fictitious...she is more than human] – in other words, N. is paradoxically, “real” but superhuman (37). Melanie Hawthorne, in her introduction to the publication of the English translation of the book, *Women Lovers, or The Third Woman*, writes that “Barney explicitly invokes [the] third sex category but in such a way as to challenge and rewrite the usual twentieth-and twenty-first-century understanding and hierarchy of the sexes” (17). Indeed *La troisième* is in part representative of the classical definition of the *androgyné*, but s/he is also committed to

“la destruction du couple” [the destruction of the couple] and is searching for a “un compagnon d’amour – une variété de son espèce, variable à l’infini – depuis l’homosexuelle la plus invétérée jusqu’à l’ange – cette paire d’ailes!” [‘a love companion’ – a variation of his/her kind, infinitely variable – from the most inveterate homosexual to the angel – such a pair of wings!] (37).¹⁰⁰ In the final section of the book, *La troisième* in fact identifies as an angel; N. reveals to the character “N.M.” or “The Newly Miserable Woman” that “[u]ne seule, dans mon expérience humaine, était comme moi, isolée, réfractaire à cette loi terrestre – irradiant de son propre centre sa chaleur et sa clarté... ‘*Toi seule me parus ce qu’on cherche toujours...*’” [‘only one woman, in my human experience, was like me: isolated, resistant to this earthly law – radiating warmth and clarity from the center of her being... ‘*You alone seem to me to be what we are always searching for...*’] (151).¹⁰¹ The “only woman” like N. is, according to a footnote, Éloa, the titular character from the poem, “Éloa, ou, La soeur des anges” [“Eloa, or, The Sister of Angels”], written by the French poet Alfred de Vigny. Published in 1824, the philosophical poem recounts the story of an angel named Éloa who falls in love with Lucifer, who ultimately takes her with him to hell. Likely also influenced by Balzac’s *Séraphîta*, Barney refers to angels as the ideal “third sex” or as a “troisième” to indicate the character N.’s desire to seek a new sexual identity and spiritual transcendence.

Like many of Vivien’s and Barney’s literary works, *Amants féminins* self-consciously toys with genre – it is autobiography and fiction, combines poetry and prose, oscillates between narrative and strict dialogue and between third and first-person narration – and uses Sappho’s figuration to explore the limits of gender and spirituality.¹⁰² The book opens with a poem about Sappho entitled “Cette Nuit...”, written by N.C.B. (Barney’s initials):

Cette nuit Sappho couche en rêve avec Cypris...
Je me donne à ton ombre et c'est ton nom que nomme
Le plaisir inouï de mon corps vierge d'hommes,
–Mon corps à moi, c'est toi seule qui me l'as pris ! (24)

[This night Sappho sleeps in a dream with Cypris...
I give myself to your shadow and it is your name
that names The unknown pleasure of my body,
never touched by men -My body is mine, it's you
alone who took it from me !]

The poem continues by recounting a destructive and fraught relationship between the narrator and the lover to whose body she submitted. The relationship detailed involves infidelity, jealousy and rivalry, leading the narrator to denounce coupledom: “Je ne danserai plus cette amoureuse danse/Du couple, menacé par le plus vivant deuil” [I will no longer dance that amorous dance/Of the couple, threatened by the most powerful grief] (25). The final stanza, in a reversal of the first, describes the narrator's violation of her lover's body, and her desire to create a new kind of being out of this violation:

Et j'ai violé ta forme au sommeil qui t'allonge
Dans le subconscient, ce réel d'un reflet,
Et par l'étrange union de notre être complet
Crée à ton image une race de songes. (25)

[And I violated your form in the sleep to which you laid
yourself In the subconscious, a reflection of reality,
And by the strange union of our complete being
Created in your image a species of dreams.]

The poem can be interpreted as a summation of the narrative that follows, as it recounts the annihilation of self that can occur from intensely loving another person, and the possibility for an alternative self that can emerge from this destruction. As in Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut*, in *Amants féminins*, Sappho's peripheral influence initiates an unexpected form of emancipation.

The emancipatory possibilities offered by the third sex figure in *Amants féminins* (and in *The One Who is Legion*) emerge not solely from the representation of the respective character but also from the text's formal construction. The juxtaposition of narrative voices and genres is as much the text's representation of La troisième as is the character itself, just as the hybridized, fragmented narrative of Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut* parallels the message conveyed by the figure of San Giovanni. Barney is particularly interested in blurring the distinction between the author and N., and in oscillating between third and first-person narration. The narrative's movement back and forth between the narrator and N. on the one hand presages the twenty-first century shift in which those who do not identify as male or female identify using third-person pronouns; on the other hand, it suggests a nuanced literary strategy that calls attention to the limits of language to express sexuality, and to the problematic distinction between author and narrator – especially female author and narrator.¹⁰³ The narrator claims in the first section of the book, for example, that “[c]e roman est tiré des cahiers des notes de N. Les scènes et les observations à la troisième personne sont faites objectivement par son ami le plus proche : l'auteur ” [this novel was pulled from notes in N.'s journal. The scenes and observations about the third person were made objectively by her closest friend: the author] (41). It is therefore especially troubling that many critics have read and continue to read Barney's and Vivien's *oeuvre* autobiographically (as Sappho's

poetic work has also been interpreted), when the cornerstone of their projects is to subvert autobiographical interpretations in order to create new forms of narrative and subjectivity altogether. The assertion made by the narrator of *Amants féminins* is therefore accurate: N. is *not* the author. Rather, the voice that emerges when Barney writes of N. is a third term or third sex “already in existence,” to recall Irigaray’s reading of Diotima’s speech: it is the voice that exists between an author and its characters.

Structurally, *Amants féminins* is more self-consciously fragmentary than is *Une femme m’apparut*, indicative of the difference between Barney’s and Vivien’s styles, and also perhaps of the respective moments in which the books were written.¹⁰⁴ As Ray claims in the introduction to her translation of *Amants féminins*:

Barney echoes experiments in narrative perspective that can be found in the work of modernists such as William Faulkner, for example, and the work of visual artists (Pablo Picasso, the surrealists) who made collages out of everyday scraps of paper. Occasionally, such as when Barney is discussing “several types of third ones,” she abandons conventional linguistic notation altogether and simply draws in the kind of symbols she is referring to, using pictures rather than words (86). Such a decentered narrative rejects the authority of a single narrative voice, and indeed Barney rejects closure in her final statement: “END (but there is no end . . .)” (160; “FIN [mais il n’y a pas de fin . . .]”). (25)

Barney’s approach is reminiscent of many of the experimental writing projects undertaken by Modernists, yet Ray notably compares Barney’s approach to male writers and artists instead of to female modernists, like Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein, who, like Barney, believed the disruption of conventional linguistic and narrative structure necessary to disrupting traditional conceptions of binary sexuality.

Such disruption is most acute in Barney's only published work written in English, the fascinating book *The One Who is Legion or A.D.'s Afterlife* (1930), which depicts an angel named "One" that resurrects and relives the life of a female writer who committed suicide. The angel is composed of a "legion" of beings that refer to the body as "we."¹⁰⁵ In *The One Who is Legion*, the newly formed angel finds a book that details A.D.'s life, and discovers that the book is made from flesh:

In search of oppositions and differences between A.D. and ourselves, we observed the book, the binding which had pleased our touch. What once living parchment had been stretched into service? Our eyes examined the grain, discovered that the smoothness of either side-cover, when bent back to leave a hollow between them, had once been a human breast. (29)

Barney's and Vivien's resistance to realism, like Balzac's in *Séraphîta*, is a textual attempt to make new linguistic and corporeal "flesh." In her book *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz draws together Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of flesh and language, defining flesh as "that elementary, precommunicative domain out of which both subject and object, in their mutual interactions, develop... Language, in short, is the result of or is made possible by the dehiscence or folding back of the flesh of the world. In this sense, language too is 'another flesh'" (103). The connection between bodies and language was especially powerful in the nineteenth century precisely because the literature of late Modernism was attributed with having positive and negative effects on the body, and because of social anxieties about reproductivity and the expanse of Western empire. The nineteenth-century Austrian physician and social critic Marx Nordau, for example, famously warned against reading literature, ironically in his genre-crossing book, *Degeneration* (1892). Nordau utilizes the emergent theories of race and eugenics to

argue that many literary authors possessed degenerating minds that were capable of further degenerating the Western European race.¹⁰⁶ Nordau considered certain emergent literary genres, like Naturalism, to be the most insidious, precisely because the “founder” of Naturalism, Emile Zola, believed his literature to be a corrective to the degenerating French society.¹⁰⁷

For Barney, Vivien and Irigaray, new linguistic practices are essential to the creation of new bodies, new flesh, and new kinds of relationships. “The androgyne,” Weil writes in *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, “is the ideal meeting ground of author and reader, but only insofar as s/he annuls the transcendent origins of meaning...Séraphîta is the word made flesh, but only insofar as s/he makes clear the very fleshiness of words” (88). Barney’s and Vivien’s literary use of the *androgyne* thus aligns with Nordau’s anxiety (though to the opposite effect): by affecting language, literature can affect the body.

The *androgyne* was not an angelic figure for all literary writers of the period who were interested in creating new corporeal and literary “flesh,” however. The writer Marguerite Eymery, who took the pen name Rachilde, was a prominent member of the French decadent and symbolist circles at the turn of the century, and authored the notorious novel, *Monsieur Vénu*s (1884). In the book, Rachilde crafts an *androgyne* born of the period’s materialism, who achieves emancipation in a violent nexus between flesh and language.

Chapter III:

Être Sapho, ce serait être tout le monde !": Rachilde and Textual Afterlives

In the popular and highly controversial novel, *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), the female protagonist, Raoule, responds unfavorably to the presumption by her male suitor that her non-normative sexual desires would make her a “Sapho,” or a lesbian:

- Sapho !....Allons, ajouta-t-il, je m'en doutais.
- Vous vous trompez, Monsieur de Raittolbe ; être Sapho, ce serait être tout le monde !

[“Sapho!...Come, come,” he added. “Just as I suspected.”

“You are mistaken Monsieur de Raittolbe; to be Sapho is to be like everyone else!]

The frustration that Raoule expresses at being mistaken for a “Sapho” is emblematic of the Sapphic movement’s prevalence in late nineteenth-century France – and of the fact that the movement’s popularity frequently obfuscated the deeper project Barney and Vivien intended. Yet, the character Raoule’s refutation of nineteenth-century French Sapphism is equally indicative of the resistance on the part of *Monsieur Vénus*’s author to affiliate with the broader literary and political movements of the moment. Marguerite Eymery, who took the pen name Rachilde, was a writer, provocateur, and socialite whose cross-dressing and rabble-raising earned her significant notoriety in the nineteenth century. Married to the famed editor Alfred Vallette, Rachilde herself became a prominent member of the decadent and symbolist artistic circles at the turn of the century.¹⁰⁸ Despite her radical public persona and the radical portrayals of women in her literary work, however, Rachilde’s relationship to the contemporary feminism of her day and to the Sapphist movement initiated by her peers was one of ambivalence.

Natalie Barney in fact devotes a chapter to Rachilde in her memoir *Aventures d'Esprit* (1929), and recounts Rachilde's unwillingness to read her work publicly in Barney's literary salon:

Rachilde est la terreur des réunions parce que, parmi tant de gens qui parlent, elle seule ose dire ce qu'elle sent. Elle ne boit que de l'eau et supporte de n'aimer personne. Je salue en elle une force qui ne se leurre pas et qui, prenant tous les buts pour des cibles, n'en manque aucun. Voici comment Rachilde ne veut pas qu'on la fête : Merci, chère amie, pour votre idée de lecture de mes œuvres, mais je dis :

« Merci, non ». J'ai toujours vendu ma salade (style de Montmartre ou de Montparnasse !) dans la rue, et je n'ai jamais voulu la vendre...ou l'étaler dans les salons... et quand je vais chez vous, c'est pour vous voir, vous entendre et vous embrasser. (87)

[Rachilde is the terror of meetings because, among the many people who speak, it is she alone who dares to say what she feels. She drinks only water and can't bear to love anyone. I salute her for her undeterrable strength that takes all goals as targets and misses not a single one. This is how Rachilde does not want to be celebrated:

'Thank you, dear friend, for your idea of reading my work, but I say: Thank you, no. I've always sold my salad (Montmartre or Montparnasse style!) in the street, and I never wanted to sell it...or spread it in salons...and when I go to your place, it is to see you, hear you, and embrace you.']

Rachilde's hesitancy to identify with feminist movements is most notoriously articulated in her 1928 essay, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* [*Why I Am Not a Feminist*]. Rachilde employs an ironic style typical of her literary writing to characterize feminism a regressive movement beholden to bourgeois morality that has not "améliorer énormément l'existence" [enormously improved existence].¹⁰⁹ She writes:

Je n'ai jamais eu confiance dans les femmes, l'éternel féminin m'ayant trompé d'abord sous le masque maternel et je n'ai plus confiance en moi. J'ai toujours regretté de ne pas être homme (6).

[I have never trusted women, I was first misled by the eternal feminine from under the maternal mask, and I no longer trust myself. I have always regretted not being a man.]

While her rejection of feminism can be interpreted as an ironic and nuanced resistance to conflate sexuality and gender, Rachile's perceived politics and her critique of feminism has persisted in affecting the reception of her work. Nearly all of her biographers claim that *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* sparked much confusion and even outrage on the part of her contemporaries – as did her portrayal of violent and treacherous female characters in her fiction.¹¹⁰ To the detriment of her literary work, much twentieth and twenty-first century literary criticism on Rachilde and her writing focuses primarily on the challenge of reconciling her anti-feminist declarations with feminist readings of her novels.

The publication history of *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde's most well-known novel, is almost as bizarre a story as the novel's narrative. When it was first published in 1884, it took the French literary world by storm. While the novel may have earned her the title, "queen of decadence," many critics could not believe that a young, aristocratic woman devised such a salacious text.¹¹¹ Though a Belgian literary press specializing in erotica published the book, it was banned and Rachilde was subsequently sentenced to prison for pornographic writing.¹¹² In order to deflect questions about the novel's conception, the 1889 French edition added a troubling preface by Maurice Barrès that claimed the book not as literary fiction but rather the case study of a hysterical woman: a personal account of Rachilde's mental instability and perversion.¹¹³ "Barrès's perspective,"

Melanie Hawthorne writes, in the introduction to her translation of *Monsieur Vénus*, “brings into focus the apparent incongruity of her work within the decadent orientation adopted by other, almost exclusively male, *fin de siècle* writers” (xxxiii). Keenly aware of her public image, however, Rachilde herself attempted to playfully offer various sensational stories about the narrative’s conception, none of which ultimately helped to prevent continued controversy over the novel.¹¹⁴

An attempt by the French publisher Flammarion in 1977 to reissue *Monsieur Vénus* was not well received, for reasons some critics have attributed to Rachilde’s perceived stance as anti-feminist and the narrative’s portrayal of women to be cruel and violent, which did not align with the politics of Second Wave feminism.¹¹⁵ Yet following new French and English editions published by The Modern Language Association in 2004, which include portions of the novel that were previously unpublished in English, Rachilde and *Monsieur Vénus* have been hailed queer and feminist forerunners in many academic circles, even while questions about Rachilde’s politics continue to circulate.¹¹⁶ Despite the fact that Rachilde – and *Monsieur Vénus*’s narrator, Raoule – did not want to be “Sappho,” or feminists, they are, in the twenty-first century, folded into feminist projects in ways that are at once both compelling and suspect.¹¹⁷

Aside from *Monsieur Vénus*, there has been a dearth of interest in Rachilde’s other literary works, like her novel *La Marquise de Sade* (1887). While *La Marquise de Sade* has received notably less attention than has *Monsieur Vénus*, the two novels place their female protagonists in the unlikely positions of sadist and masochist respectively to offer a provocative critique of the decadent moment and its representations of sexuality, the body, and nationalism.

Indeed, the misogynistic treatment of Rachilde and her books aligns with the treatment Barney, Vivien, and Sappho have also received. The intense interest in

Rachilde's biography and in the publication history of *Monsieur Vénus*, has obscured her strategic use of sexual violence which – like Barney and Vivien – Rachilde uses to articulate a “third sex” or non-binary sexuality. Rachilde's literature also addresses androgyny, Hellenism, and deviant sexual practices that resist predominant gender categories, sexual morality, and heterosexual conceptions of coupling and reproduction. Her status as a native French citizen allows for a more nuanced critique of the limits and possibilities of gender and class in France at the turn of the century.

In part a Pygmalion trope, *Monsieur Vénus*'s plot centers on the relationships between its bourgeois female protagonist, Raoule de Vénérande, and Jacques Silvert, a working-class artist. Raoule dresses and refers to herself alternately as a woman and as a man, and upon meeting the young and androgynous-looking Jacques, she becomes obsessed with him. Jacques agrees to be her lover and sex slave, and they engage in violent drug-fueled sexual encounters initiated by Raoule – ones that push the boundaries of gender in distinct and transgressive ways. At first a clandestine relationship, since Raoule is a member of the French aristocracy and Jacques is not, Raoule eventually marries Jacques, eliciting shock from the Parisian bourgeoisie. Following their wedding, Jacques is inadvertently killed, but Raoule finds a way to preserve his corpse for her eternal sexual pleasure.

While the violent sexual relationship in *Monsieur Vénus* has been characterized by certain critics as sadomasochistic, I argue that it is specifically masochistic, based on the concept Gilles Deleuze offers in his book, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*.¹¹⁸ For Deleuze, sadomasochism is a reductive conflation of two distinct sexual perversions, masochism and sadism, that are motivated by divergent responses to social and historical moments, and deploy quite different formal literary strategies. According to Deleuze's definition, a masochist is typically a male subject who seeks a cruel, unsentimental

woman to dominate him in order to experience a temporary disavowal of his masculine agency, which is reemphasized following the masochistic encounter. Since a male subject is in the prime position of social power, a masochist desires dominance from a woman so that he can simulate an experience of powerlessness. To do so, he establishes with her a set of rules or contracts by which he can experience temporary submission. Because masochism takes its name from the nineteenth-century author of *Venus in Furs*, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, it is in part a response to the Romanticism of Masoch's day, which was, Deleuze claims, a historical moment that was so sensual, it became anti-sentimental, prompting the masochist to desire a cold, and unsentimental woman. He writes:

Man became coarse and sought a new dignity in the development of consciousness and thought; as a reaction to man's heightened consciousness woman developed sentimentality, and toward his coarseness, severity. The glacial cold was wholly responsible for the transformation: sentimentality became the object of man's thought, and cruelty the punishment for his coarseness. In the coldhearted alliance between man and woman, it is this cruelty and sentimentality in woman that compel man to thought and properly constitute the masochistic ideal.¹¹⁹

The sadist, on the other hand, "professes an essential coldness which Sade calls 'apathy'"(51). Of all the differences between sadism and masochism there is "the most radical difference between sadistic *apathy* and masochistic *coldness*" (134). Literary instantiations of masochism and sadism therefore use formal strategies to convey either anti-sentimentality or apathy. Masochistic literature typically employs suspenseful, decadent descriptions and its scenes are populated by cold statues and art objects. "Sade's heroes, by contrast, are not art lovers," Deleuze claims. Sadistic literature instead utilizes

long descriptions and readings of text, punctuated by apathetic descriptions of sex and murder.

In the masochistic dynamic between the characters Raoule and Jacques, however, the masochist is Raoule – an upper-class woman who often acts like a man, and who initiates the relationship with Jacques – a working-class man who is often described as a woman:

‘Tu ne seras pas mon amant... Tu seras mon esclave, Jacques...’

‘Quoi ?... Tu es folle !...’

‘Suis-je le maître, oui ou non !’ s’écria Raoule.

‘Je vais m'en aller... je vais m'en aller !’ répéta-t-il désespéré, ne comprenant plus les désirs de son maître.

‘Pardon !’ murmura-t-elle, ‘moi, j'oubliais que tu es une petite femme capricieuse qui a le droit, chez elle, de me torturer.’

[‘You will not be my lover ... You will be my slave, Jacques....’

‘What? You're crazy!’

‘Am I the master, yes or no!’ exclaimed Raoule.

‘I’m going to leave... I’m going to leave!’ he repeated, desperate, no longer understanding his master’s desires.

‘I’m sorry!’ she murmured, ‘I forgot you’re a capricious little woman who has *her* right to torture me.’]¹²⁰

Raoule is both the dominant, gendered female and the dominator – the one who has more social and financial power, and elects to take on a young, lower-class artist to reject the social order of the aristocracy – which she rebukes by not wanting to marry, much to the chagrin of her aristocratic suitor, and to her aunt and guardian. Raoule’s proclamation, that as a woman Jacques has the right to torture her, is an ironic acknowledgement of the prototypical masochistic dynamic, and by extension, the societal male and female

dynamic. Since men are ultimately in the primary position of social power, it is only in a masochistic dynamic orchestrated by a man that a woman holds the temporary power to torture him. Yet, because Raoule is also acting as the male subject, she complicates the masochistic paradox and is able to act as both the male and female subject.

In the essay, “Masochism: A Queer Subjectivity?” (2005), Amber J. Musser revisits Deleuze’s definition of masochism and Judith Butler’s definition of subjectivity to consider how a reinterpretation of both definitions together can offer a more expansive conception of queerness and of masochism. She insists that the masochist should not necessarily be thought of as a masculine subject or as even an individual: “Deleuze’s masochist...s/he requires a symbolic dominator to be complicit in the illusion of powerlessness...the masochist and his/her dominant only exist in their interrelation, neither can be thought as individuals.”¹²¹ In the dynamic between Raoule and Jacques their version of masochism in fact insists on masculine and feminine subject positions precisely in order to render them symbolic – social, performative, and unbound to the biological body. As their relationship progresses, the narrator even claims that they “s’unissaient de plus en plus dans une pensée commune, la destruction de leur sexe” [were more and more united in a common thought: the destruction of their sex] (98). Domination on the part of Raoule as female subject is significant, however, because the violence of her masochism is to humiliate the male subject by placing him in the inferior role of a woman: “Raoule, supplia-t-il, ne m’appelle plus *femme* cela m’humilie” [Raoule, he begged, don’t call me a *woman* anymore, it humiliates me] (88). More effective than even physically harming him, Raoule’s ultimate form of torturous pleasure will be to linguistically humiliate Jacques by falsely flattering his masculinity:

Elle ne le frappait plus, elle ne l'achetait plus, elle le flattait, et l'homme, si abject qu'il puisse être, possède toujours, à un moment de révolte, cette virilité d'une heure qu'on appelle *la fatuité*.

‘Ignorez-tu, Jacques, ignores-tu que la chair fraîche et saine est l'unique puissance de ce monde !... Il tressaillit. Le male s'éveilla brusquement dans la douceur de ces paroles prononcées très bas. (88)

[She did not hit him anymore, she did not buy him anymore, she flattered him, and man, as abject as he can be, always has – even at a moment of revolt – that fleeting virility called *fatuity*.

‘Do you not know, Jacques, do you not know that fresh and healthy flesh is the only power in this world!’

He flinched. The male awoke abruptly in the sweetness of those words pronounced very low.]

Raoule mocks Jacques's femininity not to denigrate women or to deem them inferior subjects but rather to reveal the relationship between gender and sexuality as performative and socially determined. It is significant that the word 'fatuity' is italicized in this passage, since throughout the novel, the narrator and Raoule alternately use masculine and feminine pronouns to describe the type of behavior she and other characters adopt – often within the same conversation and with the same person. In a compelling metanarrative move, Rachilde italicizes the mis-gendered adjectives and nouns to call attention to these choices. Yet, the grammatical gender of "*fatuité*" is feminine in French, a choice that perhaps serves to linguistically feminize Jacques and men, while simultaneously calling attention to the way language itself often arbitrarily designates women as weak. Notably, Jacques becomes sexually excited by Raoule's suggestion that he has "healthy flesh"; in Musser's interpretation of masochism, she claims that "flesh [is shown] to be a valuable commodity in and of itself, not something

excluded by discourse, but a necessary active part of subjectivity; the masochist requires both flesh and desire to attempt a loss/refinding of self' (2005). If the materiality of the flesh can offer potential emancipation in a masochistic dynamic, this possibility is absent from Raoule's and Jacques's; her flattery of Jacques is yet another false affirmation because he does not in fact have 'fresh and healthy flesh' at all. Rather, Raoule is in fact actually calling attention to his lack of flesh, and its disappearance under modernity.

Jacques is in fact consistently described by the narrator as having 'marble flesh', and his body is likened to a Greek statue. The first time Raoule sees Jacques nude, he is compared to a famous statue of Venus:

Digne de la Venus Callipyge, cette chute de reins ou la ligne de l'épine dorsale fuyait dans un méplat voluptueux et se redressait, ferme, grasse, en deux contours adorables, avait l'aspect d'une sphère de Paros aux transparences d'ambre. Les cuisses, un peu moins fortes que des cuisses de femme, possédaient pourtant une rondeur solide qui effaçait leur sexe. (40)

[Worthy of the Venus Callipyge, that curve of his lower back where his spine ran down to a voluptuous plane rose firm, fat, in two adorable contours, and looked like a transparent amber sphere of Paros. His thighs were a bit less thick than women's thighs, and yet possessed a solid roundness that concealed their sex.]

As the title of *Monsieur Vénus* (and of Masoch's *Venus in Furs*) suggest, these novels are in dialogue with the nineteenth-century literary obsession with Hellenism, and with Greco-Roman marble statues (like the Sleeping Hermaphroditus) which represented a nexus between the natural and non-natural body. The image of the body conveyed by these statues was typically that of a superior or idealized human form, and yet it was not necessarily sexed, rendering the statue's gender likewise ambiguous. The description of

Jacques's body that likens him to the Venus Callipyge notably claims he has the transparency of 'amber': marble statues of bodies do not reveal veins or blood, and therefore conceal not just sex or gender, but also natural life itself.

Deleuze claims that the predominance of marble statues in Masoch's writing are representative of the severity the nineteenth-century 'repression of sensuality' elicited, and argues that the body in fact only 'became human' in the nineteenth century when it was represented as art:

It has been said that...the eye, for example, becomes a human eye when its object itself has been transformed into a human or cultural object, fashioned by and intended solely for man...[I]t is the experience of this painful process that the art of Masoch aims to represent...The lover embraces a marble woman by way of imitation: women become exciting when they are indistinguishable from cold statues in the moonlight. The scenes in Masoch have of necessity a frozen quality, like statues or portraits.¹²²

Thus unlike the narrators of Gautier's and Swinburne's poems, Raoule does not bow before the idealized marble image of humanity her love-slave represents; instead, she bites Jacques's 'marble' flesh, and breaks it apart:

D'un geste violent elle arracha les bandes de batiste qu'elle avait roulées autour du corps sacré de son éphèbe, elle mordit ses chairs marbrées, les pressa à pleines mains, les égratigna de ses ongles affilés. Ce fut une défloration complète de ces beautés merveilleuses qui l'avaient, jadis, fait s'extasier dans un bonheur mystique. (132)

[With a violent gesture she tore off the strips of linen bandage that she had rolled around the sacred body of her young male lover, she bit his marble flesh, squeezed it with both hands, scratched it with her sharp

nails. It was a complete deflowering of the marvelous beauty that had once made her ecstatic with a mystical happiness.]

Throughout the novel, Raoule is referred to as unsentimental for a woman, or *'froide'*, reminiscent of the unsentimental and cold woman Deleuze's masochist seeks. In *Monsieur Vénus's* vision of masochism, the 'cold' body of the woman therefore finds the cold, marble body of a man and ultimately produces a non-human entity or a third-sex. Her 'deflowering' of his flesh ultimately renders his body available for a non-conventional form of pro-creation. Raoule is seeking to create a new version of flesh, a new body – one that is artificial, and one that does not require a woman for reproduction. After Jacques is killed by Raoule's former suitor Raittolbe in a fencing duel gone-wrong, she commissions German engineers to make his corpse into a rubber sex automaton. Jacques's marble flesh is therefore replaced with a new and different unnatural material:

Sur la couche en forme de conque, gardée par un Eros de marbre, repose un mannequin de cire revêtu d'un épiderme en caoutchouc transparent. Les cheveux roux, les cils blonds, le duvet d'or de la poitrine sont naturels ; les dents qui ornent la bouche, les ongles des mains et des pieds ont été arrachés à un cadavre. Les yeux en émail ont un adorable regard. (209)

[On a shell-shaped bed, guarded by a marble Eros, rests a wax mannequin adorned in transparent rubber skin. The red hair, the blond eyelashes, the golden fluff on its chest are natural; the teeth that adorn its mouth, the fingernails and toenails, have all been extracted from a corpse. The enamel eyes have an adorable look.]

The marble statue that guards the rubber version of Jacques is described as more "natural" than the description of his body, likening it to a marble one. Yet, its

transparency reveals not the mysticism of amber or the *vérité* of blood, but rather its synthetic exterior exposes the unnecessary human parts of his body. With the rubber version of Jacques, Raoule is finally able to inhabit either a male or female role depending on her desire:

La nuit, une femme vêtue de deuil, quelquefois un jeune homme en habit noir, ouvrent cette porte. Ils viennent s'agenouiller près du lit, et, lorsqu'ils ont longtemps contemplé les formes merveilleuses de la statue de cire, ils l'enlacent, la baisent aux lèvres. Un ressort disposé à l'intérieur des flancs correspond à la bouche et l'anime en même temps qu'il fait s'écarter les cuisses. Ce mannequin, chef-d'œuvre d'anatomie, a été fabriqué par un Allemand. (211)

[At night, a woman dressed in mourning clothes, sometimes a young man in black, opens the door. They come to kneel near the bed, and when they have long contemplated the marvelous shapes of the wax statue, they embrace it, kiss it on the lips. A spring placed inside the flanks corresponds to the mouth and animates it at the same time it makes its thighs move apart. This model, a masterpiece of anatomy, was made by a German.]

While the conclusion of *Monsieur Vénus* has often been cited in contemporary scholarship as an example of post-humanism, it also the most critical of the novel's historical moment: it is indicative of the final stage of the Industrial Revolution, and the conversion of human beings from consumers of manufactured goods to the objects of manufacture themselves.¹²³ Germans, who made the automaton, embraced industrialization more enthusiastically than did the French. This final chapter of the novel begins by revealing that Raittolbe has left France to fight in Africa, signifying the loss of potential sexual procreation and the continued growth of colonialism.

The synthetic is therefore emancipatory: spirituality, in *Monsieur Vénus*, is materialistic –precisely as Musser suggests: “flesh [is shown] to be a valuable commodity in and of itself... a necessary active part of subjectivity” that allows for a re-finding of self. As Musser also claims, flesh is “not something excluded by discourse”; in Rachilde’s, Barney’s and Vivien’s literary works, flesh is shown to be inextricable from discourse. This inextricability is likely why Rachilde not only utilizes literary sadism and masochism – conventions that acknowledge the relationship between flesh and discourse – but also manipulates them, in order to create alternative possibilities for women and their sexuality.

In an obscure essay by Rachilde that has never been translated, *Sade Toujours!*, she indicates that her literary interest in masochism and in sadism is an intervention that attempts to separate the sexual proclivities from the men who gave them their names. She argues that the Marquis de Sade was not in fact insane, that he was not a marquis, and that he did not invent sadism:

Rassurez-vous: je n’ai pas envie de réhabiliter le Marquis de Sade...Le sadisme – que n’a certainement pas inventé le Marquis de Sade – n’est pas autre chose que l’exaspération de l’amour par la vue du sang ou la sensation de la douleur... Et le sadisme et ses racines sont profondément enfoncées dans l’animalité proche parente de l’humanité. (12)

[Rest assured: I do not want to rehabilitate the Marquis de Sade... Sadism – which was certainly not invented by the Marquis de Sade – is nothing more than the intensification of love at the sight of blood or at the feeling of pain. And sadism and its roots are deeply entrenched in animality, a close relative of humanity.]

In the final line of the essay, however, she proclaims its title, “Sade Toujours!” [Sade Forever!]. Rachilde’s invocation of sadism is another form of her non-conventional critique of misogyny; in 1887, she published *La Marquise de Sade*, a novel which remains far lesser known than *Monsieur Vénus*. The introduction to the 1981 French edition continues to characterize Rachilde a *misogyne* [misogynist], while still championing the importance of her literary work.¹²⁴

Despite its title, there is no character in *La Marquise de Sade* who officially bears that name. Yet presumably, the “Marquise de Sade” is the protagonist Mary, the daughter of a French military officer. As she grows, Mary becomes increasingly violent, her lust for blood ignited when, as a young girl, she accidentally witnesses an animal being slaughtered on the family farm. She marries and then murders her uncle, an older scientist who, chaste for many years, claims that women are inferior – until he meets Mary. She also becomes his *protégé*, capable of wielding the apathetic logic of science better than he can. Upon attending a medical lecture with him, Mary remarks: ““Leurs conférences me rappellent un abattoir que j’ai vu dans ma petite enfance...” [‘their lectures remind me of a slaughterhouse I saw in my childhood...’] (206). It is civilization that is barbaric in Rachilde’s writing, as it is in the writing of the Marquis de Sade. Yet Sade sought to depict savagery as more humane than civilization by depicting explicit sexuality in scenes of mundanity; in Rachilde’s writing, sadistic and masochistic sexual practices create a space of possibility for what cannot be experienced in everyday life.

At the conclusion of *La Marquise de Sade*, when Mary has become a full-fledged murderess, she resides in Paris, where ‘her life blossoms into an exaggeration that the philosophers of the century call *decadence*, the end of everything...a period of universal cowardice...She was not of today’s decadence

but of Rome's' (303-5).¹²⁵ The book concludes with Mary's decision to begin killing male transvestites that hold wild parties in Parisian nightclubs, perhaps precisely because their transsexuality is a surface-level performance of "queerness" ultimately grounded in misogyny. Her murderous tendencies are fueled by the *fin-de-siècle* decadence of Paris, a place of banality and horror: the nexus of sadian apathy.

Notably, Rachilde's friend and famed-writer Guillaume Apollinaire also returned to sadism in his pornographic novel, *Les Onze Mille Verges*, which Pablo Picasso dubbed Apollinaire's masterpiece.¹²⁶ The narrative recounts the fictional story of a Romanian prince, Mony Vibescu, as he travels throughout Eastern Europe and Asia committing violent sexual acts and murder. In *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*, Scott Baker writes of *Les Onze Mille Verges*:

The characters embark on voyages into areas much in the news in early years of the twentieth century during the Russo-Japanese War. Apollinaire detested Russia and was enthusiastically on the side of the Japanese in that conflict, unlike most of the mainstream French media...it is not a coincidence that Mony Vibescu's most violent, most nauseating deeds, those involving torture and mutilations, make of him a Russian war hero. Indeed, several of the most violent incidents in the book were taken from reports in mainstream newspapers of the time, leading to the conclusion that the novel...is an ironic commentary on the terrible consequences of excessive sexuality and the gratuitous violence of war.¹²⁷

While Apollinaire's style in the book adheres closely to the Marquis de Sade's and to what Deleuze describes as the sadian literary technique – long, repetitive and apathetic descriptions of sex and violence – Rachilde's *La Marquise de Sade*, does not.¹²⁸ Most of

the descriptions of violence are in fact deferred until the final-third of the novel. In *La Marquise de Sade*, apathetic violence is manifest in the banality of daily bourgeois life, and specifically, female life. Both Apollinaire's and Rachilde's novels also suggest that there was a renewed interest in sadism during the moment in France when both of these novels emerged that was tied to the solidification of national and colonial borders that cultivated an environment of state violence, apathy, and even fascism – with which Rachilde herself would in some ways come to be associated. She, for example, had a fan in the Italian futurist and proto-fascist F.T. Marinetti, who sought to translate her work into Italian, and whose controversial novel, *Mafarka The Futurist* (1909), Rachilde reviewed in the *Mercure de France*. In the essay, '(En)Gendering Fascism: Rachilde's "Les Vendanges de Sodome" and *Les Hors-Nature*' that appears in the collection, *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* (1997), Melanie Hawthorne argues that "nationalism is as much a social construction as gender; nineteenth century nationalism is gendered since women were not legal citizens." Hawthorne interprets Rachilde's incorporation of Sodom and Sade in a collection of her short stories as, "evok[ing] the short-lived Italian fascist state know as Republic of Salò, which Pasolini made the setting for his last film, *Salo: 120 Days of Sodom* (1975)...which in Pasolini's story, as in Rachilde's story, combines a vision of the authoritarian state with sexual politics" (38).¹²⁹ Rachilde's rejection of feminism, which has been so controversial, can, in her literary invocation of sadism and masochism, be interpreted as a rejection of the French state itself.

Sadism and masochism, according to Deleuze, reflect perversions produced by the violence of bourgeois morality. He asks, '[o]ught we to conclude [the language of sadism and masochism] is paradoxical because the victim speaks the language of the

torturer he is to himself, with all the hypocrisy of the torturer?’ (23). Rachilde’s literature offers another paradox altogether: the characters Raoule and Mary are themselves both the torturers *and* victims – because they are women. This new position of woman as torturer is therefore the “third-term” in Rachilde’s writing – the figure capable of achieving sexual and social transcendence. The function of the mannequin or sex doll in *Monsieur Vénus*, for example, is that it must reach a place of inactivity to attain control.

The unconventional and complex invocation of sadism and masochism Rachilde adopted in her writing has led to both its misunderstanding and to its allure. Indeed, what remains one of the most unfortunate points of commonality among Rachilde, Barney, Vivien and Sappho is the continued gendered reception and publication of their literary work. In her equally unusual sequel to *Monsieur Vénus*, *Madame Adonis* (1888), Rachilde uses the introduction as an attempt to address the backlash she received from writing *Monsieur Vénus* and the misogyny with which she has been treated as a female author. In response to being termed a “*vieille bique*” – or an “old hag” – by journalists and literary critics she writes:

Ces mots: *Vieille bique*, me hantèrent longtemps...La *vieille bique* ne s’explique pas, du moment que ce gros monsieur est bien élevé, charitable, père de famille...Est-ce que ce ne serait pas un rêve que d’être *femme de lettres*? Femme de lettres ayant succès, beauté, génie? La *vieille bique* a fait un trou dans mon cerveau, trou par lequel, je crois, toute ma faible raison a passé. (v-vi)

[These words: *Old hag*, haunted me for a long time...The *old hag* cannot explain herself, as long as the big man [journalist] is well brought up, charitable, the father of a family...Wouldn’t it be a dream to be a woman of letters? A woman of letters having success, beauty, genius? The old

hag made a hole in my brain, a hole through which, I believe, all of my feeble faculties have gone.]

The narrative of *Madame Adonis* also focuses on androgyny, genderplay, and class; in fact, as opposed to a statue of Venus, it is a statue of Sappho that presides over the characters in the boudoir where they transgress.¹³⁰ Yet neither the narrative nor the introduction received much attention, and *Monsieur Vénus* has persisted as the most popular and notorious piece of writing attributed to Rachilde.

Throughout the narrative of *Monsieur Vénus*, attempts to access real or natural bodies only lead to fragmented and incomplete forms. The conclusion of Rachilde's novel ultimately suggests that the artifice of Jacques's rubber body – unlike the cold, hardened statues of antiquity – is pliable, flexible, and always open. In this sense, Rachilde, like Sappho, can be conceived of as an authorial figuration that can reanimate the various translations and publications of her text, and can render our readings of them more malleable: a counterpoint to attempts at textual mastery or restoration, attempts that are – like the statues of Venus – always incomplete.

As both Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray assert, because texts are not inert objects controlled by their authors, their resistance to ownership can be a counterpart to the subjugated body and sexuality. New translations and new publications can therefore also be ethical rewriting projects that allow for new reading practices and new conceptions of authorship. Irigaray terms the parallelism between texts and bodies an 'isomorphism;' as Grosz interprets:

[T[exts [for Irigaray] are not inert objects controlled by their authors....A text's 'viscosity,' its materiality, its super abundance regarding an author's intentions, and its resistance to ownership is seen by Irigaray as a counterpart or recalcitrance

of the female body and sexuality in patriarchal culture... This parallelism, or, in her terms, 'isomorphism,' between bodies—especially women's bodies—is not random... Thus a transformation in modes of writing is the condition of a transformation in modes of corporeal inscription and thus a transformation in bodies themselves. (Grosz, *Transfigurations*, 201)

Texts are not inert objects controlled by their authors, and yet, in the case of authors like Rachilde, Barney, Vivien and Sappho, whose biographies have become an intrinsic part of their literary work and its translational history, the author's relationship to her work is crucial.

In Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," he famously asks, "isn't the afterlife of works of art easier to recognize than that of living creatures?"¹³¹ Benjamin's provocation has compelled many readers and critics to consider how certain works of art have, as cultural objects, the capacity to live beyond the time of their emergence, and how their afterlives illuminate the moment of their conception and beyond. The historical reception of Rachilde's, Barney's, Vivien's and Sappho's work, on the one hand, underscores the way attempts made by female writers and artists to subvert or self-consciously engage the effects of patriarchy have been, in many cases, used to re-inscribe and extend the cultural, patriarchal inscriptions their narratives seek to dismantle, or at least upend. Yet what is both compelling and valuable about the various afterlives of their work is that they reveal their respective texts' resistance to a singular or canonical reading. These afterlives are indicative of radically different investments in feminism – and investments in literature. Literature as a discourse bears the unique and problematic capacity to showcase the investments of different discourses – precisely what makes it, as Jacques Derrida has famously claimed, a strange institution, that therefore also offers the

possibility for such historical shifts and investments to be turned inside out and made visible.¹³² What can these authorial figurations reveal about the respective cultural moments in which they disappear and reappear?

DeJean, for example, whose scholarly pursuit of Sappho continues, published “The Time of Commitment: Reading Sappho 1900,” in 2004, in which she re-visits her own scholarship on the Sapphists of late-nineteenth century France in order to posit a possible alliance between the female Sapphists and “pro-Jewish thinkers” (those who supported Dreyfus and spoke out against anti-Semitism). She concludes her essay: “Who can tell what will happen to Sappho in the new Europe now being proclaimed, a Europe without airtight frontiers that sheltered the rise of nationalism?” (159). DeJean’s seems ever more a question today: how does Sappho continue to act as a figure that animates literature, female authorship, sexuality, histories of feminism?

In the United States in the 1950s, the first lesbian civil and political rights organization named itself “Daughters of Bilitis,” after Louÿs’s book, because of both its obscurity and its reference to Sappho as a lesbian poetess (Gallo, 9). The book was only officially reprinted in the 1970s, and has become a sought-after cult text among the lesbian underground. In 1950s Jamaica, there were attempts to create a “Sapphic club,” the first Caribbean woman’s literary club, which described its project as a sacred sorority and Sappho as its honorary president.¹³³ In the twenty-first century, 2010, a kuchu-queer club named *Sappho Islands* opened in Kampala, Uganda; because the Ugandan government passed more restrictive laws against homosexuality, the club was ultimately forced to close a year later. The story of *Sappho Island’s* emergence and subsequent closure became the subject of a theatrical project, *Clubscenen*, that premiered in 2012 in Stockholm.

The 1970s republication of *Les Chansons des Bilitis* contains an added dedication “to the young women of a future society” (3). The texts that comprise the Sapphic constellation I have constructed are thus not only connected to the past (and various imagined pasts) but also imagine futures and utopic spaces. The figuration of Sappho provided these authors with an alternative space and time, revealing the non-linearity of historical representations and underscoring the importance of radical re-visionings of Greek narratives.¹³⁴ Just as her nineteenth-century revival ignited the French political and social sphere, so too can Sappho’s figuration continue to animate us beyond the pages of books.

Endnotes

- ¹ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- ² The famous composer Claude Debussy was a friend of Louÿs's and adapted three of the poems, "La flûte de Pan: Pour le jour des Hyacinthies," "La chevelure: Il m'a dit 'Cette nuit j'ai rêvé'" and "Le tombeau des Naiades: Le long du bois couvert de givre," for voice and piano in 1897. See *Debussy and the Fragment* (2006) by Linda Cummins for more information.
- ³ The figure of Aphrodite (her Greek name) or Venus (her Latin name), for example. For more information, see Athena Leoussi's *Nationalism and Classicism: The Classical Body as National Symbol in Nineteenth-Century England and France* (1998) and, *Sex: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (2015), by Daniel Orrells. As Page duBois writes in *Sappho: Understanding Classics* (2015): "[T]he 'translation', the reception, the making of a Sappho for modernity [can be described as] 'Christianisation'. This Sappho is redeemed, as she becomes a virgin priestess. The French version of Sappho was in the nineteenth century a more contradictory one; their Sappho was either pure and chaste, or a dissolute homosexual, an alienated modernist lesbian" (26).
- ⁴ Albert's book was originally published in French, under the title, *Saphisme et decadence dans Paris fin-de-siècle* (2005). Because this article is written in English, I will cite from the English version of Albert's book, translated by Nancy Erber and William Peniston, and published in 2016.
- ⁵ Classical scholar Page duBois, for example, whose several books on Sappho: *Sappho is Burning* (1995), and *Sappho* (2015), utilize feminist approaches, among others.
- ⁶ Lorenz's title is actually a vindication of the pejorative title, "Sapho cent pour cent", that was also given to the group retrospectively by the critic and editor André Billy in the 1950s. Billy was critical of Barney and Vivien's unconventional translations of Sappho's work. The French spelling of Sappho used only one "p" for her name – "Sapho" – hence it will be spelled this way in nearly all of the French accounts I will cite in this paper. For more information, see DeJean's *Fictions of Sappho*.

⁷ I am referring to Marguerite Yourcenar's *Feux* (1936) and Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2002).

⁸ Paula Blank's article, "The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice," is influential to my project in its approach to the intersection of antiquity and contemporary sexuality; Blank emphasizes that the meaning of the word "lesbian" has often deviated problematically from its current usage (Erasmus translates "Lesbian" one who performs fellatio, for example). As opposed to overlooking its former usages, or rejecting the word lesbian altogether, however, Blank argues for an interrogation of the word's etymology from Ancient Greece to the present that does not seek a singular meaning.

⁹ In *Mimesis*, Auerbach develops his concept of a figural interpretation of history, which he began in *Figura*. He writes that such an interpretation implies, "that every occurrence, in all its everyday reality, is simultaneously apart in a world-historical context through which each part is related to every other, and thus is likewise to be regarded as being of all times or above all time" (35).

¹⁰ Barthes asserts in his 1967 essay *La mort de l'auteur* (*The Death of the Author*) that an author's biography should not be used to derive meaning from the author's writing. Miller articulates this particular argument in her essay, "Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic," which appears in the book *Poetics of Gender* (1986).

¹¹ While Carla Freccero's *Queer/Early/Modern* (2005) is not focused on antiquity, she too develops a radical re-reading method – "fantasmatic historiography" – that centers the role of fantasy and desire in the construction of historical narratives.

¹² As I will explain in detail in Chapter II, legally categorizing individuals as "third-sex" would have meant that they could be denied certain legal rights (like the right to marry, or the right to inherit property).

¹³ This translation comes from *m Charles Baudelaire, With a Few Original Poems*. This translation comes from Richard Herne Shepherd's 1869 translation of Baudelaire's poems, *Translations from Charles Baudelaire, With a Few Original Poems*

¹⁴ The emergence of vocabulary to connote homosexuality was different between France and England, although they influenced each other. DeJean details:

In France, Sappho really becomes a homosexual poet only after the vocabulary of homosexuality had been developed, when female same-sex love had been renamed... For the scholarly sexualization of Sappho, English usage is more important than French: two years after Symonds introduced “homosexual” in his commentary on ideal love, he provided the translation of Bergk’s homosexual Sappho into a modern language, that inspired the same revision in French. (237)

¹⁵ See page 234 of DeJean’s *Fictions of Sappho*.

¹⁶ See pages in 182 and 183 in Albert’s *Lesbian Decadence* for more information.

¹⁷ Jacqueline Fabre-Serris cites Reinach’s praise in her essay titled, “Anne Dacier (1681), Renée Vivien (1903): Or What Does it Mean for a Woman to Translate Sappho?”, that appears in the collection, *Women Classical Scholarship*, p. 93.

¹⁸ The letters include comments from scholar Gaetan Baron, who taught Vivien ancient Greek, and worked on translating Sappho’s fragments with her.

¹⁹ Reinach actually died in 1928, but Aimé Puech continued with the revision of the book, hence his name is credited as a co-collaborator in the title.

²⁰ Found near central Egypt, it is often referred to as the “Berlin fragment” because it was deciphered by a German linguist, and was housed at a university in Berlin.

²¹ Reinach’s demand was published as an essay titled, “Pour mieux connaître Sappho”, *Compte rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 55^e année, N. 9, 1911. pp. 718-734. As I will later discuss in more detail, in her book, *Pensées d’une Amazone* (1920), Barney titled a section, “Le Malentendu ou Le Procès de Sappho,” [“Misunderstanding or Sappho’s Trial”] in reference to this debate.

²² The citation includes a tacit reference to Ovid’s *Heroides* where he stages the laments of abandoned famous women. He includes a letter from Sappho to Phaon which became very important for poets in early modern England. The myth of Sappho the abandoned (heterosexual) lover is implicit in the characterization of Sappho as Sappho.

²³ Barney was called an “Amazon” by the French writer Remy de Gourmont, and was often the subject of tabloids – both in France and in the United States

²⁴ Vivien worked with the Hellenist scholar Jean Charles-Brun and Gaetan Baron to learn ancient Greek.

²⁵ In the section titled “Renée Vivien,” in Barney’s memoir *Souvenirs indiscrets*, she writes: “Peu de temps après ses premiers succès, [Renée] m’emmena chez elle, à Londres, où je pus retrouver . . . un exemplaire des fragments de Sapho, traduits par Wharton . . . Ce précieux recueil servit à Renée Vivien de comparaison avec sa traduction française, devint son livre de chevet et la source où elle puisa l’inspiration païenne de plusieurs de ses livres à venir” [Shortly after she’d had her first success, Renée took me to her home in London, where I was able to find a copy of Sappho’s fragments, translated by Wharton. This valuable collection served as comparison for Renée Vivien’s French translation, became her bedside book, and was the source of pagan inspiration she drew from in many of her books to come] (87).

²⁶ Like Louÿs, Salomon Reinach and the editor and Hellenist scholar Jean Charles-Brun.

²⁷Jean-Paul Goujon, Vivien’s biographer, previously recounted that she was introduced to Sappho by Eva Palmer, in 1900. Yet among the letters Reinach deposited are three from the scholar Gaetan Baron, who wrote that he first met Vivien in Paris in 1898, “quand elle eut la velléité d’apprendre le grec” (when she wanted to learn Greek). He believes that he was likely her first Greek tutor, and describes Vivien as she translated Sappho’s poetry: “les plus informes fragments de Sappho prenaient instantément forme et vie, à l’appel de ses évocations” (the most unformed of Sappho’s fragments instantly took form and life, at the call of her evocations). The first of these citations comes from a letter Baron wrote to Reinach, dated March 29, 1920; the second comes from Baron’s memoirs, dated February 27, 1916. They are both in the archive Reinach bestowed to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, under *Renée Vivien (Pauline Tarn), II*, NAF26583, F13-18, Département des manuscrits.

²⁸Her first collection, *Études et preludes*, is under the name “R. Vivien,” to conceal the fact that she was a female author. There is speculation that she chose the name “Renée” after the deviant character Renée in Émile Zola’s *La Curée*. See *Renée Vivien à rebours: Études pour un centenaire* (Paris: L’Harmattan: Ed. Nicole G. Albert, 2009), 97

²⁹ Renée Vivien, *Sapho: Traduction nouvelle avec le texte grec* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1903

- ³⁰ Swinburne attempted to imitate Sappho's style in the poems he dedicates to her, while also emphasizing her sexuality. See "Swinburne's Sapphic Sublime" in Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (1999) for more detail.
- ³¹ DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 287.
- ³² See Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 362; and Melanie Hawthorne's introduction to Chelsea Ray's translation of Natalie Barney's *Women Lovers or the Third Woman* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 24.
- ³³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 187.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.
- ³⁵ Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 1.
- ³⁶ Elena Tzelepis and Athena Athanasiou, eds., *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and "the Greeks"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 372
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ³⁸ See Luce Irigaray and Sara Speidel, "Veiled Lips," *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3 (1983): 96.
- ³⁹ Tzelepis and Athanasiou, *Rewriting Difference*, 28.
- ⁴⁰ Irigaray and Speidel, "Veiled Lips," 103.
- ⁴¹ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 182.
- ⁴² Irigaray and Speidel, "Veiled Lips," 93.
- ⁴³ Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, 88. Since Vivien's translation appears in italics in the book, I have maintained her format in the citation.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ⁴⁵ See Albert, *Lesbian Decadence* 249.
- ⁴⁶ Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, 40–42.
- ⁴⁷ Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, "Anne Dacier (1681), Renée Vivien (1903)," in *Women Classical Scholars: Unsealing the Fountain from the Renaissance to Jacqueline de Romilly*, edited by Rosie Wyles and Edith Hall (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 102.

- ⁴⁸ Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, “Textiles That Matter: Irigaray and Veils,” in Tzelepis and Athanasiou, *Rewriting Difference*, 73.
- ⁴⁹ Albert writes that the “ornamental insets of different sizes . . . lighten the page presentation but sometimes give it a distracting, collage-like appearance” *Lesbian Decadence*, 231).
- ⁵⁰ Anne Carson, trans., *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage, 2003), xi.
- ⁵¹ André Lebey, *Les Poésies de Sappho: Traduites en entier pour la première fois*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1895), 10.
- ⁵² Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, xi.
- ⁵³ Natalie Clifford Barney, *Souvenirs indiscrets* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 67.
- ⁵⁴ She greatly inspired the English author Radclyffe Hall, for example, who wrote *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), hailed as the most famous lesbian novel of the twentieth century, which was famously banned in England but published in France (Barney also appears as the character Valerie Seymour in the book). Illustrated with woodcuts, Djuna Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack* (1928) was about Barney, who appears in the narrative as Dame Evangeline Musset, a character who helps women in need, provides them with wisdom, and is ultimately made into a saint: “[She] was in her Heart one Grand Red Cross for the Pursuance, the Relief and the Distraction, or such Girls as in their Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most” (42). Barney even attempted to create L’Académie des Femmes (The Academy of Women) as a female alternative to the formerly all-male Académie Française.
- ⁵⁵ `This citation comes from Tristram Powell’s 1967 BBC documentary, *Natalie Clifford Barney*.
- ⁵⁶ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 273.
- ⁵⁷ See Mary C. Greenshields, “The Amazon in the Drawing Room: Natalie Clifford Barney’s Parisian Salon, 1909– 1970,” University of Lethbridge Department of English (2010); and Samuel N. Dorf, *Performing Antiquity: Ancient Greek Music and Dance from Paris to Delphi, 1890–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵⁸ Barney introduced Vivien to Charles Brun, who became one of Vivien's Greek tutors, one of her editors, and one of her confidantes.

⁵⁹ The play was apparently first titled "Sapho," which created controversy because it shared its name with Alphonse Daudet's extremely popular novel *Sapho* (1884).

⁶⁰ Natalie Clifford Barney, "Équivoque," in *Actes et Entr'Actes* (Paris: E. Sansot, 1910), 57.

⁶¹ Dorf, *Performing Antiquity*, 64.

⁶² This controversy was reported by the *Dayton Journal* in Dayton, Ohio, Barney's hometown, in November 1909. While the author defends Barney and praises her intelligence, he fascinatingly did not understand the play's plot twist: that Sappho does not love Phaon but his fiancée.

⁶³ Charlotte Lysès, Marie Rambert, Penelope Duncan, and Marguerite Moreno, for example.

⁶⁴ See Dorf, *Performing Antiquity*.

⁶⁵ Many aspects of the character Phèdre were based on Sappho's perceived biography (Phèdre jumps off a cliff, for example, at the end of the play). Racine also includes Sapphic fragments in the play. Arsène Houssaye and Francis Vielé-Griffin also wrote plays about Sappho that were quite popular. See *Fictions of Sappho* for more detailed information.

⁶⁶ J. J. Winkler, "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics," *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, edited by Laura McClure (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2007), 74.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁸ She in fact describes her frustration with Colette's famous partner, the writer Willy, for insisting on accompanying her to one of the performances. See page 237 of *Souvenirs indiscrets*.

⁶⁹ Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 137.

⁷⁰ *Pensées* is a series of fragments written by the seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal and published posthumously. They are primarily about the reasons for his conversion to Christianity.

⁷¹ This text was printed in English.

⁷² Natalie Clifford Barney, *Pensées d'une Amazone* (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1921), 76.

⁷³ The French version of this stanza uses the adjective “*stérile*” or “sterile” to describe hours, which connotes the infertility that would be associated with a “hermaphrodite” or intersex person.

⁷⁴ In the previous chapter, I cited a passage in Barney’s *Pensées d'une amazone* in which she cites from Swinburne’s poem. The “Sleeping Hermaphroditus” was purchased by the Louvre in 1807.

⁷⁵ Patrick Graille, *Les Hermaphrodites aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001), p. 9. Original text: ‘Ignorez-vous que le marbre de l’Hermaphrodite du Louvre a été usé par les caresses des visiteurs, et que l’administration des musées a dû protéger par une barrière la figure monstrueuse et charmante?’

⁷⁶ Translation by Roy Campbell, *Poems of Baudelaire; a translation of Les Fleurs du mal*, 1952.

I refer to the influence of Baudelaire’s poetry on Sappho’s popularity in nineteenth-century France in Chapter I, p. 8. For further information, see Joan DeJean’s *Fictions of Sappho*, p. 272.

⁷⁸ See Lorraine Datson and Katharine Park’s, “The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature: Sexual Ambiguity in Early Modern France”, *GLQ* (1995), p. 421.

⁷⁹ See Linton, “Hermaphrodite Outlaws”, p. 91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁸¹ The publication of the memoirs of Herculine Barbin introduced by Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin dite Alexina B.* (1978) [*Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*], brought the devastating experiences of a French individual legally deemed a *hermaphrodite* to twentieth-century consciousness. Herculine Barbin was a nineteenth-century French intersex person who was deemed a female at birth. After being caught having an affair with a woman while in

a convent, a judge ordered her to become a man. Barbin ultimately committed suicide in 1868. Barbin's memoirs recount the excruciating emotional and physical experiences s/he experienced in the medico-legal world.

⁸² See "Tracking the Vampire" by Sue-Ellen Case, in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991), pages 1-19.

⁸³ See *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End* (2014) by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen, pages 12-15.

⁸⁴ The canonical French writer Honoré de Balzac, for example, wrote a novella, *Séraphîta* (1834), in the early part of the nineteenth century that deviated notably from his trademark realist style. Natalie Barney was herself, in fact, greatly inspired by it. In the narrative, a scientist named Emmanuel Swedenburg is visited by an androgynous angel, Séraphîta who represents sexual and spiritual wholeness that transcends the material world. Scholars of Balzac's writing have typically focused on the influence of scientific discourse on this text, as opposed to its anxiety over the absence of spirituality in human life.

⁸⁵ The original French text uses "connaître" for "knowing," a verb which in French means "to know" on an intimate or personal level, as opposed to the French verb "savoir", which means to know information, facts or details.

⁸⁶ See Weil, pages 83-86.

⁸⁷ Ellis Hanson's excellent book, *Decadence and Catholicism* (1998), explores possible reasons that nineteenth-century writers like Oscar Wilde, Charles Baudelaire, J.-K. Huysmans, Walter Pater, Paul Verlaine turned toward Catholicism as a means of escaping the vacuous materialism of their decadent moment.

⁸⁸ See *Renée Vivien: à rebours* (2009), ed. Nicole Albert

⁸⁹ See Marie Perrin's excellent book, *Renée Vivien, le corps exsangue: De l'anorexie à la création littéraire* (2003) for a nuanced interpretation of Vivien's conversion to Catholicism and its relationship to her body.

⁹⁰ Vivien would in fact put this cult into real-life practice, by organizing trips to the island of Lesbos, where she, Barney, and other female writers in their circle, performed plays and devised rituals in the name of Sappho. I will further discuss their trips to Lesbos in the conclusion.

⁹¹ For example, in the introduction to the 2008 republication of the 1904 version of *La femme m'apparut*, Melanie Hawthorne characterizes the book as a *roman à clef* as does Juliette Dade in her essay, "La Décorporalisation de la femme dans les deux éditions d'*Une femme m'apparut*" which appears in the collection *Renée Vivien à rebours*.

⁹² The character San Giovanni is based on Leonardo da Vinci's painting of Saint John the Baptist, "San Giovanni Battista". Da Vinci's depiction has long been characterized as androgynous; Frank Zöllner writes in his book *Leonardo Da Vinci* (2000), "the gentle shadows imbue the subject's skin tones with a very soft, delicate appearance, almost androgynous in its effect, which has led to this portrayal being interpreted as an expression of Leonardo's homoerotic leanings" (90).

⁹³ I will refer to San Giovanni with female pronouns since this is how Vivien refers to her in the book, despite simultaneously deeming her an *androgynne*.

⁹⁴ In Melanie Hawthorne's introduction to the 2008 republication of the 1904 version of *La femme m'apparut*, Hawthorne suggests that San Giovanni is Vivien's alter ego, as does Juliette Dade in her essay, "La Décorporalisation de la femme dans les deux éditions d'*Une femme m'apparut*" which appears in the collection *Renée Vivien à rebours*.

⁹⁵ One critic of the 1904 version of *Une femme m'apparut* was Rachilde, who will be the subject of the second half of this chapter. As I will cite in that section, Rachilde published a scathing review of Vivien's book in *Mercure de France*.

⁹⁶ *Une femme m'apparut* was republished in the 1970s by the French publisher Hachette and then in 2008 by the French imprint Édition Adventice. It was translated and published in English by Naiad Press in 1976.

⁹⁷ The character Éva is based on Eva Palmer-Silkelianos, a childhood friend of Barney's with whom Vivien had a romantic relationship; Dagmar is believed to be based on Olive Custance, the wife of Lord Alfred Douglas and a lover of Vivien's.

⁹⁸ Grosz's essay, "Irigaray and the Divine" in *Transfigurations* offers more details about the contention reception of Irigaray's theories of the angel and the divine.

⁹⁹ Liane de Pougy was one of the most famous courtesans of late-nineteenth century France; she and Barney were lovers, and de Pougy detailed their relationship in a thinly veiled novel, *Idylle saphique* (1901) which became a bestseller; Mimi

Franchetti was an Italian baroness, dancer and pianist who identified as a lesbian, and who had a romantic relationship with one of Barney's lovers, Romaine Brooks.

¹⁰⁰ As Hawthorne affirms in her introduction, N./La troisième is "grafted on to the Platonic understanding of human beings as originally a couple, a fused twosome" (22).

¹⁰¹ The character, The Newly Miserable Woman, is believed to be based upon Djuna Barnes.

¹⁰² As Chelsea Ray writes in the introduction to her English translation of the book, it is not known why Barney did not publish the book in her lifetime.

¹⁰³ It is worth noting that in French exists the third-person singular pronoun "on", and that it is frequently used instead of the third-person pronoun "nous" (we). In Barney's book, the character N. also oscillates between using *on* and *nous* to refer to themselves.

¹⁰⁴ 1904 for *Une femme m'apparut*, and 1926 for *Amants féminins*.

¹⁰⁵ Significantly, Barney's use of the word "legion" is a reference to the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac in the New Testament. In the story, to perform an exorcism, Jesus demands the demon who is possessing a man emerge and reveal its name (a necessary step in an exorcism); the man turns out to be possessed by a group of demons, however, who claim the collective name "Legion." By writing the legion in her story as an emancipatory collective of spirits that are the resurrection of a dead woman, Barney is rewriting the original Christian narrative from her radical feminist and spiritual perspective.

¹⁰⁶ Nordau's book first appeared in German in 1892. He specifically warned against reading the literature of Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and Émile Zola.

¹⁰⁷ See page 138, *Degeneration*.

¹⁰⁸ Vallette edited the *Mercure de France*, a well-regarded French literary magazine.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ These biographers include Melanie Hawthorne, Claude Dauphiné in *Rachilde femme de Lettres 1900* (1985), and Auriant in *Souvenirs sur madame Rachilde* (1989), for example.

¹¹¹ Rachilde claimed sole authorship over the first edition of the book but, because of the narrative's prurient content, a supposed male co-author, Francis Talman, joined her name on the second "first" edition of the text (it remains unlikely

Talman ever existed, however). While subsequent editions did not bear the phantom Talman's name, questions as to the narrative's inspiration persisted.

In her book, *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship* (2002), Melanie Hawthorne claims that Rachilde became the "queen of decadence" following the publication of *Monsieur Vénus*, p. 76.

¹¹² *Monsieur Vénus* was first published by the Belgian literary press Auguste Brancart. Because Belgium had more flexible publishing laws than did France during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it was not an uncommon strategy for French writers to publish their salacious works of literature in Belgium to garner more attention for their writing in France. While Rachilde was sentenced to prison, it was essentially a *pro forma* condemnation, and she never saw the inside of a jail cell. See Hawthorne's *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship* for further information.

¹¹³ As Hawthorne details, Rachilde herself variously claimed that it was based on an obsession with the male writer Catulle Mendès; that it was an autobiographical account of her obsession with a young, working-class man; and that it was written purely for shock value and to make her money. These claims, however, were tongue-and-cheek, and in keeping with the way Rachilde engaged the press and responded to its shock over her writing.

¹¹⁴ Rachilde addresses the extraordinary and unexpected controversy she faced over *Monsieur Vénus* in a lengthy preface to its follow-up novel, *Madame Adonis* (1888).

¹¹⁵ Hawthorne makes this claim in the preface to the English edition of *Monsieur Vénus*, p. 23.

¹¹⁶ Rita Felski, for example, in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) writes, "we do not need to claim Rachilde as an exemplary feminist forerunner in order to appreciate the startling and innovative power of her representations of female sexuality" (206). Melanie Hawthorne in *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship* and Rachel Mesch in *The Hysteric's Revenge* (2006) hail the innovative importance of Rachilde's female characters while considering the question of Rachilde's misogyny and political affiliations within the context of her literary work.

¹¹⁷ Raoule corrects a male character in the novel who thinks she is a lesbian by telling him she is not “Sappho” because “being Sappho” means to be like every girl in Paris (Rachilde, 87).

¹¹⁸ For example, Janet Beizer characterizes Rachilde’s writing as sadomasochistic in her introduction to *Monsieur Vénus* in *The Decadent Reader* (1998), p. 239. Romana Byrne also characterises the novel and Rachilde’s œuvre as sadomasochistic in her book, *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism* (2013). Felski too discusses the sadism of Rachilde’s characters in the chapter, ‘The Art of Perversion: Female Sadists and Male Cyborgs,’ in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995). Deleuze’s book *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* was first published in French as *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: le froid et le cruel* (1967).

¹¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 57.

¹²⁰ Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus* (MLA, 2004), p. 88.

¹²¹ Amber J. Musser, ‘Masochism: A Queer Subjectivity,’ *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, 11/12 (2005)

<<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/musser.html>> [accessed 8 September 2018].

According to Musser:

[B]oth Butler's subject and the masochist rely on similar strategies, namely repetition, materiality, and disavowal, but corporeality, desire, and intersubjectivity, the essential components of the masochist/dominant complex, are nearly omitted in Butler's rendering of subjectivity.

Accounting for this difference facilitates comparisons between the two and enables alternative readings of Butler's theory of subjectivity.

¹²² Deleuze, p. 69.

¹²³ Rita Felski’s chapter, “The Art of Perversion: Female Sadists and Male Cyborgs,” in her book *The Gender of Modernism* (1995), characterizes the novel’s conclusion as post-human, for example.

¹²⁴ Rachilde, *La Marquise de Sade* (Mercure de France, 1981). The preface reads, “Misogyne, Rachilde se défendait d’être féministe. Au moment où s’impose une nouvelle lecture de son œuvre, gageons que chacun saura y prendre une vivifiante leçon de liberté.” [A misogynist, Rachilde proclaimed that she was not a feminist. At a moment

that calls for a new reading of her work, we bet that it will provide each and every one with an invigorating lesson in freedom] (iv).

¹²⁵ Original text: Sa vie s'épanouit en des exagérations à travers ce que les philosophes du siècle appellent la *décadence*, la fin de tout...une période de lâcheté universelle... [E]lle était de la décadence de Rome et non point de celle d'aujourd'hui.

¹²⁶ Apollinaire originally published the novel anonymously, under the initials, "G.A." The title, *Les Onze Mille Verges* is a play on words; Scott Baker explains in *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*: The title of the work is a pun on *verges* ("rods" or "scourges") and *vierges* ("virgins") and originates in the medieval legend of 11,000 virgins martyred by the Huns at Cologne. It also relates to a proverbial expression for a would-be womanizer, "a man in love with the 11,000 virgins." The main character in the book, the wealthy Romanian hospodar Mony Vibescu (*Mony* = "prick" in Romanian; *Vibescu* = French slangs for "Dickfuckass"), an insatiable priapist, boasts that he can copulate twenty times in a row. His failure to accomplish this heroic feat results finally in his death under the scourges of 11,000 Japanese soldiers! (34)

¹²⁷ Scott Baker, "Apollinaire, Guillaume," in *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*, ed. by Ed. Gaétan Brulotte and John Philips London (Routledge, 2006), p. 33.

¹²⁸ It is also relevant that one of the Marquis de Sade's most popular works, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, written in the late-eighteenth century, was not published in France until 1904. Apollinaire participated in editing and printing parts of it.

¹²⁹ Melanie Hawthorne, "(En)Gendering Fascism: Rachilde's 'Les Vendanges de Sodome and Les Hors-Nature'" in *Gender and Fascism in Modern France*, ed. by Richard J. Golsan and Melanie Hawthorne (University Press of New England, 1997), p. 38.

¹³⁰ Rachilde writes: "De chaque côté de la Sapho, deux amours à pieds de faunes élevaient des girandoles garnies de vertes bougies tortillées en spirales... Une heure s'écoulait, la Sapho le tenait là, passif, sous son regard mort, il aurait voulu ne plus s'en aller" [On each side of the Sapho, two cupids with faun's feet raised a string of lights garnished with green candles twisted into spirals...An hour went by, and the Sapho held him there, passive, under her dead gaze; he wanted never to leave] (155-158).

¹³¹ From "The Task of the Translator," translated by Harry Zohn, which appears in *The Translation Studies Reader* (2000), ed. by Lawrence Venuti.

¹³² Jacques Derrida calls literature “a strange institution” in the chapter “This Strange Institution Called Literature” in his book *Acts of Literature* (1991).

¹³³ Belinda Edmondson discusses the desire to formulate this Sapphic literary club in her book, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (2009).

¹³⁴ Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero articulate an influential approach to temporality in *Premodern Sexualities* (1996), arguing that premodernity and modernity are mutually constructed, the book interrogates the way historical anachronism and identifications with past figures produce queer temporalities.

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