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**(Un)veiling Sappho: Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford
Barney's Radical Translation Projects**

Rebekkah Dilts

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 Pamphylie 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.¹

(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 Pamphylie 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.)²

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. 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. Louÿs's endeavor both challenges the ethics of "faithful" translation and raises the question: why didn't readers care that Bilitis wasn't a real poet?

The success of *Les chansons des Bilitis* is indicative of the veritable obsession with the Greek poet Sappho in the nineteenth-century French literary world through a plethora of plays, novels, poems, commentaries, and translations. 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 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.³

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 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 oeuvre. Scholars like DeJean and Albert, who have written about Barney's 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.

The purpose of the present essay is to consider how Barney's and Vivien's invocations of Sappho's poetry, unlike even Louÿs's unconventional attempt, represent a radical approach to translation than those canonical and phallogocentric—an approach that echoes Luce Irigaray's theoretical feminist approach to rewriting classical Greek texts. DeJean and Albert offer a comprehensive historical account of the translations and commentaries on Sappho in nineteenth-century Western Europe; for context, I briefly discuss several of the primary works of translation and interpretation that appeared during the period and those that were of most influence to Vivien and to Barney (some of which are cited directly in their writing and translations). In nearly all these works of translations, even when it is unintentional, fantasy is integrated with what its editors and translators considered historical accounts. In the cases of the literary writers Charles Baudelaire and A. C. Swinburne, their writing is not translation 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 *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 lesbian in every sense of the term).⁷ 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 “there 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.⁸

Less than a decade after Deschanel’s article, there appeared what would become the definitive nineteenth-century translation and commentary of Sappho’s poetry in Latin, *Anthologia lyrica* (1854), by the German philologist Theodor Bergk. Scholars credit Bergk’s translation with conferring 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 in previous versions, a male pronoun was used instead. 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”].”⁹

Baudelaire’s extremely popular and controversial book of poetry *Les fleurs du mal* was published in 1857, although most of the poems had already 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. These poems had an enormous influence on popularizing the decadent lesbian image of Sappho,

inspiring a wide number of writers, artists, scholars, and translators. He was also famously put on trial following the book's publication for "outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes moeurs" (outrage to public morality), which was largely attributed to the homosexual content in "Femmes damnées" and "Lesbos."

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.

While Swinburne's poems were his own invention, they attempted to mimic Sapphic verse. Even though 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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."¹² 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."¹³

André Lebey, a French writer, poet, and editor of *La Revue socialiste*, was one of the scholars who claimed 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 Their 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 petite bourgeoisie. A person with a truly powerful nature has the right not to follow the common standards of decency).¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Lebey's book ultimately did not sell well, and there were just under three hundred copies ever 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."¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

In 1911 the French archaeologist and Hellenist scholar Théodore Reinach first published his book of translations, *Alcée. Sappho*, the revised 1937 version, remains today one of the definitive French translations of Sappho's poetry.¹⁸ Reinach initially took great pains to argue that Sappho was chaste, changing his opinion by the second edition of the translations. In 1879 Western Europe's archaeological and burgeoning colonial projects led to the discovery of the first new Sapphic fragment since the early seventeenth century.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

Indeed, even the most avowedly historical editions of translations or publications about Sappho reflect misogynistic representations of female sexuality and the body that were widely held during the period. Likely because disciplines like archaeology and philology were part of nationalism and colonialism, 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 sexual and a racial 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.²¹

(The beauty contest was a real institution, destined to maintain and perfect the race. They alone, in ancient society [the women of Lesbos], 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, it also suggests that race endows bodies with different kinds of sexual proclivities and that a particular race could itself be “perfected.” Deschanel’s Lesbos is an exotic place that reflects the colonial imaginary that would flourish in France for years to follow.

Baudelaire’s and Louÿs’s writing similarly represents Lesbos as an exotic space of otherness where Sappho and Lesbians are of a different race that allows for 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 / Caresent les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité / Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses” (Lesbos, Land of hot and languid nights / Which make, before their mirrors, sterile pleasure! / The hollow-eyed girls / Caress the ripe fruits of their amorous bodies’ nubility / Lesbos, land of hot and languid nights).²² In *Les chansons des Bilitis*, Louÿs

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 in sight of the shores of Asia).²³

In her scholarly account, *Sappho* (2015), Page duBois suggests that because Lesbos is “facing East” (the island is in 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.²⁴

Arguably, the conception that Sappho was closer to the “East” further ignited the orientalism and exoticism of nineteenth-century Western Europe. There was even conscription of Sappho onto non-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,” her poetry and biography interpreted through Sappho’s:²⁵

Nouvelle Sappho abandonnée par son Phaon, elle tend toutes les cordes de son coeur 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.”²⁶

(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 racism and misogyny 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; 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.²⁷ Vivien's invocations and translations of Sappho have, even in contemporary scholarship, frequently been read through her biography.

Of Barney and Vivien, Vivien was the only one to perform direct translations of Sappho's poetry.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Born in London with the name 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

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.³² 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:

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.³³

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*³⁴

Swinburne's poem is a playful attempt to mimic Sapphic lyricism, and Vivien endeavors to do the same in her second, more extended translation. 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.³⁵

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 had such a problematic influence in 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.³⁶ While a separation between author and text is necessary in literary analysis, to interpret Vivien's translations as an identification with Sappho's supposed suicide and as a harbinger of Vivien's is also to ignore the larger implications of the project. Instead of a veiled suicide note, these unconventional translations can be read as a feminist intervention that echoes those 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."³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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 the field of translation has historically been a male-dominated one that privileges mastery. Irigaray has also been invested in performing mimetic rereadings of canonical Greek texts in

particular because, 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."⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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."⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ 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).⁴⁶

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 enter 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 Lebey*” (*I don’t know what to do: I have two thoughts. I don’t know what I lack: my thoughts are double*).⁴⁷ 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):

Ζὰ δ' ἐλεξάμην ὄναρ Κυπρογενήα.

Et certes j'ai couché dans un songe avec la fille de Kupros.

Autre version du fragment:

Ἡράμην μὲν ἔγω σίθεν, Ἄτθι, πάλαι πότα.

Et certes j'ai parlé en songe avec la fille de Kupros.⁴⁸

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

Other version of the fragment:

Ἡράμην μὲν ἔγω σίθεν, Ἄτθι, πάλαι πότα.

And certainly I spoke in a dream with the daughter of Kupros.)

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.⁴⁹ Yet Vivien never interjects as a translator to privilege any particular version.

The extended translations Vivien offers—or the "amplifications" that De-Jean 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 indécié et voilé... / Fille de Kuprôs, 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 Kuprôs, I spoke to you long ago / Through a dream).⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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.”⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

(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.⁵⁶

(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—and still is—rarely 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).⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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."⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

While I wish to avoid conforming 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³ 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.

Gogro: 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.*⁶⁴

(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."⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ There have been a number of thoughtful 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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰

Winkler also contends that, because Sappho's poetry was to be delivered as lyric song in public, it intended to stage an intimate female experience:

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 three 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).⁷¹

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.⁷² 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.”⁷³ 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.”⁷⁴ 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!...”⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶

(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, bears 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 definitely 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. Barney's "Le malentendu ou le procès de Sappho," like Irigaray's *Marine Lover*, uses preexisting and often opposing forms of discourse to articulate new possibilities for female sexuality.

Despite the privilege that afforded Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien an education and lifestyle unavailable to most of their peers, it did not prevent their absence from conversations on translation and literature. It remains difficult to acquire most of their texts, even in French. In her preface to Chelsea Ray's recent English translation of Barney's prescient text, *Women Lovers or the Third Woman*, Melanie Hawthorne writes:

[Barney's] role as salon hostess has become the stuff of legend, and her social connections to the literary lions of modernism has long been recognized, but her own contributions to modernism and the international waves that shaped it have been vastly underrated. ...much of the work she chose to publish during her lifetime is in a genre that does not speak to the Anglophone world and its contemporary literary traditions.⁷⁷

Luce Irigaray (whose theoretical work has also not spoken to the Anglophone world as fluidly as have her French contemporaries) establishes radical textual encounters with the Greek canon that expose the construction of female subjectivity by phallogocentric discourse. For her part, the figure of Sappho, whomever she may have been, seems capable of intervening in the sexual politics of disparate historical moments. Indeed, the republication of Loüys's *Les chansons des Bilitis* added a dedication to "les jeunes filles de la société future" (the young women of a future society).⁷⁸ Vivien's and Barney's translations of Sappho are thus not only connected to the past (and various imagined pasts) but also imagine futures and utopic spaces. In 2004 DeJean published an article titled "The Time of Commitment: Reading Sappho 1900," revisiting her previous scholarship to posit a possible

alliance between Barney and Vivien and the “Dreyfusards or pro-Jewish thinkers” (those who supported Dreyfus and spoke out against anti-Semitism). She concludes her essay with the question: “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?”⁷⁹ How are translations of Sappho still dedicated to those of “future societies?” Sappho continues to offer radical possibilities for translation, sexuality, and female authorship, even outside Western Europe and the United States. In 1950s Jamaica, for example, there were attempts to create a “Sapphic club,” the first Caribbean woman’s literary salon that described its project as a sacred sorority and Sappho as its honorary president. 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 forced to close a year later. The story of Sappho Islands’s emergence and subsequent closure became the subject of a theatrical project, *Clubscenen*, that premiered in 2012 in Stockholm. Just as her nineteenth-century revival took place in the political and social sphere of the literary salon, Sappho’s presence has continued to animate groups to convene beyond the pages of books.

* * *

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Notes

¹ Pierre Louÿs and Mariette Lydis, *Les chansons de Bilitis* (Paris: G. Guillot, 1948), 10.

² All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13.

⁴ Albert's book was originally published in French, under the title *Saphisme et décadence dans Paris fin-de-siècle* (2005). I cite from the English version of Albert's book, translated by Nancy Erber and William Peniston, and published in 2016.

⁵ The classical scholar Page duBois, for example, whose several books on Sappho—*Sappho Is Burning* (1995) and *Sappho* (2015)—use feminist approaches, among others.

⁶ Lorenz's title is actually a vindication of the pejorative title “Sappho cent pour cent” that was given to the group retrospectively by the critic and editor André Billy in the 1950s. Billy was critical of Barney's 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 the French accounts I cite. For more information, see DeJean's *Fictions of Sappho*.

⁷ Émile Deschanel, “Les courtisanes Grecques, Sappho et les lesbiennes,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, no. 83 (1847): 343.

⁸ DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 261.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰ 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. However, this statement should not be taken as confirmation of the theory that the homosexual in the modern sense only came into existence: the relation between word and sexuality is more elusive than my first sentence reveals. Dictionaries note “saphisme”'s existence in the sense of “female homosexuality” as of 1867 (post-Deschanel), and the entrance of homosexual only in 1906. This evolution is reversed in English, in which a vocabulary for female same-sex love develops later than in

French: sapphism and lesbian seem to have been associated with same-sex love only after “homosexual”’s implantation. 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. (*Fictions of Sappho*, 237)

¹¹ Henry Thornton Wharton, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2010), 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ See DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 234.

¹⁴ André Lebey, *Les poésies de Sappho traduites en entier pour la première fois* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1895), 15.

¹⁵ The following is Lebey’s translation of “The Ode to Aphrodite” (italics added):

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 coeur 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!)

¹⁶ DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 261.

¹⁷ See Albert, *Lesbian Decadence*, 182–83.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Found near central Egypt, it is often referred to as the “Berlin fragment” because it was deciphered by a German linguist and housed at a university in Berlin.

²⁰ 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, no. 9 (1911): 718–34. As I later discuss in more detail, in her book *Pensées d'une Amazone* (1920), Barney titled a section "Le malentendu ou le procès de Sappho" ("The Misunderstanding or Sappho's Trial") in reference to this debate.

²¹ Émile Deschanel, "Les courtisanes Grecques, Sappho et les lesbiennes," 237.

²² Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal* (Paris: Le Livre du Poche, 1964), 67.

²³ Louÿs, *Les chansons de Bilitis*, 46.

²⁴ Page duBois, *Sappho* (London: I. B. Tauris), 47.

²⁵ The citation includes a tacit reference to Ovid's *Heroides*, where Ovid stages the laments of abandoned female literary figures. 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 Sampaeur as Sappho.

²⁶ Duraciné Vaval, *Histoire de la littérature haïtienne ou "L'âme noire"* (Port-au-Prince: Édouard Heraux, 1933), 88.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ Vivien worked with the Hellenist scholar Jean Charles-Brun and Gaetan Baron to learn ancient Greek.

²⁹ 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 Sappho, 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).

³⁰ Like Louÿs, Salomon Reinach, and the editor and Hellenist scholar Jean Charles-Brun.

³¹ Jean-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.

³² Her first collection, *Études et préludes*, 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*, Nicole G. Albert, ed. (Paris: L'Harmattan: 2009), 97.

³³ *I loved you, Atthis, long ago... / In the evening faded delights bloom / The reflection of your eyes and the echo of your voice... / ...I loved you, all throughout those distant years, / Atthis, long ago.*

³⁴ Renée Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle avec le texte grec* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1903), 16.

³⁵ DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 287.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 187.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 277.

³⁹ Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 1.

⁴⁰ Elena Tzelepis and Athena Athanasiou, eds., *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and "the Greeks"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 372.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴² See Luce Irigaray and Sara Speidel, "Veiled Lips," *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3 (1983): 96.

⁴³ Tzelepis and Athanasiou, *Rewriting Difference*, 28.

⁴⁴ Irigaray and Speidel, "Veiled Lips," 103.

⁴⁵ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 182.

⁴⁶ Irigaray and Speidel, “Veiled Lips,” 93.

⁴⁷ Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, 88. Since Vivien’s translation appears in italics in the book, I have maintained her format in the citation.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ See Albert, *Lesbian Decadence* 249.

⁵⁰ Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, 40–42.

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, “Textiles That Matter: Irigaray and Veils,” in Tzelepis and Athanasiou, *Rewriting Difference*, 73.

⁵³ 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).

⁵⁴ Anne Carson, trans., *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage, 2003), xi.

⁵⁵ André Lebey, *Les Poésies de Sappho: Traduites en entier pour la première fois*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1895), 10.

⁵⁶ Vivien, *Sappho: Traduction nouvelle*, xi.

⁵⁷ Natalie Clifford Barney, *Souvenirs indiscrets* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 67.

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ This citation comes from Tristram Powell’s 1967 BBC documentary, *Natalie Clifford Barney*.

Powell, Tristram. "Tristram Powell." Last modified 2019. <http://tristrampowell.com/cms/index.php/documentary/7-natalie-clifford-barney?play=ihzoL-rUkNoc>

⁶⁰ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 273.

⁶¹ See Mary C. Greenshields, "The Amazon in the Drawing Room: Natalie Clifford Barney's Parisian Salon, 1909–1970," Master's thesis, 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).

⁶² Barney introduced Vivien to Charles Brun, who became one of Vivien's Greek tutors, one of her editors, and one of her confidantes.

⁶³ The play was apparently first titled "Sappho," which created controversy because it shared its name with Alphonse Daudet's extremely popular novel *Sappho* (1884).

⁶⁴ Natalie Clifford Barney, "Équivoque," in *Actes et Entr'Actes* (Paris: E. Sansot, 1910), 57.

⁶⁵ Dorf, *Performing Antiquity*, 64.

⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Lysès, Marie Rambert, Penelope Duncan, and Marguerite Moreno, for example.

⁶⁸ See Dorf, *Performing Antiquity*.

⁶⁹ Arsène Houssaye and Francis Vielé-Griffin also wrote plays about Sappho that were quite popular. See *Fictions of Sappho* for more detailed information.

⁷⁰ 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.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷² 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*.

⁷³ Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 137.

⁷⁴ *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.

⁷⁵ This text was printed in English.

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

⁷⁷ Chelsea Ray and Natalie Clifford Barney, *Women Lovers, or the Third Woman* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 12.

⁷⁸ Louÿs, *Les chansons de Bilitis*, 3.

⁷⁹ Joan DeJean, "The Time Commitment: Reading Sapho 1900," *Modern Language Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2004): 59.