

Reading Sapphic Modernism: Belle époque poésie and Poetic Prose

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ABSTRACT

CATHERINE CLARK: Reading Sapphic Modernism: Belle époque poésie and Poetic Prose

(Under the direction of Erin Carlston)

This study builds on current trends in queer and gender theory by re-evaluating the presence of Greek poet Sappho's fragments in nineteenth and twentieth century poetry and poetic prose. In particular, I unravel the conflation of the "Sapphic" and "lesbian" (conceived by 1980's feminists) and instead engage Sappho's lyric as a particular model of creative awareness rather than as an expression of sexual preference. I draw on W.E.B. Du Bois's and Jack Winkler's definitions of "double consciousness" to define a "Sapphic consciousness" that negotiates a lyrical space between queer and normative expression. Sappho's poetry resists normative discourses of power by occupying multiple perspectives within one poem, often engaging in a kind of lyrical cross-dressing or transvestism. This often results in a confusion of lyrical subject and object, destabilizing definitions of a marginalized "other."

Both Sappho's poetry and the selected Modernist texts evoke fluid identities that are tied to gender roles and performance. Modernism's particular evocation of this Sapphic style was fueled by historical, aesthetic, and social factors at the turn of the century during a surge of artistic movements in the midst of continued industrialization and a sense of alienation expressed by growing expatriate communities. The Sapphic voice exists as a palimpsest within Modernism, creating a space where writers found new

modes of expression. By contextualizing the Modernist movement within a Sapphic tradition, I interpret the texts through the critical lens of contemporary theorists (Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault) and classical scholars (Ellen Greene and Page duBois). My research opens up the field of Sapphic Modernism by sidelining questions of authorial influence and pursuing fresh transnational comparisons among the works of modernist poets, male and female, such as Emily Dickinson, Charles Baudelaire, Colette, Anna de Noailles, Guillaume Apollinaire, Djuna Barnes, H.D., and W.B. Yeats.

To my sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret, who share my breath, my love, and my life.

Τάδε νῦν ἐταίραις ταῖς ἔμμοισι τέρπνα κάλως ἀείσω.
(Sappho, Fragment 11)

*Today is far from Childhood –
But up and down the hills
I held her hand the tighter –
Which shortened all the miles –
(Emily Dickinson)*

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CHAPTER ONE

Exploring Sappho's Identities and Defining the "Sapphic"

The nineteenth century marked a transmission of Sapphic scholarship and interpretation from German philologists to French writers. Charles Baudelaire's work *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) defined European notions of *modernité*, dominating creative conceptions of sixth century poet Sappho, shifting popular interest in her corpus from the "science of antiquity" to fictional texts, from the scholarly to the aesthetic. A few decades earlier, Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker's 1816 treatise, *Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurteil befreit*, was a high point of German classical scholarship in the early nineteenth-century. Welcker redefined, or "vindicated," Sappho's homoerotic reputation, along with that of her fellow ancient Greeks, in order to prop up a nationalistic crusade that promoted his countrymen as the modern Greeks. Welcker relied on the representation of Sappho's restored sexual purity and Greece's lauded military power in order to establish a connection to the new German state through careful redefinitions of male *pederastia* promoting "chaste" masculine camaraderie.¹

By the late nineteenth century, Henry T. Wharton's 1885 translation and compilation of Sappho's works into English was closely followed by a French translation by André Lebey in 1895. While both volumes were definitive editions for decades to follow (both academically and popularly), Wharton's translation became the new

¹ For Sappho's reinvention and transmission under nineteenth century German philology, see Joan DeJean's article "Sex and Philology: Sappho and the Rise of German Nationalism" in *Representations* 27 (Summer, 1989), 148-171.

authority over Sappho's works in the English-speaking sphere at the dawn of Modernism (a translation that remained authoritative until Page and Lobel's scholarly edition in 1955, subsequently usurped by David A Campbell's *Greek Lyric: Sappho, Alcaeus*, 1982). Reconsiderations and translations of Sappho and her corpus of work continue to this day. However, the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries saw a particularly renewed interest in concepts of Sappho and the "Sapphic," fueled by a variety of historical, aesthetic, social and political factors. This Introduction will try to do them justice.

Moving Sappho into Modernism: A Historical Perspective

Μνάσασθαί τινά φαμι καὶ ὕστερον ἄμμεων.²

In 1896, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, two fellows of Queen's College, England, began excavating an ancient rubbish dump in Oxyrhynchus south of Cairo, an archeological find to which they would devote the rest of their lives. Egyptian farmers had begun turning up papyrus pieces while plowing new fields, and western countries (France, Germany and England) quickly sent excavators to the region. Among the mounds of preserved papyri scraps, they uncovered at least a dozen lost fragments by the Greek poetess Sappho, including some of the most substantial additions to her existing *œuvre*.³ Several of these verses became vital to the emergence of new Sapphic "voices"

² "Someone, I say, will remember us in the future." (Campbell frag. 147) All Greek translations are from David A Campbell's *Greek Lyric: Sappho, Alcaeus* vol. 1 (Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 1982) unless otherwise noted.

³ The excavations of Sappho's fragments in Egypt are detailed in: Ellen Greene's *Re-reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1996), Margaret Reynolds's *The Sappho Companion* (Palgrave: New York, 2000), Willis Barstone's *Sweetbitter Love: Poems of Sappho* (Shambhala: Boston, 2006) and David Campbell's *Greek Lyric: Sappho*,

from across time and beyond the grave, including Fragment 16 (“Some say a host of cavalry...”) and Fragment 44 (“Hector and Andromache...”). These findings sparked a myriad of new interpretations and translations, encouraging a new understanding of Sappho’s voice.

This discovery (and subsequent publication of the recovered poetry starting in 1910) coincided with several other conditions at the end of the nineteenth century that made European Modernists re-evaluate, reconsider, and often strongly identify with Sappho’s lyrical style and character. In this way, she became a point of reconciliation between the old Classics and the new literary movement looking for fresh inspiration, corresponding with T.S. Eliot’s concept of the Poet in his 1922 essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” where he declares: “No poet, no artist of any art, has complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists... [Y]ou must set him for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (4). Eliot attempts a fusion of the past and his present and, as we will see, it was a task manifestly less standardized during Modernism than represented in his essay. Nonetheless, Sappho’s heightened presence under Modernism becomes a distinctive trend.

In order to understand the position of Sappho within Modernism it is necessary to examine how she was conceptualized and received prior to the turn of the twentieth century. From the time when most of Sappho’s corpus was lost (some scholars place this as late as the twelfth century) until the end of the nineteenth century, Sappho was principally known by only two poems – “Ode to Aphrodite” (frag. 1) and “Ode to

Alcaeus vol. 1 (Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 1982).

Anactoria” (frag. 31).⁴ The survival of the latter poem is thanks to Longinus’ treatise *On the Sublime*, probably written during the first century CE. The essay quotes Sappho’s poem, possibly in its entirety, and the author’s reading has become the standard description of the effects of love and desire in poetics in general:

Are you not amazed how at one instant she summons, as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed, soul, body, ears, tongue, eyes, colour? Uniting contradictions, she is, at one and the same time, hot and cold, in her senses and out of her mind, for she is either terrified or at the point of death. The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions. All such things occur in the case of lovers, but it is, as I said, the selection of the most striking of them and their combination into a single whole that has produced the singular excellence of the passage. (Chapter 10.3 *On the Sublime*)

Longinus is most interested in the “shattering” effect of love on the lover, and how the poet, languishing in the face of unrealized passion, analyzes the effect of desire on her various individual body parts. While Longinus certainly seems like one of the first to emphasize Sappho’s corporal fragmentation (even as he ensures her status and immortality), it is worth noting that this is an effect carefully realized by Sappho in her verse itself, and, as we will see, became a definitive aspect of the Sapphic style.

Joan DeJean’s *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937* (1989), Yopie Prins’ *Victorian Sappho* (1999), and Margaret Reynolds’ *The Sappho Companion* (2000) offer comprehensive studies of Sappho’s afterlife in European literature and scholarship from the last five centuries. They demonstrate that during the Renaissance and Romantic eras Sappho was primarily interpreted via Ovid’s narrative of her distracted love for Phaon and Catullus’s “heterosexualized” interpretation of Sappho’s fragment 31 (“He seems as fortunate as the gods to me...”). Ovid’s *Heroides* (ca. 20 BCE), a collection of fifteen

⁴ See **Appendix A: Sappho** for translations of Fragments 1, 16, and 31.

Latin epistolary poems written from Greek or Roman women to their lovers, ends with Sappho's lyric lament to Phaon. According to DeJean, "The epistle that Ovid imagines from Sappho to her legendary lover Phaon is quite simply the most influential Sapphic fiction ever: fictions of Sappho begin when Ovid and Sappho intersect in the early modern imagination" (12). Sappho's heterosexual desire for Phaon is complicated by various biographical accounts of Sappho as a teacher, Muse, courtesan, and lesbian, among others. But Alexander Pope's 1707 translation of Ovid reinforces Sappho's *impuissance* in the face of her desire for Phaon, rejecting her own professed same-sex eroticism within the poem:

No more the Lesbian dames my passion move
Once the dear objects of my guilty love:
All other loves are lost in only thine,
Ah, youth ungrateful to a flame like mine! (l. 17-20)

The poem ends with Sappho's despairing leap from the Leucadian cliff:

If not from Phaon I must hope for ease,
Ah, let me seek it from the raging seas
To raging seas unpitied I'll remove;
And either cease to live or cease to love. (l. 256-9)

Reynolds theorizes that the story of Sappho's suicidal love of Phaon "...was probably the result of a literary mix-up," since Phaon was another name for Adonis, the goddess Aphrodite's lover. Because Sappho's poetry simulates her patron goddess's woes and loves, "... later interpreters seem to have assumed that she was speaking in her own persona and confessing a personal passion... [T]he same assumptions are regularly made today about writers, especially women writers" (71). Whatever its origin, Sappho's heartsick leap from the Leucadian cliff for love of a man remains popular narrative into the nineteenth century. Peter Jay and Caroline Lewis's Introduction to *Sappho through*

English Poetry (1996) demonstrates that the Phaon legend surrounding Sappho served largely to “heterosexualize” her in British translations and criticism through the eighteenth century (examples include Alexander Radcliffe’s “Sappho to Phaon” in 1696, Alexander Pope’s “Sappho to Phaon” in 1712, and Mary Robinson’s “Sappho and Phaon” in 1796). By the mid-nineteenth century Sappho as a lover of women (or even as an asexual poet, a version of her promoted under English Victorianism) had largely been usurped by the Sappho-pining-for-Phaon myth. As demonstrated by Christina Rossetti’s deliciously titled poem, “What Sappho would have said had her Leap Cured instead of Killing Her” (published posthumously in 1990), even efforts to liberate Sappho’s legacy from prevailing patriarchal interpretations accepted the biographical “facts” of her Leucadian leap and love for Phaon. The dwindling yet persistent presence of the legend into the twentieth century can be noted in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades” (1943) in which a heterosexualized poet Sappho reminisces to the Styx ferryman Charon about her “other” ferryman Phaon.

Voyeuristic fascination with Sappho’s *eros* as a female poet may have its origin in the Roman imagination. The poet Catullus (ca. 84 BCE – 54 BCE) admired Sappho’s poetry and dedicated twenty-five of his erotic poems to the poetess and his beloved “Lesbia” (a pseudonym for a real lady but chosen in honor of Sappho of Lesbos).⁵ Catullus’s Latin revision of Sappho’s poem is the first in a long line of works by male poets who commandeer and re-write Sapphic lyric to suit their own context: Catullus shifts Sappho from a lyrical to a sensual poet, no longer part of a public, performative

⁵ The Roman lyric poet Horace (65-8 BCE) admired Sappho’s technical skills as a writer and his *Odes* consciously adapted her native Aeolic Greek dialect into Latin verse. While Sappho does make an appearance as a character in his work (Ode 2.13), his meticulous rendering of Sapphic meter was (and is) more of a literary recognition of her accomplishments as a poet.

culture but belonging to a private, personal space. As Reynolds points out, from the Roman era onward, “Sappho was... becoming fit only for the boudoir” (74). In a move often adopted by the nineteenth century Decadent poet *par excellence*, Charles Baudelaire, Catullus even inserts himself into the final verse:

idleness, Catullus, is bad for you:
in indulgence you exult and in foolish play.
Idleness, that has ruined kings before now,
lost cities. (qtd in Reynolds 76)

In an odd move with no basis in the original Greek, the male poet contrasts the seductive female space (where he has exiled the Sapphic voice) with the political world of men, implying that his desire is weakness, and that his beloved Lesbia is responsible for his emasculation. He chides himself for letting love weaken him, implying that the “frivolity” of the private realm is fit only for women and idle lovers. While this gendered dynamic is completely unfounded in Sappho’s own verse, the conflation of Sapphic lyricism (often seen as female poetry in general) and the sexualized emasculation of a male lover and writer will continue into the twentieth century.

Catullus in turn heavily influenced the Italian writer Petrarch (1304-1374), whose lyrical passion for “Laura” shaped a Christian revision of the poet/beloved formula. While Catullus’s responses to his concretely sexual Lesbia vary from sarcasm to tenderness, Petrarch’s Laura is voyeuristically ravished but always adored and idolized from a virtuous distance. The progression of the female beloved as poetic object affects Sappho’s representation. In particular, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Sappho becomes remade in this Petrarchan image, “ravished by the male gaze,” which displaces and affects Sappho’s own language and gaze (Prins 44). For example, translators such as John Hall and Ambrose Philips inserted gendered pronouns into

Sapphic Fragments 1 and 16 assuming (or even promoting) the poet's heteronormative desire; the latter's translation became the most influential translation for the Romantics and became "synonymous with the sentimentalism of women's verse" (Prins 47).

DeJean's authoritative book *Fictions of Sappho* traces the presence of Sappho in the French literary tradition from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. DeJean makes the convincing case that Sappho was predominantly a French domain until the eighteenth century when English and German scholarship gained prominence. However, as a response to DeJean's omission of the English tradition from her book, Prins argues that the fate of Sappho in English is markedly different from the French tradition throughout the last four centuries (Prins 14). DeJean justifies this exclusion with the statement that "The English discovery of Sappho reproduces so closely the structure of her entry into the French tradition... that an analysis of its unfolding would have been repetitive, without being essential to an understanding of the future of Sapphic fictions" (5). In either case, Sappho's development into Modernism is strongly linked to both French and English literary traditions. DeJean marks the second and third decades of the nineteenth century as a time of radical reorientation in "both Sappho scholarship and Sapphic speculation" (13). For the first time since the sixteenth century, complete editions of Sappho's fragments and new translations foster an explosion of Sappho "fictions." In an increasingly common disclaimer today among Hellenists and scholars, DeJean points out that Sappho's "afterlife" in the Western imagination defies consistency or unanimity. This is especially true in the decades leading up to Modernism, and during the nineteenth century "national scholarly traditions part ways most violently on the subject of Sappho" (DeJean 13). The German Hellenists maintained a rigid theory of Sappho's chastity,

rejecting both the Phaon myth and the possibility of same-sex desire, while the French scholars and writers began to explore aspects of “Sapphism” (same-sex desire) that had been suppressed for the last two centuries. During this time period English scholars were largely inspired by the French movement, then developing their own influential versions of Sappho by the early twentieth century.

Prins’ book *Victorian Sappho* traces the reception and portrayal of Sappho and “sapphic” poets in the English tradition during the second half of the nineteenth century. Prins claims that the Victorian period was a defining moment in Sappho’s reception because of a “particular fascination with the fragmentation of the Sapphic corpus.” The increased circulation of Sappho’s recovered fragments, as well as the popularity of her “poetic translations ... and other literary imitations,” led to the “construction of Sappho herself as the first woman poet singing at the origin of a Western lyric tradition” (Prins 3). In addition, the nineteenth century conflation of “Poetess” and “Sappho” also became interchangeable with concepts of “Woman” or the feminine, and Sappho was transformed into a Victorian emblem of womanhood. (She was popularly understood to have been the head of a school of young girls akin to a schoolmistress of a British boarding school, an image that carefully shunned any suggestion of the sexualized, female version of Greek *pederastia*.) Prins demonstrates that “The canonization of the Poetess depends on a conflation of poet worship and woman worship...” (84). For example, early Victorian poet L.E.L.’s poem “Sappho’s Song” (1824) relives Sappho’s dying moment, intimately associating the poetic voice with the poem’s subject by using the first person “I.”⁶ Prins points out that the sublimely tragic figure of the female poet is tempered by some ambiguities in L.E.L.’s poem, especially in the fourth stanza:

⁶ L.E.L. was the popular name of Letitia Elizabeth Landon.

If song be past, and hope undone,
And pulse, and head, and heart are flame;
It is thy work, thou faithless one!
But, no! – I will not name thy name! (qtd. in Prins 194)

The refusal to “name thy name” allows the poem to maintain a distance from the Phaon myth and the heartbroken suicide (despite the obvious demise of the poetic subject). The final lines of the poem reinforce the interpretive nature of Sappho’s demise: “Forgotten music, still some chance / Vibrate the chord whereon it sleeps” (l. 77-78). The *cause* of Sappho’s death becomes subject to interpretation, and, like the “name,” inevitably postponed like an echo of her song, as if suspending the identity of the poetess’s lover delays the moment of her death.

The majority of nineteenth century writers certainly agreed with Edgar Allen Poe’s statement in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846) that “the death ... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.” The conflation of Victorian female poets with the “dead” (or constantly “dying”) figure of Sappho was gleefully noted by contemporary male scholars through the examples of poetesses L.E.L. and Renée Vivien, both of whom identified strongly with Sappho and provided posterity with a mimetically suicidal death. The link between their biographies and their work became as highly over-determined as Sappho’s own, despite the complete absence of evidence that Sappho killed herself. By the Victorian era, Sappho’s fragmented corpus and repeatedly “feminized” death (dissected and eroticized by male poets) had been infinitely resounded through multiple versions (often synonymous with translations) of a dying/dead Sappho. Prins, DeJean and Schlossman all draw parallels between gender and genre: from the Middle Ages through the twentieth century, lyric poetry became increasingly “feminized” in relation to the epic due to the control

conventionally associated with the masculine lyric “I” and the poet’s subject (the feminine beloved/object). The (male) poet’s manipulation of the lyric poem became equivalent to the authority of the male gaze, which “penetrates” and interprets an increasingly silenced female object. Similarly, the implied male poet “enters” and (re)creates a lyric tradition according to his own desired image, dominating and even silencing the Sapphic lyrical voice. The lyric tradition itself is thus feminized and “dead” by the end of the nineteenth century.

While popular poetesses were identified with Sappho and lyric poetry during the Victorian era more than previous periods, these female writers also tended to associate themselves with Sappho voluntarily. As always, Sappho’s reception and transmission, while marked by different movements and time periods, are also marked by contradiction. Several female writers looked to Sappho as the original poetess, seeking a kind of literary foremother in Sappho, even though she often came to represent the *loss* of female poetic voices (Prins 174). Sappho’s corpse, eroticized by male Romantics, enacts an eternally reenacted Ovidian leap for Victorian poetesses who were popularly linked to her *pathos* and suicide. In addition to Sappho’s Victorian era representation(s), women readers and writers relied on male translations of Sappho’s verse with few exceptions. Not until Modernism did several self-taught female scholars and writers learn ancient Greek in order to bypass past translations (examples include H.D., Virginia Woolf, Renée Vivien and Anna de Noailles). Renée Vivien is generally recognized as the first woman to publish translations of Sappho (*Sappho*, 1903, from Greek to French); however, many scholars credit Mary Barnard with the first complete translated publication of Sappho by a woman (into English in this case), which was as late as 1958.

In her book, Prins identifies two influential English figures who largely determined the Sapphic persona during the Victorian era. The first is Henry Thorton Wharton, whose 1885 translation of Sappho's verse (which was closely studied later by Modernists Ezra Pound and H.D.) was widely popular and thus reprinted five times between 1885 and 1907. Wharton's stated goal was to reclaim Sappho in English verse and tradition, and to expand exposure to Sappho's corpus beyond Fragments 1 and 31. To this end he collected all Greek fragments by or *attributed to* Sappho textually laid alongside various previous English translations, expanding her "corpus" with the help of any possible resources at his disposal. This layout, along with Wharton's (unconvincing) modesty as a classicist, implied that *anyone* could read Sappho – he gave her a face, both visually with pages of artistic portraits and descriptively with a biography, creating a new literary mask for a new era. While Wharton's book diversified and revived Sappho, it also emphasized her fragmentation by presenting multiple versions of a single poem, often more complete than the original Greek verse (demonstrating the "incompleteness" of Sappho's own remaining papyri and the multitude of possible rewritings).

The second figure was Algernon Charles Swinburne, who Prins and other critics claim was the "most Sapphic of Victorian poets" (112). Swinburne drew on Longinus's concept of the Sapphic sublime, where poetic meter is closely linked to achieving sublimity (which is associated with Sappho's description of Eros as the "loosener of limbs").⁷ Swinburne's emulations of Sapphic verse closely linked rhythm and meter to the physical body, and Sapphic stanzas became an equivalent of the lesbian body (Prins

⁷ Ερος δαῦτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει, γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον, "Once again limb-loosening Love makes me tremble, the bitter-sweet, irresistible creature (Campbell Frag. 130)

114).⁸ Swinburne's poetic tributes to Sappho further contributed to the confusion of corpus and corpse. Jay and Lewis describe Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866), which is dominated by translations and emulations of Sapphic meter and verse, as "the beginning of the modern, post-Romantic appreciation of Sappho's poetry" (20).

Swinburne self-consciously followed closely in the footsteps of French poet Charles Baudelaire, identifying more as a *décadent* than Romantic poet.⁹ In Swinburne's poetics Sappho is repeatedly scattered and gathered, and, much like his predecessor Baudelaire, he manipulates her fragmented corpus/corpse in order to declare himself her (living) scholar and adherent.

Jane Garrity's introduction to the recent book *Sapphic Modernities* (2006) points out not only that Modernism is associated with a shifting view of Sappho and her poetry, but also that this era coincided with a new concept of sexuality as an identity rather than an act. She states: "[O]ur sense [is] that the emergence of the Sapphic within modernity is bound up with the circulation of medical and sexological knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries..." (3). One of the more prominent figures in the field of sexology, Havelock Ellis, published widely read theories on "sexual inversion" in 1897, closely followed by Freud's concepts of psychosexual development. The influence of these "sexologists" is inextricably linked to concepts of Modernism, and affected broader concepts of gender which endure up to the present day. (For example, modernist

⁸ Although Sappho used several different metrical forms, the "sapphic stanza" became the most popular with later poets. The Sapphic stanza is a four-line stanza with hendecasyllabic verses with the third verse continuing with five additional syllables. This is measured in stressed and unstressed syllables in English versus long and short in Greek.

⁹ The most obvious and high profile Sapphic poet of the nineteenth century was Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who will be more extensively treated in the following chapter of this study.

poet H.D. (1886-1961) personally consulted with both Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud during her creative years). Michel Foucault's study *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976) also argues that this moment in history resulted in a sexual discourse that was "administered" and distributed as a discourse of "truth." The medicalization of sexuality led to binary divisions of "hetero-" and "homosexuality:" these binaries both defined Sappho as "lesbian" in sexual preference rather than cultural origin (from Lesbos) and were simultaneously challenged by the fact that her verse predated and eluded such sexual categorization. Foucault efficiently summarizes this shift in conceptions of sexuality from act to identity by stating: "Le sodomite était un relaps, l'homosexuel est maintenant une espèce" (59).¹⁰ It's interesting to note that current feminist critics maintain this tie between Sappho the poet and modern concepts of sexuality, two previously independent identities that become synonymous when the adjective "sapphic" is used interchangeably with "lesbian."

However, earlier in the nineteenth century Baudelaire had already artistically (and popularly) linked the notions of lesbianism (often personified by Sappho) and "modernité." This association of the lesbian with French *décadence* and broader concepts of modernity maintained a tenacious hold into the early twentieth century (and, it could be argued, today). Approaches to and interpretations of Sappho experienced literary revitalization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, based mainly in France and England, and coinciding with the Romantic, Decadent, and Modernist movements. As noted earlier, up until the early nineteenth century Sapphic scholarship was a predominantly German province. The usurpation of Sappho as a sensual Muse by

¹⁰ "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (43). All translations are from *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley, trans. Vintage Books: New York, 1990.

Baudelaire, then Swinburne, marked the transference of Sapphic interpretation into the francophone and anglophone spheres. DeJean identifies the mid-nineteenth century as a turning point in Sapphic scholarship and in female representation in France; Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) represents Sappho as both Lesbian and lesbian and "sapphism gains public recognition" (23). DeJean adds that Baudelaire marks a turning point in the narratives of Sappho: "Baudelaire is the first French lyric poet to reject simple adaptation of the Sapphic original, à la Catullus or Ronsard, in favor of a highly original personal fiction of Sappho" (274). In addition to Baudelaire's newly sexualized version of the Lesbian/lesbian Sappho, by the end of the nineteenth century female homosexuality was a *visible* minority identity in France due to Pierre Louÿs's erotic poetic tributes in *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1894) and the "Sappho 1900" circle of female artists in Paris (directed by heiress Natalie Barney and her lover Renée Vivien). This community contributed to a culturally heightened awareness of gender and sexuality in early twentieth century poetry and prose.

European Modernism was characterized by a struggle between breaking with past artistic and literary traditions, a drive to find new modes of expression, and an effort to establish/promote new movement(s).¹¹ Paradoxically, these new literary and rhetorical trends often depended on drawing on past genius. Matthew Arnold's 1857 essay "On the Modern Element in Literature" shows a continued tendency from past centuries to look to the Classics for an understanding of contemporary reconsiderations of art, literature, and

¹¹ I want to note that my aim is to study a European movement without promoting a Eurocentric approach to literature in general. In other words, "Modernism" is understood as a predominantly European phenomenon (ca. 1880-1930) within this study, and is not intended to dismiss more global contributions to the Modernist movement (for example the artistic communities in Latin America) or racial/ethnic factors such as the Harlem Renaissance in the United States.

a changing society, despite emerging desires to break with tradition: “To know how others stand, that we may know how we ourselves stand; and to know how we ourselves stand, that we may correct our mistakes and achieve our deliverance – that is our problem.” (305/3). However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw increased tension between the validation and inspiration provided by Classical studies, and the growing need to establish new literary voices in the face of a war-torn and rapidly urbanizing Europe. Virginia Woolf’s essay “How It Strikes a Contemporary” (1925) makes the following observation about her epoch: “No age can have been more rich than ours in writers determined to give expression to the differences which separate them from the past and not to the resemblances which connect them with it” (*The Common Reader* 237). Yet despite the urge to break from the past, sixth century poetess Sappho was being remade and reconsidered due to archeological discoveries, new translations, and changing views of sexuality. In several ways, her lyrics and identity dovetailed with the Modernist movement admirably. A paradox thus existed between the turn-of-the-century desire to “make it new,” as Ezra Pound urged, and the prominence provided by aligning these new poetics with the Classics. Sappho became a way of reconciling these aspirations.

Sappho’s treatment by male and female modernists reveals a basic struggle over how to position her within the western literary heritage: As Shari Benstock points out in *Women of the Left Bank*, many female modernists “channeled” Sappho’s poetry through their own writing as a means of validating themselves as writers by reminding their contemporaries of Sappho’s importance, and positioning themselves alongside literary greats. Greek civilization was still seen as the creative and scholarly seat of

intellectualism, and Sappho's canonical status is solidified by Longinus's praise of her in his essay and Aristotle's naming her the tenth Muse. She was so renowned in classical texts that she was simply called "the Poetess" (as Homer was referred to as "the Poet"). Therefore, Sappho's "Mother" text was, in many ways, neatly situated to rival those of Homer and Shakespeare. Artists such as H.D., Bryer, Natalie Barney, and Virginia Woolf embraced a Sapphic, pre-Oedipal heritage which privileged the feminine lyric legacy in an effort to reposition themselves as authors and not as creative subjects.

One of the most dynamic and vehement promoters of the pre-Oedipal female heritage, Natalie Barney, expanded on Baudelaire's treatment of Sappho as a cult experience at her Parisian salon, which became a performative perversion of the Classical male model of *pederastia*. She instead invited her "students" (her lovers and those who frequented her salon) to reject the lessons and norms of the dominant culture in favor of an imagined Edenic setting before the Judeo-Christian ethics of Victorianism, when Greece's most celebrated lyric poet was a woman who loved other women. Barney's little book *Cinq petits dialogues grecs* (1902) unapologetically extols the passions of Lesbos – an environment that she tried to re-create (an effort made understandably easier by her large fortune and disregard for public sentiment).

However, the majority of the avant-garde continued to think of "Female" as a subject for art rather than an author/producer of art (as exemplified in Breton's *Nadja* and, arguably, Joyce's *Ulysses*). Harold Bloom's discussion of the "strong" poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries maintains this assumption and emphasizes the critical role of past writers in his book, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1979):

The argument of this book is that strong poets are condemned to just this unwisdom; Wordsworth's Great Ode fights nature on nature's own ground, and

suffers a great defeat, even as it retains its great dream. That dream, in Wordsworth's ode, is shadowed by the anxiety of influence, due to the greatness of the precursor-poem, Milton's *Lycidas*, where the human refusal wholly to sublimate is even more rugged... The young citizen of poetry, or ephebe as Athens would have called him, is already the anti-natural or antithetical man, and from his start as a poet he quests for an impossible object, as his precursor quested before him. (9-10)

If we accept Bloom's Freudian approach to literary heritage and transmission, which positions *male* poets as the anxious Oedipus before the poetic Great preceding them (like the father-figure of Laius), then this emphatically masculine model is complicated and confused by Sappho's presence. This "anxiety of influence" is disrupted when one or both of the following occur: a) the poet is in fact a female confronted by centuries of male literary genius, or b) the Oedipal father is in fact a pre-Oedipal mother (Sappho). Cassandra Laity's 1996 book *H.D. and the Victorian fin de siècle* addresses this phenomenon when she observes that the male modernist anxiety over a "domineering foremother" threatening to "womanize" a specific modernist enterprise translates into an equally anxious resistance to the influence of the previous "feminine" Romantic and Decadent movements. H.D.'s writing, for example, was thus often dismissed as "escapist," sentimental, self-indulgent, and "confessional" (an especially "feminine" genre of writing). Romantic poets were often described by modernists like Pound and Yeats as being in an "infantile" stage that was refined and matured by Modernism (thus following the Freudian model of independence from the Father figure).

Many female modernists participated in their male contemporaries' anxiety of Romantic and/or feminized Sapphic influence: their writing reveals an ambivalent approach to Sapphic transmission and influence. For example, Marguerite Yourcenar's book of poetic prose, *Feux* (discussed in the final chapter of this study), resists making

overt judgments about Sappho's legacy and instead contemplates Sappho's corpse *à la* Baudelaire. Amy Lowell's poem "Sisters" (1922) acknowledges her sister poetesses – Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Emily Dickinson – but ultimately rejects their "voice" in her own poetry in an attempt to establish herself as a "new" poetic voice independent of her predecessors. And certainly Gertrude Stein unashamedly upheld the "law of Oedipal sexual identity," choosing to position herself as an exceptional "male genius" rather than re-align herself with a feminine tradition. The "anxiety" of these female writers is indicative of Sappho's precarious yet undeniable position as the "Mother of Lyric poetry." Male leaders of the modernist movement, particularly T.S. Eliot and Pound, made deliberate efforts to define Modernism in narrowly "masculine" terms – Pound subsequently deserted H.D. and the Imagist movement for Vorticism, which he defined as "hard," direct, and virile.

The mid-nineteenth century through World War II saw a surge of new artistic movements in the midst of continued industrialization in European cities and the sense of alienation expressed by the growing expatriate communities (the concept of the "Lost Generation" popularized by Ernest Hemmingway). There was revived interest in Sappho, partly because her style, fragmented through centuries of loss and recovery, suited the Modernists' spirit of experimentation, even blurring the lines of poetry and prose. In *The Common Reader*, Woolf observed that "It is an age of fragments..." (234). Sappho specifically became, for the Modernists, a voice of alienation as well as a Mother-Muse for female Modernists like H.D. and Renee Vivien. Modernists identified with Sappho's biographical and lyrical fragmentation, sense of alienation (since the

modernist movement was largely associated with expatriation), and linguistic ambiguity; shifting identities inherent during the modernist era naturally lent themselves to the echoing of Sappho's verses.

My study invites an expanded definition of "Sapphic Modernism" and eventually a definition of a "Sapphic consciousness" particular to this time period. It is therefore valuable to review the manipulation and transmission of Sappho's persona and poetic fragments (which are difficult to disentangle from each other) leading up to the twentieth century. In the following sections I will continue on an allied trajectory and examine the treatment and changes that Sappho undergoes in the late nineteenth century that "make" her modernist.

Interlude: Sappho's Poetry

Although this study is dedicated to the poetry and poetic prose of Modernism, it is worth analyzing Sappho's poetry if we are to use her lyric voice as a critical *point de départ*, and the most obvious way to establish Sappho's style is by example. Sappho's ability (noted by Plato and Longinus as well as present-day critics) to adopt multiple perspectives within one poem is mirrored in the modernist experiment to find new voices and modes of expression. Poets such as H.D., Yeats, and Apollinaire demonstrate the ability to re-appropriate established myths and make them "new" (in keeping with Pound's prescription for Modernism), an effect that Sappho accomplished 2500 years earlier.

For example, in Fragment 16, one of Sappho's more completely preserved poems,

the poet explores both the Homeric epic tradition *and* the lyrical praise of beauty.¹² In this case Sappho adopts multiple voices surrounding the Trojan War – that of Homer’s narrator, and Helen’s, traditionally appropriated within the patriarchal discourse of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. However, the premise is more elaborate than a simple opposition of binaries: the multiple identities in the poem, as in other Sapphic verse, fail to reconcile themselves, and leave a sense of fragmentation that undermines the poem’s apparent premise (which in this poem is often misread as simply female vs. male desire).

The poem opens with a catalogue of military might using epic language recalling the Greek armies of *The Iliad*.¹³ The poetic voice begins as generalized indirect discourse – the poet remains uncommitted by stating “some say” without specifying who “they” are. The reader is referred to a communal discourse since Sappho is speaking in cultural and social generalizations (a similar technique is used in Fragment 56 to relate the myth of Leda, as we will see later). The poet then asserts her *own* definition with the introductory conjunction “*but* I say,” using the first person in opposition to the previously expressed cultural norms or consensus. We can see how the symmetry and repetition of “they/oi” creates a specific emphasis in Greek, rhythmically alternating with the *on/ón* internal rhymes (a dynamic that is lost in translation). This rhythm is then aurally and metrically disrupted by the poet’s personal pronoun “*egó*”.

Οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στροτόν οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖς ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον
ἔγω δὲ κῆν’ ὅττω τις ἔραται

oi men **ippéon stroton** oi de **pesdón**
oi de **naón phais** epi **gán melainan**

¹² Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (ca. 8th century B.C.) predate Sappho’s verses (ca. 6th century B.C.) – modern scholars generally agree that Sappho’s poem is directly addressing his epic poetry.

¹³ For complete text of Fragment 16 in Greek and English translation see **Appendix A: Sappho**.

emmenai **kalliston**,
egó de kén ottó tis **eratai**.

The poetic voice is now individualized and proposes a broader, more encompassing definition of beauty and desire. “What one loves” is not a person or object but an abstract concept: Helen is held up not as an object of desire herself but as an example of an acting *subject* who followed what *she* desired. In fact, Helen is herself a complex representation of love since she is both “unsurpassed in beauty” *and* “understandable” to “us” as her peers and readers.

Page duBois, in her essay “Sappho and Helen” (1996), defends the poem against Denys Pages’ dismissive comment in his respected collection *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (1955) that “[t]he sequence of thought might have been clearer... The poem opens with a common device... [that] rings dull in our doubtful ears” (qtd. in duBois 79). DuBois argues that the “common device” in fact serves a specific purpose within the poem: the language of the epic poem and the example of Helen of Troy’s beauty are in fact challenges to the rhetorical tropes of verse. Sappho is manipulating conventional perceptions of desire in favor of a more abstract notion by cloaking philosophical cogitation (analyzing the nature of desire) in the guise of narrative discourse (the story of Helen during the Trojan War). DuBois argues that Sappho’s poem accomplishes two effects:

I see ... in this poem, one of the few texts which break the silence of women in antiquity, an instant in which women become more than the objects of man’s desire. Sappho’s fragment 16 reaches beyond the confines of the lyric structure, looks both forward and backward in time, expresses the contradictions of its moment in history. (79-80)

John J. Winkler’s analysis of Sappho in his essay “Double Consciousness in Sappho’s Lyrics” (1990) helps us understand her lyrical distinctiveness during her epoch

and in following centuries. Winkler points out that other Greek poets sang about similar themes but from “a single persona in a fixed situation... Sappho seems always to speak in many voices – her friends’, Homer’s, Aphrodite’s – conscious of more than a single perspective and ready to detect the fuller truth of many-sided desire” (Winkler 166/187). Sappho’s powerful use of *pathos* is accentuated by her poetic ability to speak in many voices. She tenaciously yet elusively maintains an element of the poet’s own voice while expressing the views of her various personae, maintaining a tension between various narrative voices without necessarily resolving their differences.

As we will see in the following chapters, the poetry of the Sapphic Modernists made similar attempts to understand various silences surrounding their identity, like Sappho challenging the dominant understanding of Helen’s role in the Trojan War, and to confront their own paradoxical moment in history.

Definitions of Sapphic Modernism: Critical Approaches

Καὶ ποθήω καὶ μάομαι¹⁴

Since the onset of the modernist era, the renewed interest in Sappho has resulted in an ever-growing body of translations and critical interpretations. Because I will be using the term “Sapphic” (and its variations), it is crucial to outline the critical precedents of the term as well as my own definitions. Shari Benstock is generally credited with coining the expression “Sapphic modernism” in her essay, “Expatriate Sapphic Modernism: Entering Literary History” in 1994. Benstock makes the undeclared assumption that “Sapphic” is equivalent to “lesbian.” Her declared objective is to contest

¹⁴ “and I long and yearn” (Campbell frag. 36).

“the conceptual categories of modernism” in ways that, she claims, feminists had hitherto failed to do. She declares: “We have posed the question ‘Was there a modernism for women?’ without asking ‘What was modernism?’ ...A better question might be: how many (female) modernisms were there?” (184-5). She reads Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, H.D., and Gertrude Stein as Sapphic modernists, presumably because of their lesbianism or bisexuality. However, her textual analyses discuss wider questions of unconscious expression and identities of the Other. Benstock observes in a footnote that critical commentaries on Cixous’s *écriture féminine* (which she draws on during the article’s readings) overlook two points: “(1) it can be written by either women or men...; (2) as it rewrites cultural repression it necessarily reinscribes that repression and all that has been lost to it” (199). She notes that revisions of genre are necessarily linked to revisions of gender, and characterizes the Sapphic as “a structure of the unconscious.” She goes into detail: “[The Sapphic] is not a language, but it structures language; it is mysterious and shadowy, not directly accessible, not immediately available to view... and when it finds a medium through which to speak, it radically restructures the rules of the cultural game” (193-4). This eloquent definition undermines and expands her own simplified definition of the Sapphic as lesbian, and suggests a broader understanding of Sapphism. My thesis argues that extensive discussions of Modernist gender/genre revisions by Benstock and other critics have largely ignored the logical conclusion that reconsidering women/sexuality during Modernism means revisiting the role of male writers too.

While Joan DeJean doesn’t use the exact phrase “Sapphic modernism” in her book, she does extensively define the terminology surrounding Sappho and her multiple

reincarnations. In an effort to encompass the complex concepts surrounding Sappho's biography, poetry, and multiple myths, DeJean differentiates between the capitalized "Sapphic/Sapphism" and "sapphic/sapphism." She uses the capitalized adjective "Sapphic" "... when normal usage might seem to require 'Sappho's,' as in the phrase 'Sapphic sexuality' characterizing the erotic configuration of one of her poems... in order to stress that [I am] referring to the sexual orientation not of the poem's author but of the poem itself" (8-9). The terms "sapphic/sapphism" maintain the parallel relationship between Sappho and sexuality (sexual choice or orientation): "In lower case, adjective and noun correspond to standard usage and refer to female same-sex eroticism: they do not necessarily... imply a vision of Sappho's sexuality" (9). While DeJean points out that, historically, Sappho's identity did not always imply same-sex desire (for example during the eighteenth century), it's difficult to divorce the adjective "sapphic," derived from Sappho's name, from its sexual definition. I have chosen to use "Sapphic" in the upper case in order to distance the term from synonymy with "lesbian" and in an effort to return to the richness of the original lyrical texts. I do acknowledge, however, the difficulties of using a proper noun while maintaining a distance from the historical conceptions of the poetess herself.¹⁵ I use the term "Sapphic" with the understanding that it bears, of course, the historically gynocentric connotations of sensual lyric, but also implies a sophistication of language and an ambiguity of the relationship between poet/speaker and inspirational object.

¹⁵ In my opinion, the terms "lesbian" (female same-sex desire) and "Lesbian" (from the island of Lesbos) are more easily distinguished, since it is more difficult to draw boundaries between desire in Sappho's poetry, which is ultimately subjective, and cultural concepts of sexuality. However, the linguistic and conceptual interchangeability of Sappho from Lesbos with sapphism/lesbianism remains problematic.

Diana Collecott's book *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism* (1999) defines Sapphic Modernism in the focused context of H.D.'s intertextual relationship with Sappho, made more intimate by their shared identity as "lovers of women"¹⁶ and by H.D.'s preference for working directly from the Greek, resisting previous translations and interpretations. H.D.'s work on Sappho has largely influenced definitions of Sapphic Modernism, although Collecott acknowledges broader possibilities for defining the Sapphic: "Sapphic modernism' has emerged as the term for manifestations (however obscure or disruptive) that privilege the *Sapphic*. This word has multiple meanings embracing aesthetics and intersubjectivity as well as sexual practice, with all that these involve for women in a patriarchal culture" (4). Given these parameters, it's easy to see why concepts of the Sapphic are often fluid within shifting authorial boundaries.

The recent collection of essays *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (2006) credits Collecott as one of the first scholars to acknowledge the "multiple meanings" implied in the word "Sapphic." The editors contend that using the word "Sapphic" serves as a reminder that current categories of sexuality are relatively recent cultural constructs, and that in particular, "'sapphism' played a constitutive role in the construction of a specifically modern understanding of female sexuality" (Garritty 3-4). Their Introduction points out that in general, boundaries of sexuality and identity were still in flux during the modernist period and thus more changeable than is often acknowledged. The two subsections of *Sapphic Modernities*, "Sapphic Modernity" and "Sapphic Modernities," explore the nuances implicit in concepts of the Sapphic. The first

¹⁶ This rather awkwardly worded phrase is an effort to avoid reducing H.D. and Sappho to one end of an artificially binary spectrum. As many scholars have pointed out, questions about whether or not Sappho was a "lesbian" are immaterial since such speculations apply modern twentieth-century concepts of sexuality to a classical (pre-Judeo-Christian) persona.

section credits Baudelaire with the initial association of Sappho and the “Modern,” feminizing the “perversions” of modernity and synthesizing female sexuality and textuality. The second section, therefore, proposes a more plural concept in order to encompass “not only the esthetic and political but much more” (Garrity 7). Like previous studies, *Sapphic Modernities* defines Sapphic Modernism principally through associations with lesbianism. However, it does offer a new approach by seeing the figure of the lesbian as representative of developing concepts of modernism in general: “Our contributors regard the lesbian as an exemplary subject of modernity, a key figure in the period’s articulation of itself as ‘newly modern,’ consciously breaking from constraining historical definitions regarding gender, identity, and sexuality” (Garrity 8).

Mary Galvin, in her book *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (1999), argues for a re-orientation regarding texts by queer writers in the mainstream classroom and in academia. She points out that the queer authors who are regularly included in the canon are read *in spite of* their sexual orientation, which is brushed to the side as if their literary greatness is little affected by it, thus maintaining an assumption of heteronormativity. She states, “In effect, this ‘tolerant’ approach acknowledges a writer’s difference, only to dismiss its relevance... The implication is that unless the writer’s homosexuality is the ‘overt’ subject of the poem, her queerness does not contribute to the artistic vision in any significant way” (2).

Galvin’s analysis is pertinent to this study in a couple of ways: Firstly, she identifies “the early decades of the twentieth century” as a pivotal epoch for contemporary “gay” consciousness (5). She convincingly posits that the visibility of lesbian poetics and queer theorists today is a continuation of the second-wave feminist

movements of the 1970's; these decades in turn have their origins in the metropolitan communities of European Modernism. Galvin agrees with Michel Foucault and Lillian Faderman that: "From the beginning, the development of modernist consciousness and gay consciousness has been intertwined" (5). For Galvin, as for my study, Modernism is integral to twenty-first century consciousness and development, especially regarding current approaches to language and gender/sexuality.

Secondly, despite Galvin's stated intent specifically to make *lesbians* in literature "seen," she incorporates an expanded definition of queerness in general that dovetails constructively with my reconsiderations of the Sapphic. Drawing on theorists Foucault, Monique Wittig, and Adrienne Rich, she demonstrates that the categorization of sexuality, the reductive "either/or" of normative heterosexuality, limits possibilities for sexual diversity and multiplicity, which in turn affects questions of identity in general. She calls for a broader acceptance and understanding of "erotic energies beyond the heterosexual definitions" (3). Galvin's definition of "lesbian" is therefore any rejection of the "symbolic order," a dismissal of "dualisms as the basis of truth." In addition, she chooses the women in her study because they are "nonheterocentric in their personal identities" and "innovators of modernist poetics" (6), *not* because of their sexuality. She dedicates a chapter each to Emily Dickinson, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, and H.D. In essence, Galvin's identification of "queerness" is more expansive than her five chosen women writers adequately demonstrate (a fact she herself acknowledges). Galvin's work is enticing precisely because she opens a door to further studies. Regarding the focus of her book, she concludes her Introduction with the profession:

From the beginning of the twentieth century until the present, many poets have exceeded the boundaries of heterocentric identity and epistemology in their poetics, not only these few who associated themselves with the ‘high modernists.’ I have not delved into the queer poetics in the works of American women of color, nonheterocentric males of any race, certain political and social protest poets of this century, or our current queer poets of the avante-garde [sic]. I am hoping this book will ... encourage readers and critics into further explorations of the intersections between ‘gay consciousness’ and experimental poetic techniques throughout our literary history (10).

Despite her own focus on queer female poets, her critical rejection of dualistic categories transitions easily to definitions of the Sapphic and certain male modernists broached in this study.

Sapphic Consciousness

This study revisits the conflation of “Sapphic” and “lesbian” by exploring a new “Sapphic consciousness,” a term that I use to describe the specific lyrical space that Sappho’s poetry occupies. To this end I draw on W.E.B. DuBois’s and John J. Winkler’s definitions of “double consciousness” to define a creative space where a hegemonic norm and concepts of queer interact with and confront each other.

In W.E.B. Du Bois’s essay “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) he writes: “One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings...” (4). While Du Bois is clear that the experience of the African-American male is unique, he also references it within a larger tradition of “otherness” struggling with double identities: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in his American world... It is a peculiar

sensation, this double-consciousness...” (4).¹⁷ This concept of double consciousness, conceived during Modernism, segues into what I will term “Sapphic consciousness.”

In the essay, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness” (1992), Dickinson D. Bruce Jr. outlines the psychological and aesthetic sources for the idea of “double consciousness.” In particular, he notes that Du Bois used this term to describe three different (but related) issues: to express the “real power of white stereotypes in black life and thought”; to relate the exclusionary experience of being black American in a white society; and finally to give voice to the “internal conflict in the African American individual between what was ‘African’ and what was ‘American’” (301). The third and final usage became the most developed and influential. Du Bois himself struggled with the spiritual and figurative complexities of synthesizing such self-consciousness(es), even as he saw great potential for healing African American selfhood: “[H]e [the African-American male] must be himself, and not another” (6).

Du Bois’s initial use of the term “double consciousness” therefore refers to the self-image of the African American (male) as he sees it projected by the dominant white culture. This concept of the self, as if seen in a mirror held up by another (“this is me but not me – I am here and there simultaneously, inverted and yet intact”) necessitates a particular kind of self-expression, one that is often fragmented but also broadly comprehensive. Du Bois’s “double consciousness” becomes a way for minorities to negotiate prescriptive societies to which they are both alien and indigenous, and his expression of this “double space” becomes highly relevant for John J. Winkler’s

¹⁷ In his essay, Bruce notes that Emerson used the expression “double consciousness” to describe the Transcendentalist perspective on the self and world. In fact, the link between Emerson and Du Bois foreshadows my own development of a consciousness of the Other: “...Emerson’s stress on the ‘feminine eye,’ [like] Du Bois’s stress on the African soul, ... serves as an alternative to a dominant inability to ‘see’ apart from the possibilities for action and profit...” (301).

discussions of Ancient Greek cultures.

While Winkler's study "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics" restricts itself to Classical Greece, his reading of Sappho's lyric as a response to Homer's epic can provide an exemplary framework for understanding Sappho's transcendence and, interestingly, her "modernism." Winkler's adoption of the term "double consciousness" engages in a specific lyrical discourse, which he sees as unique to Sappho among the Greek poets. Rather than discussing race he sees her double consciousness in the realm of gender and sexuality.

He points out that the anxiety surrounding Sappho is not the subject matter of her lyric (female development, experience, and sexuality), but the fact that a *woman* is treating those topics. The result of this "transgression" by a female poet is often that contradictory modes of discourse surround her work, ranging from veneration to hostility. Winkler approaches the debate by positing that Sapphic poetry occupies multiple "categories," and demonstrates that her poetry illustrates a "double consciousness" encompassing both the public and private spheres of Greek daily life. He notes that readers of Greek poetry are presented with questions about the "politics of space" which consider rhetoric and performance (the masculine public realm) versus internal dialogue (the feminine domestic/private arena). Winkler claims that Sappho's poetry negotiates both spheres. "Sappho's consciousness is a larger circle enclosing the smaller one of Homer" (Winkler 176). According to his essay, minorities (critically and textually referred to as the Other) become "bilingual" in their ability to conform to cultural norms and public ethics, as well as speaking the language of their own private reality (in this case, that of women in a patriarchal society). More importantly for this study, Winkler's

consideration of the Sapphic defines it within the realm of both “otherness” and “masculine norms” (164). While his essay acknowledges the defining role sexuality plays in concepts of the Sapphic, it is primarily limited to the ways in which sex and gender in general help delineate the consciousness of the Other.

These definitions of “double consciousness” create a useful theoretical base when examining the Sapphic voice during Modernism, which became a space for writers to find new modes of expression, meeting their efforts to describe the contradictory nature of identity. Even male modernists engaged in a lyric cross-dressing via Sapphic language. Using Winkler to return to a pre-dualist conception of sexuality (predating nineteenth century concepts of homosexual and heterosexual) and identity reveals a “queer” area occupied by the poetry of both Sappho and certain Modernists.

The double consciousness of Sappho, or “Sapphic consciousness,” is a rhetorical space within lyric poetry where the queer (the ethnic, cultural, sexual, and/or racial “Other”) interacts with dominant ideologies, or the norm. The aesthetic and rhetorical symptoms of Sapphic consciousness are verbal and corporal fragmentation, and cross-dressing or a hermaphroditic identification with both subject and object. The writers discussed in this study manifest Winkler’s concept of “bilingualism” or speaking in two tongues, displacing the poetic voice within the verse. Sapphic consciousness is thus the “larger” consciousness, a vision encompassing the more limited perspective of the governing traditions.

Establishing a “New” Sapphic Modernism

Οὐκ οἶδ' ὅττι θέω· δύο μοι τα νοήματα¹⁸

In its detailed Introduction, Barnstone’s recent translation of Sappho’s corpus notes that the papyrus discoveries in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century continue to yield new texts even today as X-ray and infrared technology improves. He also makes an interesting analogy when describing the state of Sappho’s fragments:

The precious papyri had been used as papier-mâché... The mummy makers of Egypt transformed much of Sappho into columns of words, syllables, or single letters, and so made her poems look, at least typographically, like Apollinaire’s or e.e. cummings’s shaped poems... Her time-scissored work is not quite language poetry, but a more joyful cousin of the eternal avant-garde, which is always and never new. So Sappho is ancient and, for a hundred reasons, modern (Barnstone xxix).

Barnstone then lists Sappho’s influence on Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., and Baudelaire, demonstrating that despite Sappho’s various resurrections over the last 2000 years, he finds her distinctly modernist in several ways. While I share Barnstone’s reading of Sappho’s verse, in my study, Modernism and Sapphism are not interchangeable concepts/terms although they certainly share stylistic attributes. Sapphic writers in this study emphasize the “otherness” of a poem/poet through fragmentation of voice and representation. Pound for example, despite his “modernism,” does not achieve this quality of Sapphism; writers such as H.D., Dickinson, Apollinaire, Anna de Noailles, and Yeats achieve a subtle lyric subversion that is Sapphic in a way Gertrude Stein, Paul Valéry, and Marianne Moore are not. Some poets, such as Renée Vivien and Charles Baudelaire, can be explored within the thematic Sapphic tradition without consistently displaying a lyrical and theoretical “Sapphic consciousness.”

¹⁸ “I do not know what I am to do; I am in two minds.” (Campbell frag. 51)

Sappho's verse challenges the artificial categories surrounding identity at the dawn of the twentieth century (primarily related to nationality and sexuality), and I argue, continues to find relevance into the twenty-first century. DeJean defines Sappho's voice and character as ideally suited to current literary and critical trends: "Such an unambiguous choice of erotic ambiguity would seem to position Sappho as the ultimate post-structuralist author, the poet who proclaims the death of the subject, the prophet of today's widely prevalent critical desire for a subject that celebrates... a mode beyond difference, beyond categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine" (21). Sappho's translations, interpretations, disintegration, and restoration have, according to Barnstone, "... especially modernized her into a minimalist poet of a few but important words... Every phrase seems to be an autonomous poem, including a fragment of two words describing Eros: *optais amme*: 'you burn us'" (xv-xvi). Sappho's fragmentation, like that of the Modernists studied here, is not necessarily disempowering, especially when it is self-inflicted within the verse – she fragments herself (as in Fragment 31: "my tongue is broken; /a thin flame runs under/ my skin; seeing nothing," Barnard translation) while retaining the lyric power of the whole. DeJean notes, agreeing with critics such as Reynolds and Greene, "the undeniable role Sappho herself plays in the creation of sexual confusion" (20). This is essential to studies of Sappho and Modernism – however inaccessible Sappho herself is, we must not deny the agency of her poetic voice, and the role her lyrics play in their own interpretive elusiveness. Sappho's voice is a "self-conscious discourse, a discourse that includes a commentary on its own functioning as well as its primary message" (DeJean 20). Sappho's poetry is a testimony to an identity that is elusive, multifaceted, and resists normative discourses of power.

In *Histoire de la sexualité*, Foucault traces the historically misrepresented perceptions of sexual repression and expression, which, he points out, interchangeably define and create each other. Foucault emphasizes the end of the nineteenth century as a culminating moment in the history of sexuality, claiming that Victorianism generated “un appareillage à produire sur le sexe des discours” (33).¹⁹ Foucault’s examination of sex and sexuality notes the creation of binaries – a system of “either/or” – during this time period, as well as the power of discourse to either dispute or regulate dualist constructions: “...[L]e sexe se trouve placé par lui [le pouvoir] sous un régime binaire: licite et illicite, permis et défendu... la prise du pouvoir sur le sexe se ferait par *le langage*” (110 emphasis mine).²⁰ Foucault’s discussion of constructed sexualities remains relevant to Sappho’s specific identity as both poet (speaker) and manipulated poetic object: “Le discours véhicule et produit du pouvoir; il le renforce mais aussi le mine, l’expose, le rend fragile et permet de le barrer” (133).²¹ Foucault’s work also challenges the conflation of sexuality and the body (what he defines as “le biologique, le fonctionnel”). His call to “...ne pas référer à l’instance du sexe une histoire de la sexualité; mais montrer comment ‘le sexe’ est sous la dépendance historique de la sexualité” (207) reorients the historicity of sexual perception.²² His refusal to assume

¹⁹ “an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex” (23).

²⁰ “...[S]ex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden... Power’s hold on sex is maintained through *language*” (83).

²¹ “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (101)

²² “...not refer a history of sexuality to the agency of sex; but rather show how ‘sex’ is historically subordinate to sexuality”(157).

certain “truths” about biological sex and its relation to cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality become a foundation for the theory of Judith Butler at the end of the twentieth century.

According to Judith Butler’s multifarious reading of gender and sex expanding on Foucault’s study, gender binaries are artificial constructions, and thus I would posit that heterosexual male poets are not easily disentangled from their female and/or queer counterparts. Butler states in *Gender Trouble* (1993): “[I]f Foucault’s view of power is understood as the disruption and subversion of grammar and metaphysics of the subject, if power orchestrates the formation and sustenance of the subjects, then it cannot be accounted for in terms of the ‘subject’ which is its effect... There is no power that acts but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (9). From this critical viewpoint, within literature the power dynamic of male vs. female, poet vs. creation, and subject vs. object is disrupted by the very system (or literary genre) within which it exists. Therefore, male writers don’t create the patriarchal structure but rather operate (“perform”) within it, and their destabilized literary identity exists both in tension *and* in cooperation with female poets, which is also how Sappho’s poetic voice functions.

I thus approach the male/female division as arbitrary and instead address aspects of the “Other” (marginalized groups) that exist in all the writers of this study, qualities which give them access to what I define as a Sapphic tradition. In general, dividing writers into categories of “Other” (or not) is too simplistic – for example, Natalie Barney, while openly lesbian, also enjoyed enormous wealth and sympathized with Italian fascism during World War II; Proust, gay and Jewish, borders on misogynistic in his views of female sexuality; and even though H.D.’s status as a female bisexual and

American expatriate makes her especially conscious of marginalization, her interest in and enthusiasm for the Harlem Renaissance reveals a level of “whiteness” (or naïveté) in her racial relations. The identities of modernists rarely fit neatly into either a marginalized group or the white, privileged, hetero-normative discourse of Europe at that time. Therefore, while W.B. Yeats is often included in the traditional canon, I argue that his poetry can and should be read through the lens of a Sapphic tradition with the understanding that his status as an Irishman during events like the Irish civil war gave him insight (conscious or not) into the marginalized Other. The definition of this “Other” implies a dispossession from society, which becomes disjointed and marginalized in the light of performative cultural norms. The struggle to negotiate “otherness” coincided with constructions of gender during Modernism. H.D., Colette, and Woolf’s promotion of an androgynous or hermaphroditic mind was in many ways an attempt to reconcile the shifting concepts of binaries such as male and female, private and public, domestic and foreign during Modernism.

Linked to Butler’s deconstruction of “the subject” and Cixous’ *écriture féminine*, Suzette Henke’s essay, “(En)Gendering Modernism: Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes” (1992), points out that Julia Kristeva denies that her definition of “the marginal subject position of feminine writing” is linked to either the male or female sex. Henke’s essay succinctly applies Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic to her reading of Barnes and Woolf, but her position is equally relevant to my reading of the Modernists. Henke states: “[A] man can assume the marginal subject position of feminine gender and write like a woman; and a female author can inscribe her own textual production in the logocentric tradition of her literary forefathers” (328). This is central to my argument that, for

example, Yeats and Mallarmé can be read as Sapphic; it implies a fluidity or continuum in the poetic creation of a complexly disenfranchised group of writers and artists.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the statement that Modernists turned to the classics for inspiration and direction commonly situated Sappho as an irrefutable “foremother” of lyric poetry. She remained a presence even in the quest for a new artistic style. Since identity is always a fluid mode of representation, the Sapphic can be read in writers whose biographies don’t tell us that they’ve been influenced by Sappho herself. Apollinaire and Yeats may not have been directly influenced by Sappho, as H.D. and Vivien claimed to be, but their poetry shares distinctive poetic styles with the latter two women. I am not concerned with what or who Sappho *was* (knowing that to be an impossibility) but with what she becomes under Modernism and with how her texts (and her identity) were constructed for and suited to the Modernist movement and poetics.

In many ways, a discussion about Sappho must return to gender, but relegating her exclusively to that realm is reductive. I refer again to Butler, whose examination of identity and gender contributes to studies of the position of the poet and gender. She states:

For if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an “I” or a “we” who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of “before.” Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an “I” or a “we” who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being (*Bodies* 7).

This quote is relevant in two ways: first, it examines the inconclusiveness or “slipperiness” of the poetic “I” as a predetermined and static identity (despite possible efforts by the poet to establish such a status) since the creator and creation defy clear parallels to poetic subject and object; and second, it undermines the authorial purpose laid

out by various poets themselves (Yeats' highly studied Irish Nationalism, Pound's prescriptions regarding H.D.'s Imagism, and Apollinaire's critical expositions which seem creatively "behind" his poetry). Therefore, as Dettmar points out in his introduction to *Rereading the New* (1992), close readings of the modernists should avoid the limitation of the poet's stated influences and intentions: "This is what Wimsatt and Beardsley famously called 'the intentional fallacy': looking at what the Modernists wanted their writing to do, or what they believed it to be doing, rather than at *what that writing in fact does*" (14, emphasis mine).

A preoccupation with authorial intent restricts readings since literature should expand and renew itself with each new generation of readers. Based on the premise of the theoretical framework of this chapter and demonstrative close readings, this project thus diversifies concepts of Modernism by reading poetry that manifests this Sapphic consciousness, and by extension moves across national boundaries (and across gender lines) to understand fresh correlations between French and English language poets. The following chapter demonstrates this comparative approach by examining the proto-Modernist poetics of French writer Charles Baudelaire and American poet Emily Dickinson.

CHAPTER TWO

Poetic Forerunners of Modernism and *fin de siècle poésie*: Charles Baudelaire and Emily Dickinson²³

It would be difficult to overstate the poetic influence of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In particular, his principal volume of poetry, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), defined European concepts of *modernité* and ultimately established his position as the definitive figure of French *décadence*. It is intriguing, then, given the breadth of his literary consequence, that Baudelaire's work has not yet been compared to that of his prolific contemporary, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). This is partially due to the historically dismissive attitude by critics that Dickinson's work was sentimentalist, the charming but unrefined verse of a reclusive spinster. Certainly the critical tendency to confine her within the borders of American literature was initially due to Dickinson's self-imposed physical seclusion in New England and her reluctance to participate in contemporary literary movements. In addition, she was much less published in her lifetime and significantly more private than Baudelaire, whose prosecution for "un outrage aux bonnes mœurs" ("an affront to decent morals") propelled him into the popular and critical spotlight.²⁴ However, both writers,

²³ A portion of this chapter was published in the online journal *Revue Nexilis* (Nov/Dec 2008).

²⁴ Baudelaire and his publisher were prosecuted for an affront to public decency under France's Second Empire, and fined 300 francs. Despite the suppression of several of the collection's

despite belonging to different cultural movements and using unique lyrical methods, developed distinctive yet similar approaches that foreshadowed the turn-of-the-century literary movements in Europe.

Both poets are historically remembered within the context of their national literary movements, a tendency that I hope to amend in order to bring these two writers together. Although the cultural and intellectual overlap between English-speaking and French literary societies during Modernism is widely acknowledged, their respective poetic tendencies did grow out of different traditions: French Symbolism evolved out of aesthetic *décadence* while modernist English and American poets reacted against the conservative mores of Victorianism. Dickinson and Baudelaire are popularly regarded as quintessentially “American” and “French” (respectively), symptoms of their nations at a particular cultural and historical moment. As a result, their link to modernism is often contained or traced within their respective French or American heritages (more markedly in the case of Dickinson).

In light of the historicism characterizing critical approaches to their work, it is worth pointing out that this study relies on lyrical comparisons rather than questions of historical literary influence – Dickinson’s poetic techniques prefigure experimental sub-movements of European Modernism such as the Avant-garde and Imagism, regardless of whether or not she was a direct influence on these movements. However, even discussions of influence (an admittedly limiting approach in literary studies) neglect the transatlantic presence of Dickinson’s poetry in works by expatriate American modernists such as H.D. and Gertrude Stein. As we will see, like Baudelaire’s, her verse anticipated the turn-of-the century poetic movements in style and substance. This study builds on

poems, Baudelaire continued to gain strength as one of the nineteenth century’s leading poets.

scholarship by critics over the last couple of decades such as Rebecca Patterson, Adrienne Rich, and Christina Pugh, who have begun to remedy Dickinson's exclusion from consideration within broader literary traditions of the twentieth-century.

In contrast to Dickinson, Baudelaire is widely acknowledged as the foremost Sapphist of the nineteenth century, due both to his decadent style and his adoption of Sappho as his poetic muse. He is frequently acknowledged as a "proto-modernist" (as well as a Romantic and Symbolist at times) because of his literary presence in the letters and editorials of European Modernists, as well as the obvious manifestation of his style in their poetic texts; reflections on and references to his urban aesthetics are omnipresent in the works of T.S. Eliot, Stéphane Mallarmé, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Guillaume Apollinaire. Currently, critics increasingly categorize Baudelaire as part of the poetic trends in the later, rather than early, half of the nineteenth century. For example, Beryl Schlossman argues, building on Walter Benjamin's readings (which will be discussed later in this chapter), that Baudelaire represents the death of Romanticism and is more appropriately situated with the French Symbolists and *modernité*, orienting his style from the mid- to late nineteenth century.²⁵

I propose that we read Dickinson alongside Baudelaire as an underappreciated and underrepresented Sapphist displaying a specific "double" consciousness. By examining specific poems as examples of their innovative styles, I will show that the works of Baudelaire and Dickinson are more comparable than has yet been acknowledged. Their poetic fascination with motifs such as death, eroticism, gender, fragmentation, the role of the Poet, and the natural world supply thematic parallels;

²⁵ See articles by Schlossman: "The Night of the Poet: Baudelaire, Benjamin, and the Woman in the Street." (*MLN* 119 2004) and "Baudelaire: Liberté, Libertinage and Modernity." (*SubStance* 22.1 Issue 70 1993).

stylistically they created poems that predict the lyricism of e.e. cummings, H.D., and Guillaume Apollinaire.

In this chapter, Baudelaire and Dickinson are examined as pioneers of Modernism as well as architects of the particular genre of Sapphism that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. In general, Baudelaire may be labeled as *thematically* Sapphic due to his treatment of the figure of the lesbian Sappho as a poetic foremother. Dickinson is *lyrically* Sapphic – her style more closely resembles Sappho’s poetry even though she doesn’t claim this poetic lineage or pointedly incorporate Sappho into her verse. While it seems to me that the potential for comparative research of these two poets has wide-ranging potential, for the purpose of this study I will focus on a handful of themes. For example, both poets blur gender binaries by subversively occupying, then destabilizing, the traditional lyric voice, a tactic that is linked to a challenge to the prescribed lover/beloved dynamic. In addition, both poets pay homage to the prosody and values of Romanticism only to declare the inadequacy of the movement. This study places Baudelaire alongside Dickinson, and thus his poetry (as well as hers) reveals a Sapphic *style* not necessarily tied to his fascination with the Greek poetess herself, and ultimately critically reorients both writers within a fresh transnational setting.

Baudelaire, *la modernité* and Sappho

Baudelaire’s concept of *modernité* and the “cult of the artificial” was a link from Romanticism and Aestheticism to Symbolism and ultimately Modernism. It was also interwoven paradoxically with his concept of the female object and original sin, which aesthetically contributed to new fallible (rather than idealized) modernist icons (such as

the lesbian, the dandy, and the prostitute). In his essay “La modernité” in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), Baudelaire outlines his definition of *modernité*, a concept that also doubles as his ambitions for his own poetry:

La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable. Il y a eu une modernité pour chaque peintre ancien ; la plupart des beaux portraits qui nous restent des temps antérieurs sont revêtus des costumes de leur époque... Cet élément transitoire, fugitif, dont les métamorphoses sont si fréquentes, vous n'avez pas le droit de le mépriser ou de vous en passer. En le supprimant, vous tombez forcément dans le vide d'une beauté abstraite et indéfinissable, comme celle de l'unique femme avant le premier péché (11).²⁶

Baudelaire's own poetry is fraught with tension between “le transitoire” and “l'éternel,” as well as a suspicion of idealized beauty (often synonymous with woman).

Walter Benjamin's abundant scholarship builds largely on Baudelaire's own work, and is almost single-handedly responsible for making Baudelaire synonymous with urban capitalist modernity. Benjamin's essays such as “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1940) and “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” (written 1938) found in Baudelaire the ultimate “Modern” – an allegorical poet who fully experienced and registered the shock and alienation of life among the crowd/masses of nineteenth century Paris. Baudelaire, via Benjamin, raises the flâneur, the bohème, and the prostitute to the status of modern heroes: “Baudelaire more clearly defines the face of the modern, without denying the mark of Cain on its brow” (Benjamin “Paris” 107). Michael Jennings' introduction to *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (2006) points out that one of Benjamin's principle contributions to Modernism studies

²⁶ “Modernity is the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. There was a modernity for each master painter; the majority of great portraits left to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their time period... This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so frequent, can on no account be despised or passed over. By neglecting it, one falls headlong into the abyss of an abstract and indefinable beauty, like that of the first woman before the Fall of man” (translation mine).

was setting Baudelaire apart from the Romantics and establishing him in modernity:

The poet is ... not a genius who ‘rises above’ his age and distills its essence for posterity. For Benjamin, the greatness of Baudelaire consists instead in his absolute *susceptibility* to the worst excrescences of modern life: Baudelaire was in possession not of genius, but of an extraordinarily ‘sensitive disposition’ that enabled him to perceive, through painful empathy, the character of an age (15).

It is this susceptibility to the torments of modern life that provokes Baudelaire’s poetic identification (conscious or not) with a flawed feminine muse, fracturing the poet’s voice and destabilizing the divisions between subject and object.

Joan DeJean’s book *Fictions of Sappho*, as we saw in the previous chapter, deals primarily with interpretations of Sappho from the mid-sixteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. According to her, during the nineteenth century, “reading” Sappho meant reading Baudelaire. As Benjamin and DeJean both point out, Baudelaire wanted to be read as a classical poet in a modern era. His interest lay primarily in the Romans, and only one Greek, Sappho, mingles with the Latins in his work, but his fascination with her is profound. Baudelaire’s treatment of the figure Sappho in the poems “Lesbos” and “Femmes damnées” has been capably analyzed by current feminist and Sappho critics such as Margaret Reynolds, Yopie Prins, and Joan DeJean. I will therefore be addressing Baudelaire’s work only as it underscores his connections to my study of Sapphic Modernism.

The extensive scholarship on Baudelaire has routinely highlighted his treatment of women as sexualized or silent objects in his poetry, and his misogynist views in his personal correspondence and prose. Baudelaire’s œuvre is indeed made up of numerous poems treating the female figure as an object of anguish and worship – an aesthetic source of inspiration (often treated in allegory with the natural world and various

animals) to be taken up by a male poet. Poems such as “Allégorie,” “À une Mendiante rousse,” and “Bien loin d’ici” carefully guard lyrical control over the masculine “I,” avoiding intimate association with the wild, beautiful, and depersonalized female object. His sensual and occasionally violent voyeurism of the female body has justifiably been a topic of censure by feminist scholars. However, many of his poems also demonstrate a distinct confusion of poetic subject and object, where Baudelaire’s masculine “I” becomes precariously entangled with the identity of his feminine subject. More recently, queer theorists and scholars such as Gretchen Schultz and Dominique Fisher have drawn attention to the complexity of gender in those of his verses that complicate the masculine lyric “I.” This chapter will explore three of Baudelaire’s poems to illustrate his flirtation with Sapphic consciousness.

Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the sonnet “À une passante” (1868) asserts that Baudelaire’s embodiment of emerging modernity lies in his tendency to overturn Romanticism’s formulas. Benjamin points out that the inversion of traditional readerly expectations occurs largely due to a new urbanization that defined modernity. The poet’s isolation, rather than being the result of a physical retreat to nature, is an internalized sense of alienation *in spite of* being surrounded by crowds. The lyrical poet’s gaze is thus constantly interrupted by the bustle of the Parisian crowd. The passing masses of urban Paris generate an erotic game of peek-a-boo that creates, rather than hinders, the poetic encounter with an object of desire (in this case “une passante”). Benjamin emphasizes this point: “Far from eluding the eroticist in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by the very crowd. The delight of the city-dweller is not so much

love at first sight as love at last sight” (77). The veiling and revealing of “une passante” (“a passing woman”) is essential to producing this snapshot moment in time, since any permanent knowledge of her identity or her individuality would be illusory anyway. The poet therefore savors the fleeting chimera itself. The entire poem follows here:

À une passante

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

5 Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

10 Un éclair... puis la nuit! — Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! *jamais* peut-être!
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!²⁷

²⁷

A Passer-by

The deafening street roared on. Full, slim, and grand
In mourning and majestic grief, passed down
A woman, lifting with a stately hand
And swaying the black borders of her gown;

Noble and swift, her leg with statues matching;
I drank, convulsed, out of her pensive eye,
A livid sky where hurricanes were hatching,
Sweetness that charms, and joy that makes one die.

A lighting-flash — then darkness! Fleeting chance
Whose look was my rebirth — a single glance!
Through endless time shall I not meet with you?

Far off! too late! or never! — I not knowing
Who you may be, nor you where I am going —

The paradoxical dynamic between motion and immobility, concealment and vision is what lends the poem its fundamental tension. The poet's motionlessness is established in the first line as the deafening road ("rue assourdissante") roars around him. Benjamin astutely remarks that this is part of the recurring metaphor for the crowd, which "is nowhere named in either word or phrase [yet] all the action hinges on it..." (184). In the first stanza, the woman, veiled in mourning, appears as part of the crowd passing by. However, the following line negates this scenario by referring to the woman as motionless/immobile – "avec sa jambe de statue" (l. 5). The end of the second stanza marks a moment when their eyes meet and the poet's growing identification with the female object is indicated by a transition from third person to second person singular pronouns – he is no longer talking *about* her but rather *to* her. This also marks a shift in rhythm and meter: the third stanza (a tercet rather than quatrain) opens with the stilted exclamations of the poet whose shock echoes a flash of lightening – an instantaneous dark and light. Baudelaire's use of a dash and ellipses in the same line (l. 9) creates *caesurae* and breathless space (a technique common in Dickinson's poetry but rare in Baudelaire's). The breaks in the line simulate the flash of light and the bustling crowd, both of which only provide the poet with fragmented glimpses of the woman.

Perhaps the most striking and significant aspect of this poem is its dependence on the poet's point of view. While an initial reading of the poem seems to maintain a unidirectional relationship between the poet as speaker/viewer and the object of his

You, whom I might have loved, who know it too!
(translation by Roy Campbell, 1952)

attention, Baudelaire's identification with the lady reorients the experience. The shift from the third person pronouns to refer to the passing lady (stanza two) becomes intimate identification and knowledge by the final stanza: "Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais" (l. 13). In this line the poet wonders where she is going, but she equally ponders *his* movements, suggesting a returned, even shared, poetic gaze. The inverted parallelism of this line's construction ("je/tu...tu/je") creates a mirror effect as the poet sees his own actions reflected and returned in kind. During his analysis of lyrical modernity in his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1940), Benjamin makes the crucial statement: "Inherent in the gaze... is the expectation that it will be returned by that on which it is bestowed" (204). This idea of *mutual* voyeurism, of a poet who watches his beloved object and anticipates a returned gaze, creates a mirror of the poet's own desires or experience, and sets up a fundamentally Sapphic experience of reflection and inversion.

For example, Sappho's Fragment 31, "Φαίνεται μοι/ He seems to me,"²⁸ most directly recalls the erotic tension created by the poet's gaze in Baudelaire's poem, which results in the fragmentation of fetishized body parts ("d'une main fastueuse/ Soulevant" and "sa jambe de statue" l.3 and 5). Sappho's poet directly addresses the object of her desire (in the second person) who, like the passing woman in "À une passante," causes

²⁸ **Sappho Frag. 31**

"That one seems to me to be like the gods, the man whosoever sits facing you and listens nearby to your sweet speech and desirable laughter – which surely terrifies the heart in my chest; for *as I look briefly at you*, so can *I no longer speak at all*, my tongue is silent, broken, a *silken fire suddenly has spread beneath my skin*, with my eyes I see *nothing*, my hearing hums, a cold sweat grips me, a trembling seizes me entire, more pale than grass am I, I seem to myself too little short of dead. But everything is to be endured, since even a pauper..."

(Winkler 1981, emphasis mine. Greek text printed in **Appendix A**)

her to freeze and tremble at the same time. Both poets seem to approach death as a result of their encounter with the object of their amorous regard (“La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue” l. 8). As Winkler eloquently points out in his book, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990), in Sappho’s poem “The rhetoric of praise and of submission are [sic] necessary because the poet and [the object] are in fact very threatening...” He continues by noting that the “...paradox of poem 31’s eloquent statement of speechlessness, its powerful declaration of helplessness...” is the fact that “...the poet is masterfully in control of herself as victim” (178-9). The threat of the object’s gaze, whether it is ever turned toward the poet or not, is essential to the poem’s dynamic as both a threatening *and* enabling element.

Benjamin acknowledges the reciprocity implied by the poet’s gaze in Baudelaire’s poem; he fails, however, to extend this analysis to consider the subsequent connotations for the poetic *object*. The tension at the end of “À une passante” is largely due to the fleeting possibility of shared knowledge, and of the poet’s own reflection in the form of a veiled lady. Schlossman’s analysis of this poem explores the power of memory, the gaze, and emerging qualities of Modernism; her observations remain pertinent when analyzing Baudelaire’s poetics on a broader scale. She states: “In Baudelaire’s world, the *subject* is threatened: vision threatens to succumb to the overwhelming shock of modernity” (1014, emphasis mine). At the end of the poem the poet implies that his knowledge is equally shared and understood by the object he watches, and that any ignorance on their part is equally shared: “Car j’ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais, / Ô toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!” (l. 13-14). This

upsets the power dynamic implied by the objectification of the woman as a distant entity of desire in the beginning of the poem.

An expanded example of this double consciousness through identification with the female object is the poem, “À celle qui est trop gaie” (1857) in *Les Fleurs du mal*. This poem, like the bulk of Baudelaire’s œuvre, is frequently analyzed in light of preceding and subsequent literary movements of the nineteenth century, specifically Romanticism and Symbolism/Modernism.²⁹ For example, Modernist scholars regularly draw on Baudelaire’s definition of artistic inspiration as steeped in artifice rather than the natural world. However, the remnants of Romanticism still linger in Baudelaire’s conservative poetic composition. This poem is written in a classical structure, quatrains with *rimes embrassées* (the rhyming scheme abba) – both the consistency of the lines’ metric lengths (octosyllabic) and the “embracing” rhymes structurally inform the poem’s initial premise as a lyrical tribute to a beloved. As we will see, however, this adherence to French poetic prescriptions only serves as an illusory theater for the speaker’s sadistic rupture from Romantic imagery.

The female love object is initially associated with Nature in the symbolic repetition of the images “Ta tête, ton geste, ton air /beaux comme un beau paysage” (l. 1-2) and “beau jardin” (l. 17), recalling the Romantic link between the poet and beauty/the Muse (i.e. Beloved) through which he experiences truth/inspiration in Nature. However, as we will see later in the poem, *chez* Baudelaire the hyperboles of Romantic lyricism become ambivalent, violent, sexualized, and self-effacing: desire is tinged with death,

²⁹ See **Appendix B: Baudelaire** for the complete poem and translation of “À celle qui est trop gaie.”

and love is accompanied by alienation. John Barberet's analysis of Baudelaire's poetic muse(s) in his article, "Baudelaire: Homoérotismes" (1997), emphasizes the shift from Romanticism to urban modernism: "Whereas, in romanticism, the idealized woman mediated man's relationship to Nature, in Baudelaire's modernism the idealized prostitute mediates man's relationship to urban artifice" (54). The poet's metonymic representation of the Beloved via eroticized body parts creates a poetic object who is fragmented and dismembered, and with whom the poet begins precariously to identify.

Authorial fragmentation became an aesthetic expression of the growing sense of alienation in a modernist movement that was largely associated with expatriation and, as Benjamin demonstrates, urbanization in turn-of-the-century Europe. While corporally dissecting the object of passion was (and is) a fairly standard poetic technique, under Modernism (and seen here in Baudelaire) the poet begins to self-consciously fracture him/herself as well as the poetic object.

In the third stanza of the poem, the poetic object "bursts" into the poet, reversing the lyric gender roles by enacting male penetration ("...tu parsèmes tes toilettes / Jettant dans l'esprit des poètes/ L'image d'un ballet de fleurs" l. 10-12). The floral "ballet" resulting from this moment further complicates masculine and feminine interactions with natural imagery. The gender associations of this imagery is key, especially during Baudelaire's lifetime: in the mid-nineteenth century, as noted in Chapter One, prominent sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud began blurring the physical and psychological boundaries of sex and sexuality, establishing social constructions of gender that assumed, for example, the conflation of "female" (a biological categorization) with natural and inherent "feminine" qualities (behavioral identity traits). Definitions of

masculinity, therefore, relied on the careful categorization of femininity (what the masculine is not). A male who is not fully “masculine” (who displays or identifies with “feminine” qualities) is therefore abnormal, queer, or “inverted” (to use Havelock’s term). Gretchen Schultz’s admirable study, *The Gendered Lyric: Subjectivity and Difference in Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* (1999), opens by pointing out the gender divisions of traditional French lyric poetry, a tradition that Baudelaire is subverting in this poem:

[T]he nearly exclusive heterosexuality of this tradition reinforced the paradigm of female objectification by fixing the relationship between ‘I’ and ‘you’ into an intimate opposition of masculine to feminine... [I]f the poet and the lyric persona are inevitably masculine, female roles are played by those silent creatures, Muse and beloved... (5).

As Schultz demonstrates, the traditional male poet and female beloved have been established for centuries, and perform the power relations inherent in a subject/object dynamic. She further demonstrates that Baudelaire’s destabilization of gender roles is the key to his modernism: “While Baudelaire’s alienated Poet confirms the Romantic association of virility with solitude and superiority, the masculinity represented in his work is a fundamentally threatened one” (182). The fourth stanza thus represents a rupture in the poetic voice and imagery – the poet begins to rebel against the Romantic rhetoric of the early nineteenth century, spiraling from awe to madness to violence. The poet’s growing anger turns inward even as he attempts to regain control over the deteriorating poetic roles of male subject (speaker) and silent female object. The seventh and eighth stanzas (shown below) express the poet’s surrender to frustration and rage:

Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
 Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
 Et faire à ton flanc étonné
 Une blessure large et creuse (l. 25-32)³⁰

This progression begins in the fourth stanza of the poem which contains a threefold reference to madness: “robes folles” (l. 13) and “Folle dont je suis affolé” (l. 15). The poet’s articulated torment at the end of this stanza (“Je te hais autant que je t’aime” l. 16) recalls Paul de Man’s observation that “Absolute irony is a consciousness of madness...” (qtd. in Minahen 6).³¹ The poet’s ironic awareness of his own impending insanity (“J’ai senti, comme une ironie/ Le soleil déchirer mon sein” l. 19-20) leads to increasing violence and inner conflict. By the seventh stanza, the imagery noticeably shifts from light and clarity to night and fantasy, and the use of the conditional verb tense (“je voudrais”) marks a shift from established tropes of poetic desire into veiled mania and uncertainty. The Romantic images that opened the poem are now threatening and insolent – the poet feels betrayed by “le printemps et la verdure” (l. 21). His attempts to punish (“puni” l. 23) the woman/Nature are contaminated by his own frustrated passions. The shock of the poet’s threatened identity, his awareness or “vision,” causes him to lose control of his own creation. The highly debated final line, concluding with the baffling

³⁰ Thus I would wish, one night,
 When the voluptuary's hour sounds,
 To crawl like a coward, noiselessly,
 Towards the treasures of your body,

 In order to correct your gay flesh
 And beat your unbegrudging breast,
 To make upon your starting thigh
 A long and biting weal
 (trans. Geoffrey Wagner, 1974)

³¹ See Charles D Minahen’s article: “Irony and Violence in Baudelaire’s ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’,” (*Symposium* 62.1 Spring 2008).

appellation “ma sœur” (“my sister”), is an oddly mimetic identification with the object of his simultaneous desire and revulsion: “A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,/ Plus éclatantes et plus belles,/ T'infuser mon venin, ma sœur !” (l. 34-6).³² This provokes the question: is the poet’s “infusion” literal (ejaculation during the anticipated violation) or metaphorical (the poet’s desire to poison her potential autonomy)? Tied to this query is the overtly phallic metaphor of a snake evoked by “mon venin” (l. 36), which demands a drastic revision of the innocuous sensual images earlier in the poem (“un vent frais” and “un ballet de fleurs,” l. 4 and 12). The snake introduces both masculine and dangerous elements into a previously feminized portrayal of the natural world. The contradictions of imagery and desire capsize the poet’s own efforts at lyrical expression since his expressed admiration early in the poem is corrupted by his sadistic resentment at the end.

Beryl Schlossman’s article, “The Night of the Poet: Baudelaire, Benjamin, and the Woman in the Street” (2004), argues that Baudelaire’s uneasy desire for the beloved represents a strong break from the Romantics: “Borrowed from the conventional poetics of courtly love, Baudelaire’s image is sexualized by the street context and deconventionalized by the hyperboles of the Narrator’s ambivalence” (1023). Love is fragmented, lonely, deceptive, and often destructive, thus frustrating traditional concepts of lyric inspiration from the preceding centuries. Schlossman notes that “The non-occurrence of love is Baudelaire’s contribution to the tradition of the love lyric, and in a

³² The final stanza seems so startling and scandalous that “ma sœur” is often translated as “sprite” or “sweet,” or, in the case of Jacques LeClerc’s 1958 translation, cut entirely. His poem ends with stanza seven, translated thus:

Thus I should like some night, when deep
The hour tolls out for hidden pleasures,
Softly and cravenly to creep
Close to your body’s lavish treasures.

LeClerc’s elimination of the final two stanzas the female Beloved remains an object of sexual attraction, removing the climactic moment of cross-gender identification and violence.

certain sense the end of that tradition” (“Night” 1030). Baudelaire’s urbanization and open sexualization of natural imagery emphasize the artificiality of the lyrical conventions he’s manipulating. Baudelaire’s poem thus frustrates its own lyrical efforts to draw a boundary between “I” and “you,” subject and object: despite the illusion of a Muse, the poet ultimately merges with and destroys his own allegorical inspirations.

In a technique that we will also see in Dickinson’s poetry, the beginning of the poem wears the cloak of Romantic lyricism, but the poet’s awareness of his own predetermined role and his beloved’s unrealistic perfection spirals into violence and disillusion. The poet resents his female muse for her idealized joy and beauty and reacts with madness, then violence. This self-consciousness of the subject/object as perpetually trapped in a sterile relationship ironically makes the poet a submissive recipient (as he is “entered” by the female beloved in line 11) without rescuing the woman from her own objectification. The poet is in effect nullifying the presence of an authoritative lyrical voice since neither lover nor beloved retains lyrical or allegorical control of their role within the poem. Charles Minahan’s discussion of the poem in his article “Irony and Violence in Baudelaire’s ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’” (2008), emphasizes its modernist aspects: “Resolution is not achieved; indecision and frustration prevail” (4). As we will see, Dickinson’s poetry also resists resolution and closure, cloaking desire and confrontation behind clichéd poetic tropes, and destabilizing the poetic voice *à la* Sappho.

Baudelaire’s most obviously Sapphic poem, “Lesbos” (1857), is written in quintets with *rime croisée* alternating masculine and feminine rhymes according to

traditional rules of French poetry.³³ The first and last lines of each stanza are repetitions that create a melodic quality, like the chorus of a song. These framing lines can also read like a chant, incantation, or religious mantra, as if Baudelaire's poet is summoning the ghost of Sappho. The first stanza follows here:

Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques,
Lesbos, où les baisers, languissants ou joyeux,
Chauds comme les soleils, frais comme les pastèques,
Font l'ornement des nuits et des jours glorieux,
Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques (l. 1-5)³⁴

Along with several other critics, Margaret Reynolds reads the opening line of Baudelaire's "Lesbos," "*Mère* des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques," as an address to the poetess Sappho. I would argue that the poet's choice of the word "mère," while logically directed toward Sappho, evokes three simultaneous images: those of Sappho herself, the island of Lesbos itself, or the homonymically evoked word "la mer" ("the sea"). This aural exchange in particular between the two words *mer* and *mère* complicates attempts to create clear metaphorical relationships. Indeed, throughout the poem it is arguable whether or not the poet discerns among these three entities at all, since a listener (as opposed to a reader) would have difficulty contextually understanding the difference. Thus, the poet's personification of the island necessarily becomes an objectification of the poet Sappho due to the fluidity of the terms "mer/mère." The vagueness of this linguistic referent is reiterated later in stanza 11 with the line, "Le cadavre adoré de

³³ See **Appendix B: Baudelaire** for the complete poem "Lesbos."

³⁴ Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,
Lesbos, where kisses, languishing or gay,
As melons cool, or warm as solar flames,
Adorn alike the glorious night and day:
Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,
(trans. Roy Campbell, 1952)

Sapho qui partit / Pour savoir si *la mer* est indulgente et bonne” (l. 54-5). The question whether the *sea/mer* is good (“bonne”) can also be heard as an inquiry about whether the *mère/mother* is “bonne,” an adjective that could imply correctness, moral virtue, and/or kindness. In this context the “mère” of the opening line turns back in on itself conceptually since Sappho’s mythic plunge into the ocean (“mer”) both merges and obscures the poetic tropes of mother and sea.

The poem is riddled with allusions to voyeurism beyond the poet’s gaze. In stanza three the eye of “Vénus” turns toward Sappho just as the “Phrynés” draw toward each other, creating a multiplicity of female gazes.³⁵ In stanza five “Platon” regards the island of Lesbos with a more critical and judgmental eye, foreshadowing the regard of the judicious gods in stanza seven.³⁶ Stanzas three, four, and five are shown here:

Lesbos, où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,
Où jamais un soupir ne resta sans écho,
À l'égal de Paphos les étoiles t'admirent,
Et Vénus à bon droit peut jalouser Sappho!
Lesbos où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,

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,

Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'oeil austère;
Tu tires ton pardon de l'excès des baisers,
Reine du doux empire, aimable et noble terre,
Et des raffinements toujours inépuisés.

³⁵ Phryne was a fourth century B.C.E. courtesan of mythic beauty, usually rendered as a nude, Venus-like figure. The poet’s quasi-pornographic voyeurism is implicit in the scene where multiple “Phrynés” move together following the line that Lesbos is a place where “les baisers sont comme les cascades” (l. 11).

³⁶ Plato called Sappho the tenth Muse in admiration; Baudelaire’s poem implies a critical regard (“l’oeil austère”) as if disproving of the antics he “sees” on the island of Lesbos.

Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'oeil austère. (l. 11-25)³⁷

The descriptions of Lesbos begin to shift at stanza nine where the poet introduces himself into the poem, and begins the process of poetic usurpation: the linguistic and syntactical tensions parallel the poem's content since the poet has just announced Sappho's death and his position as her chosen replacement in the earlier line: "Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre / Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs" (l. 41-2).³⁸ He announces that he is a vessel, chosen to "sing" the island's secrets. Foreshadowing the Symbolist reverence for music, and recalling the fact that Sappho's own poetry was often set to music, the poet reinforces the lyricism of his art as both oral and visual. The echoes and word/line repetition reverberating throughout the poem underpin the allusion to an oral and musical tradition, which warns the reader that the poetic voice is changeable. For example, the third stanza creates ambiguous aural and authoritative origins, where "jamais un soupir ne resta sans écho" (l. 12). This

³⁷ Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,
Where never yet unanswered went a sigh,
Where Paphos with a rival is requited,
And Venus with a Sappho has to vie!
Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,

Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,
Where gazing in their mirrors as they dress
The cave-eyed girls, in barren, vain delight,
The fruits of their nubility caress.
Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,

Let Plato frown austere all the while.
Your pardon's from excess of kisses won,
Queen of sweet empire, rare and noble isle —
And from refinements which are never done.
Let Plato frown austere all the while.
(trans. Roy Campbell, 1952)

³⁸ This line is also an in-text reference to the collection's title *Les Fleurs du mal* as well as the island's inhabitants.

reverberation and refraction is emphasized later in stanza four with the invocation of “miroirs,” which is a visual version of an echo, and also implies a mimetic confusion of originality concerning the creative source.

By stanza ten the poet is keeping vigil on the precipice of the Leucadian rocks, where legend claims Sappho threw herself to her death due to her unrequited love for Phaon. The poet is standing assertively in Sappho’s mythical shoes, lyrically stepping into the poem and breaking up the Sapphic community of his own creation. However, unlike “his” Sappho, Baudelaire’s poet does not throw himself from the cliff. In the next stanza the poem reveals “le cadavre adoré de Sapho” (l. 54), visually linking it to the “corps amoureuses” (l. 18) that are voyeuristically dissected and displayed earlier. The poem reveals here that the exiled women, Sappho’s society, are in fact banished by the poet himself with his invocation of Sappho’s death and departure. Reynolds points out, “Joan DeJean, following Walter Benjamin, sees Baudelaire’s strategy ... as one which makes his ‘poet-double’ heir to Sappho and which initiates a new literary strand which makes the lesbian, Sappho in particular, into the ‘heroine of modernism’” (152).³⁹ Sappho, as Reynolds makes clear, is simultaneously the poet’s muse and victim, since Sappho’s existence both threatens his own poetic voice (and thus identity) and paradoxically makes his lyric status possible. Lines 46 and 47 indicate the poet’s increasing identification with Sappho to the point of confusing their genders: “...*je [Baudelaire’s poet] veille au sommet de Leucate, /Comme une sentinelle*” (emphasis mine). Although he is now looking down at the place of mythic Sappho’s death, his masculinity is compromised by the feminine simile “Comme une sentinelle.” Stanzas ten

³⁹ We will see in the following chapter that this is true for Renée Vivien as well, although she resists the urge to stand allegorically in dead Sappho’s place.

through twelve demonstrate the poet's increasingly invasive yet threatened role:⁴⁰

Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,
Comme une sentinelle à l'oeil perçant et sûr,
Qui guette nuit et jour brick, tartane ou frégate,
Dont les formes au loin frissonnent dans l'azur;
Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,

Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne,
Et parmi les sanglots dont le roc retentit
Un soir ramènera vers Lesbos, qui pardonne,
Le cadavre adoré de Sapho, qui partit
Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne!

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! (l. 46-60)⁴¹

Immediately following the poetic death of Sappho is the poem's mergence of gender binaries in the oxymoronic phrase "la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète" (l. 60).

⁴⁰ Reynolds additionally acknowledges that Sappho was the first to fragment herself "even if she said that it was love, sexual desire, *eros* that was doing it to her" (162). However, Baudelaire's dialogue with his lyrical predecessor often disallows opportunities for reciprocity or mutuality.

⁴¹ Since then I watch on the Leucadian height.
Like a lone sentry with a piercing view
Who sees the vessels ere they heave in sight
With forms that faintly tremble in the blue.
Since then I watch on the Leucadian height

To find out if the sea's heart still is hardened
And from the sobs that drench the rock with spray
If it will bring back Sappho, who has pardoned,
The corpse of the adored, who went away
To find out that the sea its heart has hardened;

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
On the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers —
(trans. Roy Campbell, 1952)

As several critics have noted, in Baudelaire there is an often-unresolved tension between allegorical and literal binaries, which generally results in the confusion of poetic subject and object. This is accomplished through various poetic images and tropes including echoes, shadows, mirrors, oxymoronic phrasing (most exemplified by Sappho's own coined term "bitter-sweet" love), and ghosts.⁴² As Dominique Fisher points out in *Articulations of Difference: Gender Studies and Writing in French* (1997), the *spectre/fantôme* in French literature is traditionally, and often negatively, a metaphor for homosexuality (40). Because lesbians were (and are) conceptualized as "masculine," the figurative blurring of the poem's personalities is further complicated by the dubiously gendered presence of the poet him or herself. For example, stanza twelve repeats the line "De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète," creating gender confusion on a contextual and grammatical level. The surprising gender disagreement between the feminine article "la" and the noun "mâle" disrupts the logic of reader expectations. The question remains whether the poet refers to himself at this point, or to the languishing poet Sappho, since the virility of "Sapho" is juxtaposed with a confusing feminine noun – "l'amante" followed by a masculine noun – "le poète."

In the late nineteenth century Baudelaire embraced the paralleled figures of lesbian and prostitute as sexual deviants, frequenting his poetry with lesbians, illicit lovers, vampiric women, and prostitutes. Reynolds points out that the traditional, even venerated, practice of displaying and dissecting the female body of a poet's "subject-beloved... has become a familiar theme in modern criticism." As seen in Baudelaire's "À celle qui est trop gaie," during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "the

⁴² Fr. 40: Ερος δαῦτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει, / γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον.
(Now Love masters my limbs and shakes me, fatal creature, bitter-sweet. – trans. H. T. Wharton, 1895)

anatomisation of the female body was a distinctive and obsessive theme” (165-6).

Reynolds argues that Baudelaire’s appropriation of Sappho’s voice and lyrical status is paramount to dressing “up in drag” *à la* Kristeva, and continues, “this transvestism... far from suggesting an identification or sympathy with real femininity, does away with the feminine altogether” (168). While not fully disagreeing, I argue that Baudelaire’s poet does not entirely succeed in erasing of the feminine in his poem since his status depends upon adopting the lyrical cloak of his Sapphic predecessor, not eliminating her legacy.

Fisher’s concept of the lesbian in Baudelaire’s verse proposes a new modernist figure, which merges ancient and contemporary concepts of the feminine:

[T]he lesbian... is conceived of in the realm of the simulacrum. For it is only under the *image* of a modern Sappho, which allegorically combines the antique with the modern, that the lesbian incarnates the dream of a pure love, and like the prostitute, fights both sedentariness and the ‘abominable naturalness of women,’ and thus bears the seal of a “new heroism.” (36)

In the aesthetic sense, simulacrum describes an artistic representation of another work of art, but it also carries implications of inferiority since the image lacks the substance or qualities of the original. The persistent presence of illusory elements in Baudelaire’s poetry (such as echoes, shadows, and mirrors) makes visual simulacra as well as textual palimpsests a perpetual motif. The ghostly presence of past poets as well as the writer’s own refracted image throughout his verse undermine any claims to authorship or originality. In this case, Baudelaire’s poetic association with Sappho’s character and heritage confuses the creative source of lyricism as well as generating the gender confusion present in his verse.

While unarguably present, the misogyny in Baudelaire is unstable since his

emerging “modernist” concerns demand an undermining of the male poetic voice. Dominique Fisher notes that in Baudelaire’s developing urban aesthetic, “[T]here is a generalized feminization of the male subject, the Baudelairean figure of modernity, who, to undergo the experience of the crowd, of city life, of modernity itself, must become a passive, receptive figure instead of an active phallic male” (15). “Lesbos” in particular, at first glance appears to objectify the “femmes damnées” so that the poet may appropriate the lyric tradition. However, closer readings reveal that this tactic turns back in on itself since the poet’s self-insertion into the poem results in a kind of transgendered occupation of a female role. In keeping with Butler’s theory that male poets as well as females are obliged to perform within a patriarchal structure (*Bodies* 9), Baudelaire enacts a rejection of Romantic norms that places him in a tense relationship with the female “Other.” Baudelaire’s manifest Sapphic consciousness is the result of an intimate association with his female object, even if involuntarily. His lyric voice holds tenaciously to his central legacy as poet yet compromises this authority by negotiating an uneasy middle space between masculine (subject) and feminine (object).

Dickinson’s Sapphic Modernism

As we will see in this section, Dickinson also pays tribute to the Romantic tradition while simultaneously expressing a private, subversive reality. Margaret Reynolds’s anthology *The Sappho Companion* includes, among 2000 years of textual tributes to Sappho, Dickinson’s poem “‘Heaven’ – is what I cannot reach!” (1861, published 1896), which Reynolds presents as a nineteenth century interpretation (as

opposed to translation) of Sapphic fragment 105a.⁴³ It is worth briefly visiting Sappho's verse in parallel with Dickinson's poem. In "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics," Winkler's reading of Sappho's poem highlights certain motifs also present in Dickinson's verse. His translation of the poem most accurately captures the poet's voice if not her lyricism:

Like the sweet-apple [*glukumêlon*] ripening to red on the topmost branch,
on the very tip of the topmost branch, and the apple-pickers have
overlooked it –
no, they haven't overlooked it but they could not reach it.
(Winkler, 1981)

The elusive apple (τὸ γλυκύμαλον) is obviously a metaphor for female sexuality, but reveals much more: for example, "they [Sappho's poems] contain a delicate and reverential attitude to the elusive presence-and-absence of women in the world of men" (Winkler 183). The intimacy signified by the apple encounters the public sphere (represented by "they"), and recalls Baudelaire's "À une passante" where the intimacy of his connection to the passing woman is enacted on a busy public street. However, Sappho's obvious reverence for an autonomous female sexuality is more characteristic of Dickinson's poetry than that of Baudelaire. Sappho's playful self-correction regarding the fruit's condition implies a certain inadequacy of language to express the apple's value and status, and conveys the impression of spontaneous oral speech. As we will see, this

⁴³ Οἷον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὕσδῳ
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἄκροτάτῳ· λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπῃες,
οὐ μὰν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

As the sweet-apple blushes on the end of the bough, the very end of the bough, which the gatherers overlooked, nay overlooked not but could not reach. (H. T. Wharton, Frag. 93)

Comme la douce pomme rougit sur la branche haute, en haut, sur la plus haute, et elle a échappé aux cueilleurs de pommes; non vraiment, elle ne leur a pas échappé, mais ils ne pouvaient l'attraper. (Jackie Pigeaud 2004)

exploration of the limitations of language is distinctly thematic in Dickinson's verse as well. Winkler further says, "Among the thoughts which Sappho has woven into her poetry, in a way which both conceals and reveals without betraying, are sexual images" (181). His observation that Sappho's verse plays hide-and-seek with gender roles, public and private spaces, and erotic gazes is equally relevant to Dickinson's poetry. "Heaven" layers over Sappho's fragment to create a thematic and lyrical palimpsest:

- ‘Heaven’ – is what I cannot reach! ⁴⁴
 The Apple on the Tree –
 Provided it do hopeless – hang –
 That – ‘Heaven’ is – to Me!
- 5 The Colour, on the Cruising Cloud –
 The interdicted Land –
 Behind the Hill – the House behind –
 There – Paradise – is found!
- 10 Her teasing Purples – Afternoons –
 The credulous – decoy –
 Enamoured – of the Conjuror –
 That spurned us – Yesterday!

Dickinson's quatrains are characterized by slant (or imperfect) rhymes that place particular emphasis on the only perfect rhymes of lines 2 and 4 ("Tree" and "Me"). The poem's initial imagery surrounding the Garden of Eden is destabilized by the single quotations surrounding "Heaven," implying the poet's use of someone else's definition of Heaven, a definition which contrasts with her own. The Apple hanging out of reach is, within this Judeo-Christian context, a symbol for knowledge and sexuality; however, the poet intriguingly implies that these "sins" *are* her Heaven (even if she cannot reach it) and do not symbolize humanity's rejection from Eden and lost salvation. The puzzling

⁴⁴ All poems drawn from: Dickinson, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960.

imagery continues in the second stanza where “Paradise” is in the “House” behind a “Hill” – it appears *her* Heaven is inhabited but “interdicted” and hidden away. The third stanza becomes vital – the first word, “Her,” is a personal pronoun with an unclear referent: is the poet referring to Paradise and her personal conception of Heaven? Or is she referring to another person, perhaps inhabiting the hidden house? While one reading doesn’t exclude the other, the final line contains the poem’s second personal pronoun, “us,” which indicates an understanding, if not familiarity, between the poet and “Her” (within the poem), as well as including the reader in the poet’s vision of “Heaven.” The Christian imagery established at the beginning of the poem remains problematic since the dubious homage to someone else’s “Heaven” is now undercut by the poet’s yearning for an “interdicted Land” despite the “decoy” and inadequate “Conjuror.” The poet’s disillusion with the past is woven with erotic longing (“Her teasing Purples” l. 9). Like that of Sappho’s poet, her desire is partially hidden, out of reach, and perhaps more tantalizing because of its elusiveness.

Mary Galvin’s *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers*, establishes Emily Dickinson as a “sexual deviant precursor to the modernists” (7). She opens her book by recalling the traditional myths surrounding Dickinson: her domestic eccentricity (always wearing white and severely limiting her social circle), her apparent “neurotic morbidity” and feminine timidity, and critical speculations about a tragic romance that could lead to such seclusion. The “heterosexist myth” of Dickinson transfers onto readings of her poetry. Given her “lack” of world experience and acute sensitivity, it is unsurprising that readings of her verses were biographically influenced, and written off as “half-finished oddities, or overwritten, emotionally excessive pieces” with scattered syntax, misused

punctuation, and inconsistent meter (Galvin 11). This led to heavy editing of her posthumously published poems by well-intentioned editors, who routinely eliminated her capitalization of objects and “corrected” her punctuation, eliminating dashes and inserting commas and quotation marks. It wasn’t until 1960 that Thomas Johnson’s volume of the complete works of Dickinson presented unedited versions of Dickinson’s verse. For example, the Dickinson poem recently discussed was edited in the 1924 *Complete Poems* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company) as:

Heaven is what I cannot reach!
The apple on the tree,
Provided it do hopeless hang,
That “heaven” is, to me.

The color on the cruising cloud,
The interdicted ground
Behind the hill, the house behind, –
There Paradise is found!

This standardization completely eliminates the double consciousness by introducing a coherency and orthodoxy deliberately challenged in Dickinson’s own version. The suppression of the final verse deletes the eroticism expressed by “Her teasing Purples” (l.9), and eradicates the challenge to Western ideologies (such as organized religion and heteronormativity). Dickinson’s original version suggests that creative and historical traditions valuing female virginity constrict genuine expression by promoting a reductive female identity (a social “chastity belt”). In addition, the 1924 poem loses its “modernism” by accepting the Romantics’ glorification of God in Nature (only “Paradise” remains a proper noun), rather than subverting their nostalgic assumptions of an Edenic past. Ironically, the linear doctrine of structural prosody, which Dickinson manipulates to show how it operates as oppressor through naming/language, are exactly

the standards being re-imposed in this edited version.

As Galvin argues, the label of an “old maid/spinster” applied to Dickinson carries different assumptions about artistic motivation than the marital status of older unmarried male poets (in fact, men’s marital status is rarely considered in critical readings of their work). For example, modernist Marcel Proust’s ill, reclusive state is not generally considered to have limited his genius. If anything, the vision of his multivolume novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (largely written from his sick bed), is held up as proof of his expansive creative and mental prowess. Galvin concludes her chapter on Dickinson with the statement: “[Dickinson’s] disruptive inhabitation of the confines of meter is analogous to her disruptive inhabitation of the confines of heterosexuality. She lurks within the circumference of acceptability, of the recognizable, but with a difference. Some call this sort of existence oddity. I call it queer” (17). Within the context of emerging modernist trends, she also becomes Sapphic: Galvin’s definition of “queer” begins with definitions of sexuality but ultimately understands both the term and Dickinson’s poetry as dissident challenges to the normative discourse and standards of the nineteenth-century.

Mary Lefkowitz’s article “Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho” (1974) opens with a reading of Emily Dickinson’s poem “I had been hungry, all the Years.”⁴⁵ This is a notable choice since Lefkowitz’s essay is part of a book specifically on Sappho (*Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, edited by Ellen Greene). Most importantly, Lefkowitz is the only critic as of yet who has drawn a direct parallel between

⁴⁵ See **Appendix C: Dickinson** for complete reprint of the poem “I had been hungry, all the Years.”

the poetry of Dickinson and Sappho, addressing the lyrical similarities and critical reception of both (with a greater emphasis on the latter comparison). Her essay puts Sappho's Fragment 31 side by side with Dickinson's poem.

In her essay, Lefkowitz, like Winkler, dismisses past interpretations on the centrality of the male figure in Fragment 31 (Φαίνεται μοι) as an object of jealousy, emphasizing that the poet is describing an illusion with the framing verb "to seem" (φαίνομαι) and the noncommittal reference to "whoever" (ὅστις). "The deliberate generality of the poem, the absence of proper names and specific references to time and place, indicate that this poem is meant to bring to mind no particular place or occasion" (Lefkowitz 33). Sappho, like Dickinson, is not relating a particular moment of jealous love or loss of virginity, but lyrically exploring general sentiments of anticipation, desire, regret, and frustration. The illusion of an emotive outpouring is undercut by her refined versification.

Lefkowitz, like Galvin, quite correctly points out the critical bias traditionally surrounding female artists:

Any creative woman is a 'deviant' ... [which] results from being deprived of men – in other words, women artists tend to be (a) old maids or (b) lesbians, either overt female homosexuals or somehow 'masculine.' Because women poets are emotionally disturbed, their poems are psychological outpourings, that is, not intellectual but ingenuous, artless, concerned with their inner emotional lives (26, italics in original).

This observation is reiterated in Gilbert and Gubar's Introduction to *Shakespeare's Sisters* (1979), which points out that the "offense" of a *woman* writer was compounded when that woman wrote poetry. Gilbert and Gubar argue that within the English language tradition, novels, a fairly new genre during the nineteenth century, were a much more acceptable field for female authors (if a woman must occupy her time by writing).

Poetry, on the other hand, was cautiously guarded as a “masculine” art with roots in Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Pope.

Gilbert and Gubar draw on Virginia Woolf’s landmark essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), which uses the example of Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister whose gift for writing leads to a tragic end (and not immortality, like her brother William). At one point, while pondering the work of Jane Austen, Woolf observes that her art, while perfectly suited for Austen’s strengths, may also have been predetermined: Austen’s genius for novel-writing was, during her lifetime, a happy coincidence, since women were discouraged from writing poetry or drama. “[A]ll the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands – another reason, perhaps, why she wrote novels... For it is the poetry that is still denied outlet” (Woolf 77). Gilbert and Gubar propose a variety of reasons for this prejudice, including the almost necessary tendency for poets to become central characters of their own verse – the crucial lyrical “I” – while female novelists can remain comfortably anonymous, along with the forgivable choice to write books in order to earn a living (poetry was rarely a profitable livelihood) (Gilbert xx-xxii). The distinction between the writer being *inside* the text and remaining *outside* of it seems to be a pertinent one. The acceptability of a male poetic voice, the “I” in lyric, does not extend to female writers, who are persuaded to maintain a third person narrative voice in prose rather than inserting themselves authoritatively into the reader’s consciousness. It is with this context in mind that I approach Dickinson’s unique poetry which ultimately challenges the “illegitimate” aspects of being a female poet.

Emily Dickinson's poetry walks a tightrope between lyric poetry and free verse, often frustrating the reader's expectations regarding rhyme and rhythm. Her often-noted use of dashes and capitalized impersonal nouns forces the reader to pause at irregular intervals, creating personified objects and inserting hanging silences into her verse. Her startling, stilted, and yet melodious meter ambushes the reader at certain words, forcing particular images or lines to stand out mid-sentence and at unexpected moments. Terence Diggory's article, "Armored Women, Naked Men: Dickinson, Whitman, and Their Successors" (1979) maintains a fairly Romantic view of Dickinson's poetry, interpreting the images of flora and fauna as sources of inspiration for an emotive poet. He does, however, acknowledge certain Modernist tendencies in her verse, specifically surrounding her precise use of silence: "At least two different motivations for Dickinson's respect for silence are revealed through her poetry. The first is a recognition of the expressive power of silence... Second, silence defends against the destructive power of words in a way that armor cannot..." (140). While Diggory is discussing silence as a motif in Dickinson's poetry, I would expand this observation to include silence as a formal technique, seen in the form of absence and in the form of space (created by the white of the page and intrusive punctuation like dashes). The pauses created within the poems leave the reader breathless, as if forgetting where the verse was taking her or suddenly being taken to another thought or memory. This space of forgetfulness is where Dickinson plays with preconceptions of linearity and resolution, as we will see in the next poem.

The following two poems both demonstrate Dickinson's lyrical dexterity and emphasize her various parallels with Baudelaire. In Maurice Lee's article "Dickinson's

Superb Surprise” (2008), Lee notes that Dickinson’s poetry lacks clear resolutions because “... the proliferation of possible meanings exposes seemingly superior syntheses as mere specters of absolute truth” (55). The debates, even within feminist and queer circles, over the multiple interpretations of Dickinson’s poetry are a symptom of its double consciousness, and its link to both Modernism and Sappho. The first poem reproduced here, “I’m ceded--I’ve stopped being Theirs” (1862, published 1890), has been read as a comment on religion, patriarchal oppression, gender construction, rebirth, and even questions of choice in general. The poem in its entirety is printed here:

1 I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs--
 The name They dropped upon my face
 With water, in the country church
 Is finished using, now,
 5 And They can put it with my Dolls,
 My childhood, and the string of spools,
 I've finished threading--too--

 Baptized, before, without the choice,
 But this time, consciously, of Grace--
 10 Unto supremest name--
 Called to my Full--The Crescent dropped--
 Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
 With one small Diadem.

 My second Rank--too small the first--
 15 Crowned--Crowing--on my Father's breast--
 A half unconscious Queen--
 But this time--Adequate--Erect,
 With Will to choose, or to reject,
 And I choose--just a Crown—

The poem’s slant rhymes form the scheme aabccb in each of the second two stanzas – a couplet followed by an enclosed rhyme. As we will see, in many Dickinson poems the skeletal regularity of her prosody emphasizes the moments of irregularity, calling the reader’s attention to an extra line or, in this example, the rare perfect rhyme.

The first stanza is the exception with seven lines, as opposed to the following sestets. The opening line, the additional line in the first stanza, announces a change in the poet's condition, as if the reader has conversationally entered the poem in *medias res*. The images in the first stanza – dolls, spools (sewing), and baptism (religion's relegation of the female to stereotypes of Eve/Mary) – are all systems of social control specific to women and associated with an unnamed "They." The poet's parallelism within the first stanza of "They" and "my face" (l. 2), "They" and Dolls (l. 5) creates an anthropomorphic doubling for the female speaker, whose doll and face are defined by "Them," emphasizing her previous feelings of objectification. Paralleling the poetic voice in Baudelaire's poem, which shifts tone from amazement and reverence to torn ambivalence ("je te hais autant que je t'aime" l. 16) and finally to madness and violence, Dickinson's speaker shifts from the passive voice ("I'm ceded" l. 1) to active declarations ("I choose" l. 19). The significance of both changes in poetic voice are consistent with Winkler's characterization of a "multiplicity" of voices inherent in the Sapphic double consciousness.

Paula Bennett reads this poem from a homoerotic stance, pointing out the possibility of associating the "small Diadem," "Crescent" and "Crown" with female genitalia. She rejects hetero-feminist readings that identify the central narrative as a struggle with the male tradition: "Her use of female sexual imagery suggests ... not the 'subversion' of an existing male tradition – but rather the assertion of a concept of female sexuality and female textuality that renders male sexuality and the poetic discourse around male sexuality irrelevant" (123). While acknowledging the strong symbolic suggestion of female sexuality in the poem, it is difficult to ignore the highly gendered

vocabulary of *both* male and female social constructions. Symbols of girlhood in the first stanza (spools and dolls) shift to representations of male *and* female adulthood: “Father’s breast” (l. 15), “Erect” (l. 17), and “half unconscious Queen” (l. 16). Notably, in the final stanza, the couplet with “Erect” and “reject” forms the only two perfect rhymes in this poem, demanding that one make an aural and analytical connection between them. The simplistic interpretation (that the poet is “rejecting” the phallic tradition) gives way to a more complex image since the (female) poet describes *herself* as “Erect.” For this reason, Mary Galvin reads this moment in the poem as an appropriation of the Freudian source of male power, but adds that “Dickinson is subverting the distinctions between genders...” (16) rather than simply reversing them, since she also chooses a female Crown, rejecting her “Father’s” coronation (her baptism as a child) and instead crowning herself. She has not rejected the system that baptizes her and names her, but has rather appropriated that system in order to redefine her own identity. The “half unconscious Queen” does not, like Snow White, simply awaken as if from a dream (and Prince Charming is absent). Dickinson’s conjunctive phrase “But this time – Adequate – Erect” (l. 17) shows a new androgynous consciousness that encompasses the gendered institutions from the previous stanzas. Like Baudelaire’s closing word “ma sœur,” the end of the poem blurs gender distinctions and undermines the poet’s initial role-playing as either female or male. This shifting poetic voice ties both poets to the multiple identities present in Sappho’s lyricism, specifically in their ability to “trans-gender” their poetic voice and adopt the language of both masculine norm and feminine Other.

Another poem by Dickinson, “The Daisy follows soft the Sun” (1859, published 1890), helps further deepen our understanding of her poetry and her relevance to Sapphic Modernism, specifically as it negotiates the gender roles of poet and object (Beloved):

1 The Daisy follows soft the Sun --
 And when his golden walk is done --
 Sits shyly at his feet --
 He -- waking -- finds the flower there --
5 Wherefore -- Marauder -- art thou here?
 Because, Sir, love is sweet!

 We are the Flower -- Thou the Sun!
 Forgive us, if as days decline --
 We nearer steal to Thee!

10 Enamored of the parting West --
 The peace -- the flight -- the Amethyst --
 Night's possibility!

Emily Dickinson's ode to Nature wears the cloak of American and English Romantics such as Emerson and Whitman, but her poetry subverts Coleridge and Wordsworth's call for a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” in their *Lyrical Ballads*. Not only are the poem's language and structure carefully crafted despite the *impression* of spontaneous orality (created by dashes, line fragments, and ellipses), Maurice Lee also points out that Dickinson's poetry differs from Whitman's, Poe's, and Coleridge's in its rejection of “promised unions,” harmonious synthesis, and marketable conclusions (55). Dickinson's tenuous dialogue with her Romantic colleagues and predecessors therefore results in a new “double consciousness,” and shifts her lyric more toward the fracturing identities of the forthcoming Modernists than the emotional aestheticism of the early nineteenth century.

This poem is increasingly popular over the last three decades in light of widespread “feminist-heterosexual” readings (feminist criticism which assumes a certain

level of natural binarism of the sexes) which focus on the subversive agenda of the Daisy to “steal” at Night what the Sun will not allow her during the day (power, poetry, autonomy, and love). It is worth noting that Dickinson’s use of gendered pronouns is more significant in English rather than in French, since nouns in French have a predetermined gender. Dickinson’s (presumably) feminine identification with the Daisy creates a gendered dynamic with the male Sun, who is initially unaware of the Daisy’s presence (he “wakes” to find the flower at his feet), and is then threatened by it. Dickinson’s Sun surprisingly calls the flower “Marauder,” which overturns the reader’s initial impressions and allegorical preconceptions of a daisy as shy and delicate. Interestingly, the Sun is not fooled and regards the intrusive flower with suspicion. The dash (l. 7) creates a *caesura* separating “We” (presumably the Daisy, although the plural invites the reader to partake in the Poet’s identity) and “Thou” (the Sun), and, by implication, “feminine” and “masculine.” Dickinson’s speaker assumes multiple voices, splintering her identification with each entity as well as retaining the omniscience of a traditional poetic voice – despite this apparent division between the masculine Sun and the feminine Daisy, the poet enacts both sides of the conversation, thus asking and answering her own questions. By engaging in a kind of lyrical cross-dressing, the poetic speaker undermines the very gender divisions enacted in the poem.

The eroticism in her poetry shows an ambivalence between attraction and disappointment. Like the speaker of Baudelaire’s poem, “À celle qui est trop gaie,” the poet resorts to sneaking toward the coveted object at night (i.e. in the absence of the Sun) “like a coward” (“comme un lâche” l. 28) and a Marauder. The final line extols “Night’s possibility” as a time when the speaker is free to pursue hidden desires and agendas that

the Sun hinders. In both “The Daisy follows soft the Sun” and “À celle qui est trop gaie,” the premise of a love lyric soon gives way to darker impulses, and the sweetness of love does not offer liberation or enlightenment. The Daisy’s submissiveness is subversive and her seduction is tinged with envy and evasion, since she (or “we”) is the active party, slowly encroaching on the Sun: “Forgive us, if as days decline --/We nearer steal to Thee!” (l. 8-9). Like Baudelaire’s stricken poet, Dickinson’s speaker undercuts her own attempts to attract the object of her desire by tainting praise with intimidation, and ultimately extolling the possibilities of the Night, which can only occur in the *absence* of the Sun. The object of the Daisy’s interest is therefore complicated by a simultaneous attraction to two opposing concepts – light and dark. This fractured identity also complicates the gender roles of both the male and female poets as they impersonate, then ultimately rebel against, the lyrical conventions dictating how the poet expresses love and desire.

Vered Shemtov’s interesting article “Metrical Hybridization: Prosodic Ambiguities as a Form of Social Dialogue” (2001), describes the hybrid construction of male and female voices in Dickinson’s poetry that often manifests a “distinct metrical self/other relation” (77). Shemtov argues that the speaker in Dickinson’s verse is often engaged in a “hidden” or choral dialogue rather than a traditional lyric monologue, and that this interplay of multiple voices is *structurally* embedded in the poem.⁴⁶ He explains:

When metrical hybridization occurs, the hidden existence of the second consciousness is felt through prosodic traces, so that although the lyrical poem declares itself a monologue, two or more voices actually join the main speaker to create an audible impression of a dialogue. (78)

⁴⁶ This occupation of multiple lyrical traditions and voices recalls Sappho’s simultaneous exploration of Homeric epic and personal desire in Fragment 16, discussed in Chapter One.

In poems like “To know just how He suffered – would be dear –” Shemtov points out that Dickinson’s choice of “Common” or ballad meter engages an old and established form of English poetry (the four beat line of Old English Poetry seen as inherent to the language itself) (79).⁴⁷ However, Dickinson presents a bastardized or “hybridized” version of this tradition, introducing hymnal meter (like iambic tetrameter) to break up the iambic pentameter (which Shemtov equates with male/Christian authority). For example, in the final stanza of “To know just how He suffered – would be dear –”, Shemtov points out that the two fractured consciousnesses of the poem join simultaneously when the meters do in the final stanza, shown here:

Was He afraid – or tranquil –
Might He know
How Conscious Consciousness – could grow
Till Love that was – and Love too best to be –
Meet – and the Junction be Eternity. (l. 22-26)

The alternating line lengths and occasional caesura break up any strict adherence to a lyric or ballad formula. More importantly, they maintain an opposition of a conventional metrical structure (which Shemtov argues represents the masculine poetic tradition) and the “other” lyrical structure (the alternative meters in various lines throughout the stanzas) represented by simultaneous voices within the poem.

The last line could be read as iambic pentameter, representing the man’s consciousness and voice. But the dashes and the syntax provide a second reading – in which the word “meet” is stressed and the metrical regularity is broken – in which the female consciousness is represented. The reader, who obviously cannot perform the two readings simultaneously, has to pause and apply his or her own interpretation to the line and the poem as a whole. (Shemtov 81)

While Shemtov’s study focuses strictly on the prosody and meter of Dickinson’s poetry, I would add that his reading is supported by Dickinson’s play on words and imagery (as

⁴⁷ For the complete poem, “To know just how He suffered – would be dear –”, see **Appendix C**.

we have seen in previous examples in this chapter). In this stanza, the “Conscious Consciousness” (l. 24) implies a doubly aware speaker, and the parallelism of the repeated words “Love” and “Conscious” creates the aural effect of an echo. Shemtov posits that the irregular length and rhythm of the lines don’t support the possibility of a single echoing voice; rather, the metrical rhythm creates the impression of two poems being recited simultaneously, and that in effect the prosody effectively creates a second, “background” voice in the poem.

Shemtov’s critical reading segues neatly into my final poem by Dickinson entitled, “Me from Myself – to banish” (1862, published 1929), which recalls Sappho’s oft-quoted Fragment 36.⁴⁸ We see here a distinctly Sapphic consciousness in Dickinson characterized by self-fragmentation and a foregrounding of her self-awareness of her identity as poetess. The entire poem is reprinted here:

Me from Myself -- to banish --
Had I Art --
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart --

5 But since Myself -- assault Me --
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
10 How this be
Except by Abdication --
Me -- of Me?

As we have seen in previous Dickinson poems, the quatrains are made up of slant rhymes and perfect rhymes: in this case the quasi-homonyms “Art” and “Heart” (l. 2 and 4) and

⁴⁸ Οὐκ οἶδ' ὅτι θεῶ· δύο μοι τα νοήματα/“I know not what to do; my mind is divided” (H. T. Wharton). This can also be translated as “I know not what to do; I am of two minds.”

the perfect rhymes “be” and “Me” (l. 10 and 12) create linguistic references between the personal/intimate (“Me” and “Heart”) and the creative eternal (“Art” and “be”), pointing out how the poet’s own existence is entangled with her work. However, the capitalization of the word “Art” suggests a conflict between external concepts of “high art” (which she claims not to have), and the actual personal process of writing, which she is demonstrating by creating the poem itself. The poet’s conversation is more of an “auto-dialogue” than inner monologue since the poem becomes a feudal metaphor (“my Fortress” and “mutual Monarch” l. 3 and 9) describing her internal conflict and indecision in two distinct voices. Unlike the poem “To know just how He suffered – would be dear –” the end does not produce closure or a reunification of the voices, but turns the final inquiry outwards to the reader. The battle between her conscious and subconscious, perhaps even between convention and personal experience, is represented by alternating three and seven syllable lines. However, as established earlier, the dashes insert silences that break up the meter uncertainly, almost as if the poet is interrupting herself, and the structure of the verse ultimately leaves the reader with interpretive choices. Dickinson’s poem conveys a symptom of Sapphic consciousness – her experience can only be represented in fragments and answered with questions.

The conclusion of this chapter also serves as an introduction to the following one, since Dickinson and Baudelaire play an important part in a developing Sapphic Modernism.⁴⁹ Their poetry is not limited to any self-contained literary movement, but

⁴⁹ I would like to mention that during the period of my initial interest in and research on this topic (2008), a subject search of keywords “Baudelaire” and “Dickinson” in the MLA database returned zero hits. More recently, the same search only returned one result: a 2008 article in the journal *Poésie* comparing the two poets’ treatment of Death.

exists in dialogue with other Sapphic poets that precede and follow them.

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, a preoccupation with the *biographical* facets of *both* poets still colors readings of their work, predominantly Baudelaire's very public persona as well as his documented personal misogyny, and Dickinson's reclusive existence and refusal to publish her prolific poetry collection during her lifetime. Superficially Dickinson and Baudelaire represent different movements and cultures: American and French, female and male, Transcendentalist, Romantic and Decadent. Their poetry has not yet been examined in parallel, and Dickinson is rarely examined as one of the poets contributing to European Modernism. I therefore pose the question: why are the literary and circumstantial parallels between Baudelaire and Dickinson so neglected by critics and writers alike? Modernist H.D.'s literary lineage is commonly traced to the work of A.G. Swinburne and (when discussing her Sapphic poetry) of Baudelaire, even though she also read and admired Dickinson. However, connections between the two female poets have been only sparingly explored, despite striking stylistic and thematic similarities in their verse.

Reading Dickinson and Baudelaire comparatively resituates them within correspondent literary generations as proto-Modernists and Sapphists. As I have said, Baudelaire's verse is thematically Sapphic, treating Sappho as a character within his work, while Dickinson's poetry is stylistically Sapphic. However, both writers engage in comparable poetic strategies: they occupy, rather than reject, the conventions of Romanticism in order to expose the shortcomings of this movement. Baudelaire's poetry expresses an anxiety about its own misogyny while Dickinson subtly addresses normative discourses only to subvert and reveal their inadequacies. By means of this study, I hope

to prompt fresh readings of the parallels between Baudelaire and Dickinson, and their poetic implications into the twentieth century. By extension, Dickinson enters into dialogue with the European modernist movement from which she has been excluded, and Baudelaire's poetry receives a new dimension in parallel with an American poet. This comparison of their works further illuminates this study's interpretation of Sapphism as well as providing a valuable foundation for following studies of European modernist poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

Sapphic consciousness in Modernist poetry

This chapter shows the development in Modernist poetry of lyrical characteristics/symptoms of Sapphic consciousness that Chapter Two explored in the poetry of Dickinson and Baudelaire. It also illustrates the argument established in Chapter One by engaging in textual readings that support that theoretical framework. The texts explored in this section primarily exhibit the “self-conscious discourse” (DeJean 20) of a poet exploring the gendered roles of speaker/subject and silent lyrical object.

Sapphic Modernism exists within a larger creative movement: Some of the oft-noted characteristics of Modernism are alienation, urbanization, an effort to make sense of a changing world, decentralization of the protagonist in art, metanarrative, and multiple narrative perspectives. Walter Benjamin’s study of Modernism begins chronologically with Baudelaire and concludes with Apollinaire, seeing each as a poet who explored the new breed of modernist hero.⁵⁰ He defines the modernist poet thus: “The poets find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse. This means that a common type is, as it were, superimposed upon their illustrious type” (227). Benjamin’s definition of a new breed of writer ruptures from the Romantics’ conception of the role of the poet in the early nineteenth century, whose heightened sensitivity drew inspiration from Nature. This shifting identity of the poet

⁵⁰ From *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: NLB, 1973. Quoted in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*. Ed. Jon Cook. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

reflects the transitional nature of the Modernist period in general, and poetry (arguably) became the cornerstone of the Modernist movement. Mary Galvin makes a broad claim for the relevance of poetry as a social indicator: “Our poets are our theorists – theorists of language and form... theorists of the interrelationship of language, consciousness, sexuality, and social control, theorists of the deconstruction of categorical thinking, theorists of gender and identity and the unconscious” (3). During Modernism artistic movements expressed both anxiety and new expressive freedom. The poetry at this time is a concentrated linguistic sample of the broadly diverse Modernist experimentation.

Much of the poetry during this period was marked by an attempt to access a mode of expression beyond the limitations of language. Many Modernist poets were searching for a new means of expression that could recover a “prelinguistic site” (in the case of many sapphists, a pre-patriarchal site). This trend began with Symbolism during the second half of the nineteenth century, which represented a break from previous concepts of language and its relation to objects and representation. Stéphane Mallarmé famously quipped in his essay “Crise de vers” (1895): “Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu ; le suggérer, voilà le rêve.”⁵¹ The re-evaluation of language led to a disruption of the poet’s role, which destabilized other binaries such as the division between writer/speaker and his/her inspirational subject. Later, modernist Apollinaire expressed a desire similar to Mallarmé’s for expression beyond the limitations of language: “L'homme est à la recherche d'un nouveau langage auquel la grammaire d'aucune langue n'aura rien à dire”

⁵¹ “To name an object is to suppress three-fourths of the joy of the poem which consists of the happiness of gradual discovery: to suggest it, that is the dream” (translation mine).

(*Calligrammes* 1918).⁵² This search for a new language, read through Judith Butler's queer theory, entails a destabilization of gender and sex as well since concepts of gender depend upon a patriarchal system of expression. "If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that '*sex*' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access" (*Bodies* Butler 5, emphasis mine). The writers treated in this chapter challenge conventional methods of expression, and thus embrace multiple interpretations of gender and display the symptoms of Sapphic lyricism and consciousness.

Entering Modernism: Renée Vivien

As a transition between the *décadence* of Baudelaire and the Modernists discussed in this chapter, I propose a closer look at particular Sapphic elements in the poetry of Renée Vivien (1877-1909) while examining similar techniques and tropes in the poetry of Baudelaire. Renée Vivien's "occupation" of Baudelairean poetics serves as a transition from *décadence* to early Modernism. Taking Vivien's work as seriously as she took it herself (and as she hoped posterity would as well), I propose a "conversational" approach in which their texts are placed in dialogue with each other. Vivien's presence at the cusp of Modernism has lingered like an eternally suspended leap from a figurative Leucadian cliff, her poetry belonging neither to Symbolism nor Modernism, and her identity alien regarding both her sexuality and nationality (an Englishwoman by birth, she wrote poetry in French).

⁵² "Humanity seeks a new language about which grammarians have nothing to say" (translation mine).

Parallels have been noted between the works of Vivien and Baudelaire; critics primarily focus on the influence of Baudelairean French Symbolism and the Decadence on Vivien's poetry. In addition, commentators tend to be dismissive or apologetic when discussing Vivien's work due to a variety of factors, such as Vivien's lesbianism (or gender in general), her short-lived career, and a distracted fascination with her biography, including her pseudo-suicide and her unrealistic desire to create a modern Lesbos with lover Natalie Barney. Traditionally, criticism attaches more value to the biography of a female writer, and depends on the details of her life to "explain" her work (as discussed in Chapter Two). Vivien's lesbianism, status as female expatriate, and macabre death (due to a combination of anorexia, and laudanum and alcohol abuse) remain the focus of full-length books written about her.⁵³

For example, while Karla Jay's book, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988), is inarguably significant as the first complete biographical study of Vivien and Barney, her attempts to address the complexities of the two women and their lives often come across as apologetic, and the result is that she echoes the very sentiments she claims to challenge. For example, her "acknowledgement" that Vivien's French was archaic, passé and/or stylized plays into the evaluations of dismissive critics and reinforces Vivien's status as Other. As a result Jay focuses on *thematic* trends in Vivien's prose and neglects Vivien's skills as a technical poet.

However, essays like "Sonnet féminin" by Engelking celebrate the power of

⁵³ As Engelking's scholarship points out, Vivien reclaims the martyr figure of the Lady of the Lake; Vivien often viewed suicide as a noble alternative to compromise and/or subjection to a patriarchal-dominated existence.

Vivien's poetry, demonstrating that her work is subversive because it enters, occupies, and disrupts Baudelairean spaces – a practice that is in some ways more subversive in French than in English since its tradition admits more *salonnières* but fewer poetesses. Vivien's adherence to nineteenth century poetic forms and rhyming schemes is often dismissed as archaic, especially in the wake of European Modernism's spirit of poetic experimentation (a criticism also leveled at Anna de Noailles, as we will see later in this chapter). However, in adopting these techniques Vivien's work enters into a dialogue with the poetic voices of the past in much the same way Baudelaire's poet converses with the mythic Sappho of "Lesbos." Just as Baudelaire appropriates Sappho's considerable lyric role, Vivien occupies a Baudelairean space with a newly autonomous poetic voice. The poems of both Vivien and Baudelaire frequently explore the situations of exiled women, both poets drawing a shifting line in the sand between Romanticism and Modernism.⁵⁴ Additionally, Vivien, like Baudelaire, maintained traditional poetic meter and rhyme but took inventive lyric positions, presenting but not resolving binaries.

It is worth considering that within poetry, linguistic binaries are highly significant since each word and image is carefully chosen and syntactically placed. The overall impression of the poem is therefore highly dependent upon the interrelation of its linguistic and representational elements. Taking this into consideration, I argue that the breakdown of binaries in general (light/dark, physical/spiritual) can often be read as a gendered activity, since representations of gender depend on polarizing relationships (for

⁵⁴ Much of Vivien's verse attempts to deal with the loaded imagery surrounding female sexuality. Schlossman points out that the feminine, while still marked by centuries of sexual hegemony, evolves under Modernism: "From the Christian perspective on Eve, the snake, and the losing of paradise in chapter three of *Genesis* to the liturgical and popular traces of the Blessed Virgin Mary, eroticism in Western culture is mediated by a discourse of feminine form, Eros enters the scene of modernity. Attentive to the resonances of antiquity, Modernism rearticulates the impact of Eros the bittersweet on the poetics of love" (187).

example, the correspondence of masculine and hard to feminine and soft). French poetry in particular is, due to both language and tradition, highly gendered itself through imagery and metaphors, rhythm and rhyme, and the traditional position of lyric subject – the male poet – and female object of his gaze. For example, French tradition demands the alternation of *rime masculin* and *rime féminin* (words ending with a mute *e*) within stanzas. In addition, since every noun in French is either masculine or feminine, “neutral” or non-gendered language is almost impossible. Elaine Marks notes that the linguistic gendering of the language in Vivien’s poetry extends to larger poetic movements of the French language: “What is important in this scheme is that the male/female difference cannot be separated from the French/foreign binary opposition or from the classical/romantic opposition” (179). The highly gendered nature of the French language is pertinent to Baudelaire and Vivien’s poetry since their poems are created, respectively, within the context of a male poet appropriating (even creating) the lyric voice and status of a Lesbian poetess, and a British expatriate writing within a male French tradition about same-sex (lesbian) erotics.

Two poems that are indicative of the parallels and divergences between the two poets are Vivien’s poem “Les Iles” and Baudelaire’s poem “Lesbos,” discussed in Chapter Two.⁵⁵ Both poems employ traditional rhyming schemes and thematically adopt a Sapphic island setting populated exclusively by females. “Les Iles” is written in traditional triplets in *rime redoublée*. Like Baudelaire’s poem, the stanzas alternate masculine and feminine rhymes, but the poem also breaks the traditional “rules” of poetry by rhyming identical words, a technique that recalls but does not imitate the more “acceptable” practice of repeating entire lines in “Lesbos.” The opening line of Vivien’s

⁵⁵ For Vivien’s poem “Les Iles” see **Appendix D: Vivien**.

poem, “La mer porte le poids voluptueux des Iles...” (“The sea carries the voluptuous weight of the Islands”) recalls the “mère” that opens “Lesbos”: as noted earlier, the French language conveniently plays on the homonyms “mère” (“mother”) and “mer” (“sea”). The abstract concept of maternity is often associated with water imagery as an unpredictable life force, and the two terms can be easily confused when poems are read (or “sung” in Baudelaire) aloud. In fact, the opening line of “Les Iles” evokes an interesting image of the mer (mère) bearing the weight of the islands, paralleling Vivien’s own poetic efforts to “create” under the shadow of Baudelaire’s considerable status.

However, like Baudelaire’s poem, “Les Iles” complicates and undermines these metaphorical possibilities: in the second line of Vivien’s poem, “des ondes infertiles” (“infertile waves”) echo “la sterile volupté” (“sterile voluptuousness”) in stanza four of “Lesbos.” Often read as a commentary on lesbian relationships, I also read these images as challenges to the reductive poetic trope of the reproductive maternal. Vivien’s poem further destabilizes the metaphor in the next stanza, which evokes the “Iles d’hiver,” (“winter Islands”) in stark contrast with Baudelaire’s description of Lesbos as “chauds comme les soleils” (“hot like suns”) in his first stanza. The first two stanzas of “Les Iles” follow here:

La mer porte le poids voluptueux des Iles...
 Le lapis lazuli des ondes infertiles
 Sollicite le frais recueillement des Iles.

Iles d’hiver, ô fleurs de la nacre et du nord !
 Lorsque l’ombre a tressé les roses de la mort,
 Les Iles ont jailli de la nacre et du nord. (l. 1-6)⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “The sea carries the voluptuous weight of the Islands...
 The lapis lazuli of infertile waves
 Seek the fresh contemplation of the Islands.

Winter islands, oh mother-of-pearl and northern flowers!

Vivien's poem overall is less corporal than "Lesbos," focusing more on the haunting quality of the islands themselves and less on the sexuality implicit in Baudelaire's poem. The residents of the islands are like specters or lost souls, not sensual women and illicit lesbians. The reduced physicality is evident in the seventh stanza, which creates an unusually clear metaphor by stating, "Les âmes sans espoir sont pareilles aux Iles" ("The souls without hope are like the Islands") (l. 19). Vivien's ephemeral representation of the island's inhabitants contrasts with stanzas two and four of "Lesbos" which blur the lines between the "terre des nuits chaudes (l. 16) and the women's eroticized bodies. As in Baudelaire's poem, the "heterosexually corrective figure of Phaon" is eliminated, although Vivien maintains the dynamic of the lost Beloved since Sappho's grief here is particularly for the female Atthis (Reynolds 148):

Leucade se souvient, et les fleurs d'oranger
Mêlent leur blanc frisson aux tiédeurs du verger...
Psappha pleurait Atthis sous les fleurs d'oranger... (l. 16-18)⁵⁷

Sappho here does not throw herself from a Leucadian cliff for love of Phaon, but rather endures the memory of female friend and possible lover.⁵⁸

A poetic strategy that is particular to Vivien's poem is the insertion of ellipses in stanzas one, three, and seven, creating grammatical moments of silence between words

When the shadow weaves the roses of death,
The Islands gush from the mother-of-pearl and the north."
(translation mine)

⁵⁷ "Lefkada remembers, and the orange tree blossoms
Mingle their white shiver with the warmth of the orchard...
Sappho wept for Atthis under the orange tree blossoms..."
(translation mine)

⁵⁸ The figure of Phaon as a substitute or "stand-in" for Sappho's true desire, the girl Atthis, is revisited in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Feux*, discussed in the final chapter of this study.

and lines, and introducing a syntactical openness or space that isn't present in Baudelaire. Mary Galvin points out that this was a common practice with female poets such as Mina Loy, H.D., and (as seen in Chapter Two) Emily Dickinson; the technique was formerly seen as technical imperfection rather than poetic strategy, but has since been recognized as a struggle to develop what Cixous termed *l'écriture féminine*, rather than a phallogentric means of expression.⁵⁹

Unlike Virginia Woolf and Colette's call for an androgynous or hermaphroditic mind, Vivien's poetry proposes an idyllic place that marginalizes (or even eliminates) men and prioritizes female creativity. Interestingly, Baudelaire also eliminates a masculine element within his poetry, if only to invite the implied male reader and poet to explore voyeuristically an other-world populated by "tragic" females. Engelking states:

Well before feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous formulated her analysis of western patriarchal thought based on hierarchical binary oppositions, or Monique Wittig described gender as 'the linguistic index of political opposition between the sexes and the domination of women' (64), Vivien imagined her world in terms of a struggle between the masculine and feminine and sought to rearrange the sexual hierarchy in woman's favor. ("Genre" 83)

Vivien's "struggle" between the masculine and feminine defines her place among the Sapphic Modernists in this study – her effort to prioritize the feminine addresses an "Other" dispossessed from society. In much the same way that Winkler describes Sappho's relationship to Homer, Vivien's Sapphic consciousness is a "larger" awareness encompassing that of Baudelaire.

Vivien admired and studied French poets (an almost exclusively male group at that time), but she also sought a female alternative to the Romantic tropes and lyrics,

⁵⁹ As an example of Vivien's efforts to establish a new tradition of feminine writing, she purposely changed the French spelling "Sapho" to "Psappha" in an attempt to be more faithful to the original Greek, which she regarded as a "pre-patriarchal" language (Jay 70).

ballads, and sonnets that prioritize the analytical and erotic male poetic gaze toward a female object. In many ways Vivien's poetic voice maintains the poet-muse dynamic, placing herself as the poetic speaker, but neither Baudelaire nor Vivien occupy or recreate gender roles simplistically. Vivien's obvious "feminization" of Baudelaire's poetics cannot be read exclusively as an usurpation since she often occupies a similar lyrical space and maintains a dialogue with his verse. In many ways she echoes his language of voyeurism of the island's female occupants while simultaneously calling into question his label of the "femmes damnées."

Vivien's use of traditional forms *à la Baudelaire* equals a calculated appropriation of patriarchal language and form. Critically, since her poetry is still predominantly read biographically, she remains in many ways the object of her own work. Engelking's work attempts to re-establish Vivien as a technically proficient poet in her own right by claiming: "...what makes [Vivien's] sonnets stand out is how her level of technical poetic prowess compares to what critics called 'la poésie féminine,' a spontaneous and sensual lyricism practiced by Vivien's contemporaries such as Anna de Noailles, whose poems were believed to be more of a product of 'feminine' instinct than intellect" ("Genre" 80). While I will take issue with Engelking's praise of Vivien at the expense of de Noailles later in this chapter, Engelking's point is otherwise valid: Vivien's marginalization of the masculine presence and influence in her poetry relegated her to the margins of *la belle époque* by critics for decades after her death. Vivien's "softening" of the poet-object power dynamic in comparison to Baudelaire's "Lesbos" is less an authorial capitulation than an increased blurring of poetic identification within the work. Dominique Fisher convincingly argues for a link between the poet and his (or her) poetic object: "The

lesbian's and the poet's mirrors are indeed ironical mirrors or artifacts: they establish multiple rhizomatic networks between femininity and masculinity; subject and object; resemblance and difference; desire and allegory; silence and writing" (51). Popular readings validly note Vivien's overt desire to create a gynocentric utopia and her glorification of female characters tragically martyred by a patriarchal society, as well as Baudelaire's often misogynist objectification of women as sexual deviants. Despite these interpretations, both poets participate in a breakdown of gendered norms on several levels by creating unresolved tension between poetic binaries, and blurring symbolic associations of poetic subject and object.

H.D. and the Sapphic Modernists

H.D., fittingly restored in the past decade or two to canonical status in Modernism, is still usually studied in isolation from the movement in general (excluding her youthful association with Ezra Pound). Major studies such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *H.D., the Career of that Struggle* (1986), Cassandra Laity's *H.D. and the Victorian fin de siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (1996), and Diana Collecott's *H.D. and Sapphic modernism, 1910-1950* (1999) consider her sapphism and /or modernism as independent phenomena, or strive to separate her work and life from the prescriptive shadow of Ezra Pound, stressing the decades of work she produced after Imagism. I agree with other critics that H.D. remains the Sapphic Modernist *par excellence*; however, relegating her to a solitary creative space limits readings of both her work and the poetry of her contemporaries. The Sapphic qualities of her poetry, while often personal and fragmented, are truly "bilingual" (to use one of Winkler's terms) in

their confrontation of the hegemonic norm by the poet's expressions of "queerness." Eileen Gregory's article, "Rose Cut in Rock: Sappho and H.D.'s Sea Garden" (1986), describes H.D.'s Sapphic voice in her poetry as fluid and inclusive: "The voice of [*The Sea Garden*]... is hermaphroditic, collective, and atemporal. The poem is, in a sense, a liminal state without ordinary determinations of gender, person, or tense" (537). H.D.'s "hermaphroditic, collective" style is precisely what makes her pertinent within the larger framework of Modernism. My approach to H.D. is comparative rather than isolationist: the remainder of this chapter will examine the poetics of H.D. in dialogue with the poetry of W.B. Yeats, Anna de Noailles, and Guillaume Apollinaire. These writers are rarely read in parallel, and yet an examination of their shared Sapphic consciousness reveals a collective exploration of poetic expression that pushes the boundaries between masculine and feminine, subject and object, and ancient and modern.

William Butler Yeats may be the most surprising addition to this study. While distinctly modernist, his poetry has hardly been considered "Sapphic" or queer. Helen Vendler's recent book *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (2007) points out: "In the case of Yeats, the historical and personal drama attending the work has outranked in interest, for scholars, the forms in which the work was cast" (4). Her book presents an innovative study of the "sorts of lyrics Yeats wrote, the imaginative impulses that dictated the choice of stanza for his subjects, the poet's development within particular formal genres" (2). Her analysis of Yeats' phonetic, structural, and rhythmic poetic strategies exposes a level of experimentation and innovation (tirelessly revised over multiple drafts) that has hitherto been overlooked. While my readings of Yeats focus

more on his choice of imagery and the orientation of the poetic voice, I believe both studies reveal that “holes” still exist in critical studies of Yeats’ verse.

In addition, Beryl Schlossman points out in her book *Objects of Desire: The Madonnas of Modernism* (1999) that Yeats’ poetry in general is permeated with a Sapphic influence (an aspect glossed over in critical readings of his work yet highly emphasized in discussions of poetry by Vivien and H.D.). She points out that the “bittersweet,” fragmented language and imagery in Yeats can be traced back to Sappho: “The gestures of weeping, descending, and writing accompany the key references to Sappho in Yeats” (209). Her discussion of Yeats’ poems demonstrates the obvious infiltration of Sappho’s erotically charged language as well as Sappho’s role as a poet in her own right. For example, in the poem “From the ‘Antigone’” (1927) Yeats’s opening line echoes Sappho’s catchphrase (γλυκύπικρον “bittersweet”): “Overcome -- O bitter sweetness” (l. 1). Yeats’s phrasing is no coincidence, Schlossman continues, since Sappho is mentioned by name in his poem “The Gift of Harun Al-Rachid” (1923):

And pause at last, I was about to say,
At the great book of Sappho's song; but no,
For should you leave my letter there, a boy's
Love-lorn, indifferent hands might come upon it
And let it fall unnoticed to the floor. (l. 12-16)

The intertextuality of Sappho’s song and Yeats’ poetry implies an unacknowledged bond with the Sapphic in Yeats’ work, a connection which will become more clear when his text is read alongside those of other Sapphic modernists.

Schlossman notes the pertinence of classical myth and Sappho’s particular kind of lyricism during the Modernist period: “The literature of courtly love and the products of Renaissance Neoplatonism preserve Sappho’s bittersweet Eros until the modern period

rediscovers her and begins to unpeel the mummified translated texts and fragments. Sappho's Eros is violent, shaking, and driven..." (200). Although Greek myths in general remained a popular literary theme during the modernist era, there are few critical comparisons of the thematically similar poems "Leda and the Swan" by W.B. Yeats (1928), and "Leda" (1921) by H.D, despite the fact that they were contemporaries during the early twentieth century. However, close readings of both poems reveal an individualized and complex manipulation of the story of Leda's mythical rape by Zeus, which re-orientates the treatment of the female's role and her representation. In light of the revived interest in Sappho's poetry during the modernist era, I have chosen poems treating the Leda myth because this story could (and has) become a lesson in patriarchal power, and yet in the hands of H.D. and Yeats it becomes something more complex. An aspect of the Sapphic in the Leda myth is the bittersweet and unlikely encounter between mortality and immortality/the divine.

While discussing the creative poetics of Leda's myth, I want to draw attention to one of Sappho's own fragments before further comparing Yeats' and H.D.'s Leda poems. The striking aspect of Fragment 56 is its narrative disregard for the common legend of Leda's rape and subsequent birth to twins Helen and Clytemnestra:

Φαίσι δὴ ποτα Λήδαν ὑακινθίνων [ὑπ' ἀνθέων] πεπυκαδμένον εὔρην ὦιον.

- They say that Leda once found an egg of hyacinth colour, covered... (Campbell 1982)
- People do gossip/ And they say about/ Leda, that she/ once found an egg/ hidden under/ wild hyacinths. (Barnard 1958)

The egg implies impregnation by a swan but eliminates the sexual encounter and violence, as if Leda's part in the incident is a casual yet pleasant discovery. In addition, Leda's sighting of the egg gives her complete agency in the birth of her children – they

become a product of choice (since Leda makes the decision to pick up the egg) rather than subjecting her to violence and disempowerment. As we will see, Sappho's fragment closely resembles H.D.'s poem both in imagery and in their revision of Leda's role in her own myth.

Yeats and H.D. are both exceptional in their treatment of the Leda myth: Yeats' poet identifies more closely with the female victim than do poems by his male contemporaries and he acknowledges the broader consequences of the rape. His willingness to occupy this "queer" area of Otherness subverts and rewrites the myth in much the same way Sappho and H.D. challenge a patriarchal narrative.

Yeats' poem relates to his personal preoccupation with cyclical and often paradoxical patterns in history on multiple levels, including the political, the cultural, and the personal. The god-human-beast triumvirate in the poem creates a confusion of identities, none of which is stable or sustainable. Central to this multipart dynamic is the position of the woman's role as a vital instrument for historical and cultural change along with her ironic status as passive recipient of this change. Leda becomes a bastardized figure of the Annunciation, an unwilling participant in the fostering of divinity. The entire poem is provided here:

Leda and the Swan (1928)

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

- 5 How can those terrified vague fingers push
 The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
 And how can body, laid in that white rush,
 But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there

10 The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
 And Agamemnon dead.

 Being so caught up,
 So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
 Did she put on his knowledge with his power
15 Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Vendler notes that Yeats' poem is a "mismatched" sonnet, divided into two stanzas written as Shakespearian quatrains, followed by a Petrarchan sestet, which she posits represent the hybridity of the poem's players (divine-beast Zeus and the half-divine, half-human offspring) (173). The introductory stanza of the poem opens at the moment of the violation, with a direct "blow," with the swan suspended in time by the word "still," contemporizing the moment in the forever present. Although Leda's thighs are "caressed" (suggesting some tenderness however incongruous) we are also confronted with the image of her neck held in "his bill," heightening and complicating a contrast between the questionable willingness of Leda and her violation, as Zeus "holds" her "helpless breast" to his chest.⁶⁰

The next stanza is characterized by rhetorical inquiry rather than fragmented images of the tangled bodies, made up entirely of two questions beginning with "How..?", an interrogative that defies any kind of simplified response (meaning a "yes/no" answer will not suffice). The ambiguity of meaning increases as Yeats pushes

⁶⁰ In lyric verse the swan often represents the poet – in this case the swan is the disguise of a god. Sword describes the swan as a profoundly important symbol during the nineteenth century: "...[I]n the rich imagistic vocabulary of symbolist poetry, the swan represents the poet who, like Baudelaire's albatross, stumbles awkwardly and ridiculously on land but soars gracefully in its own medium; alternately, the swan is poetry itself, as in Mallarmé's sonnet 'Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui,' where 'le cygne'... homonymically suggests 'le signe'..., its frozen captivity in a lake of ice recalling both the fascination with perfection and the danger of sterility implicit in Mallarmé's crystalline aesthetic of 'poésie pur'" (310). Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne" represents a displaced/alienated swan displaying a spiritual deterioration due to its modern urban life/settings. Yeats' appropriation of the Leda myth serves the added purpose of aligning him with past lyric traditions.

more responsibility onto the reader to respond to the problematic discord proposed in the poem. For example, the transition “But” in the fourth line creates an augmented contradiction between Leda’s violent sexual experience and her awareness of who (or what) is violating her.

The third stanza is the most dramatic and disturbing moment in the poem: the stylistic and rhetorical shift in the poem is the line “And Agamemnon dead” (l. 11). Janet Neigh, in her essay “Reading from the Drop: Poetics of Identification and Yeats’s ‘Leda and the Swan’” (2006), reads the tower as a symbolic phallus that is simultaneously dominating and being destroyed by the same action: “...at this point in the poem, the tower is burning down and Yeats makes the out-of-context declaration that the patriarchal king Agamemnon is dead. The rape, rather than consolidating phallogentric power, seems to be undermining it” (151). In other words, only continued violence can result from such a violation, and phallogentric domination inevitably creates its own collapse. The poem also shifts temporal perspective, jumping forward from the rape *in medias res* to the resulting war over Leda’s daughter Helen, invoking images of the burning city of Troy and the entire cursed House of Atreus. The collapse of past, present, and future emphasizes the multiplicity of experiences resulting from this one moment. It is worth noting that this encounter, although impregnating Leda, does not yield a hopeful future: death, not life, is “engendered.” This rape is the moment where History intrudes onto the private sphere with lasting repercussions.⁶¹

⁶¹ “[D.H.] Lawrence was hardly alone among modernist poets, however, in his belief that violence is a necessary precondition for change; Yeats’s fascination with the Leda myth sprang from similar conviction, while T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound proved no less prone to sympathizing, so to speak, with the devil” (Sword 312).

The poem ends with an unanswered question. Yeats asks his reader to what extent Leda “puts on” Zeus’s knowledge – in other words, to what extent is she a cognizant participant in the destiny for which she will be a catalyst? Vendler argues that the merging of the swan and woman could *only* result in shared knowledge:

[W]as it possible, wonders the speaker (who has now entered the poem *in propria persona*, no longer “channeling” Leda’s perceptions but introducing, from his own historical knowledge, the acts and consequences of the Trojan War), for Leda to enter into physical oneness with all three aspects – swan, lover, god – of Zeus and *not* gain some access to his mind? (176)

The final question at the end of Yeats’ poem pointedly assumes that knowledge and power are complexly but not wholly related. This question of shared knowledge and the simultaneous assertion and destruction of phallogentric power creates a thematic instability in the poem itself. Neigh notes that “The merging of gender categories does not create unity. Sexual difference persists, but it can no longer be controlled and binarized by phallogentrism” (150). The gender divide is not the only binary blurred in the poem, however, since the private moment of rape has become public both as a published poem and as a pregnancy, and the religious (i.e. a god in disguise) becomes political (since rape begets the Trojan war).

It can be (and has been) argued that Yeats’ use of the Leda myth should not be construed as a critique of any specific experience – Yeats is not, for example, attempting to make a statement on the morality of rape itself.⁶² While Yeats is not taking a feminist

⁶² Many critics, in an effort to rationalize the graphic depiction of rape without adopting an admonitory narrative tone, have approached this poem as a contemplation of the sublime: like Yeats’ poems “The Second Coming” and “Easter, 1916” (the “terrible beauty”) Terror is the aesthetic equivalent of Beauty. Reddall’s essay claims that this reading disregards the actual power of Yeats’ poem: “...it seems appropriate to pause and reflect about the implications of this position... concerning the ultimately amoral character of reality and its status, at best, as a single vast aesthetic phenomenon that can only be complete and beautiful if it includes sorrow, torment and, for example, the rape of Leda” (6).

stand on the status of rape and his consideration of the aesthetic is definitely predominant, it would be a mistake to try to separate the artistic conception from the political implications: lyric creation is not a purely aesthetic contemplation – poetry, in this case, is outrageously political. Thus for Yeats, history and religion begin with sex, and vice versa: the three institutionalized concepts are all violent at times and inextricably interrelated. The poem thus investigates the practical as well as symbolic consequences of personal desire.⁶³

As Helen Sword points out in the essay “Leda and the Modernists” (1992), Yeats’ poem “has inspired, precisely because of its ambiguities, more diverse and often contradictory explications than perhaps any other short lyric of its era.” In particular, Yeats, perhaps more than his male contemporaries, was “...extremely sensitive to the paradoxes of Leda’s position” (307). As Vendler points out, the first two stanzas of the poem, with their alternating half- and whole-lines, channel *Leda’s* experience and intimate thoughts as they happen in real time. Vendler pays close attention to the possessive pronouns “his” and “her” as expressions of two simultaneous consciousnesses, as if “the speaker is uncertain whether he should ratify the absolute right of Zeus to set destiny going in a new direction or should sympathize with Leda’s initial terror” (174). By the end of the second stanza these two experiences have merged into a shared experience when they feel “the strange heart beating where *it* lies” (l. 8, emphasis mine). For the sake of my study this shared experience represents the Sapphic consciousness in the poem, replacing “his” and “hers” with a third possibility. Yeats’ speaker is led to the swan’s experience only via his intimate association with Leda’s thoughts. Sword’s essay

⁶³ Within the patriarchal Greek system, male sexuality is associated with violence; homosocial eroticism was encouraged, especially between soldiers, with the belief it created fiercer fighters.

states that the interaction of the female human, the divine, and the bestial in Leda's story "...offers a model of poetic creativity that is, particularly for male writers, as problematic as it is compelling" (305). She further points out that one of the complications of engaging with a rape myth, interestingly, is that male poetic identification with the victimized Leda requires a kind of "emotional cross-dressing" that most writers are reluctant to undertake/maintain (306).

However, if male poets maintained a safe distance from the female rape victim, women writers shunned it altogether. H.D., in fact, was one of the few female writers to engage the Leda myth at all, despite (or because of) its popularity among contemporary male writers, as well as its potential for female disempowerment.⁶⁴ H.D.'s early professional domination by male colleagues such as Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, and D.H. Lawrence could not have failed to heighten her awareness of dominant masculinist trends in Modernist discourse. By the time she wrote her 1918 poem "Leda" (published in 1921), she was an established poet and writer as a result of the Imagist movement, and was distancing herself from Pound's authoritarian mentorship in an attempt to attain a more autonomous career. Like Yeats, whose identity as the racial "other" (an Irishman during a particularly violent period of British domination) lent him a sense of marginalization, she accesses a feminine identity of "otherness" in life and in her poetry.

A subtle writer with an exquisite sense of poetic imagery, H.D. evokes an encounter between Leda and the swan that exists in a borderland – an "in-between" space

⁶⁴ Sword's footnote cites Robert Graves and points out that for the Ancient Greeks, swans were associated with Aphrodite and the sacred feminine (their V-shaped flight pattern recalling the female genitalia) (317). Therefore, Zeus's choice of disguise literally feminizes him since he assumes a mask that most closely resembles his prey.

where “the slow river meets the tide,” at dusk (neither day nor night), and among reeds on the water’s edge where it is neither solid land nor open water.⁶⁵ The initial stanza of “Leda” begins with the Sapphic image of a god descending to earth in reddish purple, a color that is repeated throughout the poem along with its complementary colors, gold and yellow. The repetition of color imagery in the poem links the feathery down of the swan (who is predominantly red but “flecked with richer gold” on its breast) to the “dying heat of sun and mist” and the gold day-lily. The purple and gold motifs, rhythmically repeated like a mantra, visually and rhetorically merge the two mythic figures into the surrounding landscape. This use of color recalls Sappho’s Fragment 64 where the descending divinity wears the same colors as in H.D.’s poem, and the purple of royalty is compromised by the taint of red – a color recalling both passion and violence.⁶⁶

Where the slow river
meets the tide,
a red swan lifts red wings
and darker beak,
and underneath the purple down
of his soft breast
uncurls his coral feet. (l. 1-7)

Rather than emphasizing the hybrid bestiality of the swan’s rape of Leda, H.D. erases the human presence in general, and the reader’s sole clue to the Greek myth is the title (“Leda”) and the “kingly kiss” (l. 24). This moment, the “kiss,” serves a similar structural purpose to Yeats’ line 11 “And Agamemnon dead” – it represents a visual and lyrical rupture or disturbance in the poem, and reminds the reader that the hierarchy inherent in the myth remains, even if it is self-destructive (as in Yeats) or marginalized

⁶⁵ For full poems by H.D. see **Appendix E: H.D.**

⁶⁶ “Ἐλθοντ’ ἐξ ὀράνω πορφυρίαν [ἔχοντα] περθέμενον χλάμυν (Coming from heaven wearing a purple mantle – H.T. Wharton, 1895). “πορφυρίαν” is sometimes translated as “wine-colored.”

(as in H.D.). The naming of the “king”/ “Agamemnon” in both poems marks an interaction between the narrative of a hegemonic norm and the poet’s private experience.

The end of the poems reads:

Ah kingly kiss --
no more regret
nor old deep memories
to mar the bliss;
where the low sedge is thick,
the gold day-lily
outspreads and rests
beneath soft fluttering
of red swan wings
and the warm quivering
of the red swan’s breast. (l. 24-34)

Unlike Yeats’ poem, the moment of rape in H.D.’s “Leda” is recast in favor of an oddly erotic moment that is delayed until the end. The formerly aggressive act becomes innocuous and even pleasurable. The final motion where the swan and the “day-lily” finally meet is devoid of violence, and the “soft fluttering” recalls a maternal nesting motion, like a hen laying an egg, rather than sexual conquest. Since there is no penetration, the swan is stripped of phallic dominance, and the sexual act itself is defined by images of opening and embracing: the “warm quivering” breast welcomed by the resting “out-spread” daylily evokes a distinctly *feminine* sexual experience.

Critics note with some bewilderment that H.D.’s poem is devoid of the violence and distress that dominates other modernists’ versions of the myth. Leda’s own representation in the poem as a “gold day-lily” is anomalous and, as Sword points out, “seems wholly lacking in the passion and anguish that characterize so many of H.D.’s other heroines...” (Sword 313) such as Cassandra, Eurydice (discussed next in the chapter), Helen, and Penelope. Interestingly, the poet’s refusal to foreground Leda as a

victim of sexual violence necessarily marginalizes of any possibility of male dominance within the poem. Leda is no longer voyeuristically explored and exploited, and the reader is instead invited to participate in *her* vision. For example, the poet's single moment of hyperbole – a brief emotional outburst – expresses pleasure: “Ah kingly kiss -- /no more regret /nor old deep memories /to mar the bliss” (l. 24-25). H.D.'s poem is not a complete rejection of Leda's myth since the “rape” still occurs and Zeus' presence is evoked by the “kingly kiss.” However, the speaker is rejecting past versions of the story that centralize Leda as a tool for historical change and procreation. As Sword notes, Leda's role as a visionary vessel (so expertly portrayed in Yeats' poem) inextricably ties her to a misogynist historical cycle, and “while visionary insight represents a painful burden, then forgetfulness... becomes a blessing” (315).

H.D.'s soporific borderland exists beyond binaries like masculine/feminine and dominance/submission. In typical Sapphic fashion, the characters in the poems of both Yeats and H.D. are lyrically fragmented during the brief encounter, reduced to various body parts (great wings, thighs, loins, vague fingers, soft/dark breast, coral feet) that defy unity. This magnifies the confusion of gendered experience – just as Yeats' speaker intimately experiences Leda's reaction to her rape, H.D.'s poet encompasses and occupies the pleasure of *both* the swan/Zeus and the day-lily/Leda. Lines 11-15 describe a mutual “caressing” of the lily and the golden swan on the part of the sun, implying a shared experience rather than the domination of one by the other: “the level ray of sun-beam/has caressed/ the lily with dark breast,/and flecked with richer gold /its golden crest.” This leads to a dual occupation of the Self and the Other which is accomplished without the anxiety of “feminization” surrounding the Leda poems by D.H. Lawrence,

Rainer Maria Rilke, and even Yeats. The poems of H.D. and Yeats negotiate the boundaries of their dominant culture *and* the queer or marginalized Other. However, only Yeats' poem captures the subliminal "bittersweet" eroticism originally attributed to Sappho while H.D. gently banishes the "bitter." In addition, H.D. and Yeats become unexpectedly linked in their willingness to partake in this lyrical "cross-dressing," identifying with both Leda and the Swan.

Galvin's *Queer Poetics* devotes a chapter to H.D. where she argues for a re-evaluation of H.D.'s trilogy of novels, *HERmione*, *Asphodel*, and *Paint it Today*, all published posthumously. Galvin points out that these autobiographically based books centralize, rather than marginalize, H.D.'s homoerotic experiences as significant to her formation as a writer. While Galvin is a bit overzealous in her efforts to paint H.D. as a poster child for lesbianism (H.D. was certainly not an activist for a queer movement), she does make insightful contributions to readings of H.D.'s poetic voice. For example, her examination of H.D.'s poem "Hermes of the Ways" (1913) proposes a parallel between the mythical deity at the crossroads and "H.D. as *Imagiste*, Poetess, and queer visionary... looking three ways," which creates a "palimpsestic depiction of Hermes" (115). As we see in H.D.'s other poems, the poem's classical premise is a *point de départ* for more abstract explorations of the boundaries of identity – the sexual ambiguity (Hermes' hermaphroditic associations) of the central character (possibly relating to H.D.'s own bisexuality) is echoed by the historical indeterminacy of the setting. The poem is set in the past and present, on a sea-beaten shore and in an apple orchard, and the

boundaries of these temporal and physical spaces are emphasized:⁶⁷

Dubious,
facing three ways,
welcoming wayfarers,
he whom the sea-orchard
shelters from the west,
from the east
weathers sea-wind;
fronts the great dunes.

Wind rushes over the dunes,
and the coarse, salt-crusted grass
answers.

Heu,
it whips round my ankles! (l. 16-28)

Hermes and H.D. seem to be standing at this crossroads together, looking over the sea and grasses. The first line of the poem uses terminology of water to refer to land: “The hard sand breaks,” and terms like “sea-orchard” (l. 19) merge concepts of earth and water in one seemingly irreconcilable word. The present verb tense, as Galvin notes, situates both poet and poetic object in the same moment. The final lines are the only instance of a past tense, and yet the meeting and mingling of the lyrical elements remains constant:

Hermes, Hermes,
the great sea foamed,
gnashed its teeth about me;
but you have waited,
where the sea-grass tangles with
shore-grass. (l. 48-53)

The final stanza’s use of past tense is more accurately characterized as a kind of continual present, where the mythical world “has waited” for this moment of meeting. The shifting, intertwining blades of grass mingle the disparate elements of land and sea. Galvin reads this poem as a challenge to hegemonic systems: “In her use of binary relations and

⁶⁷ For the complete poem “Hermes of the Ways” see **Appendix E: H.D.**

quaternary directional systems, H.D. belies the stability of those systems...[H.D.] invoke[s], at least fragmentarily, Hermes of the triple pathways, in his aspect as the god of paradox, duplicity, and ambiguity, the god of in-between states” (118). My reading of this poem aligns more closely with definitions of Sapphic consciousness – I see in H.D.’s lyricism a rhetorical reluctance to adopt either entirely conventional *or* queer discourses.

H.D.’s 1916 poem “Eurydice” follows a discursive pattern from personal disempowerment to autonomous survival.⁶⁸ Her challenge to standard gender roles is immediately evident as H.D. gives voice to the mythic Eurydice, Beloved of the musician and lyrical poet Orpheus. This choice is notable not only because Eurydice is usually a silent actor in Orpheus’s tale of artistic anguish and lost love, but also because the gifted Orpheus is the widely claimed patron of lyric poets, inspired by Apollo himself. H.D.’s poem disputes both of these premises, rejecting Orpheus’s legacy in favor of Eurydice’s more complex experience (like Sappho’s “larger consciousness” encircling that of Homer).⁶⁹

The first line establishes the first-person poetic voice directly addressing the second-person “you” (Orpheus), as if the reader has awkwardly stumbled upon a tense lover’s quarrel. The initial stanza is accusatory while still granting Orpheus agency and

⁶⁸ For the full poem “Eurydice” see **Appendix E: H.D.**

⁶⁹ Julie Dekens’s article, “La Réécriture du mythe d’Orphée dans *Le Bestiaire ou cortège d’Orphée* de Guillaume Apollinaire” (*Voix Plurielles* 6:1, May 2009), analyzes Apollinaire’s subversion of the Orpheus myth. Apollinaire (discussed at the end of this chapter) appropriates Orpheus’s roles as a musician/poet and demi-god (son of a Muse), disrupting the frontiers of life and death, classical and modern, pagan and Christian, and creator (subject) and created (object). Dekens concludes that: “Les figures d’Apollinaire et d’Orphée se mêlent étroitement et l’appropriation du mythe est totale, car la figure antique est devenue le double de son avatar moderne, inversant donc le rapport traditionnel... Orphée semble ainsi n’être qu’une vitrine trompeuse du *Bestiaire*” (no pagination).

power over the speaker with the passive construction of the phrase “So you have swept me back” (l. 1). However, the interjection “So” indicates a rising assertiveness, and Eurydice berates Orpheus’s “arrogance” and “ruthlessness” while still playing the role as Beloved whose rescue is dependent on the male lover. The repeated “I who...” emphasizes her uncertain identity, neither living nor dead and linked to her mythic husband, as well as her opposing tendency to question her role as the dead or lost Muse/beloved. Her objections also emphasize the rash *hubris* of Orpheus's quest to rescue her from the Underworld – her trip out of hell is an unnatural voyage backwards, temporally and physically.

In the second section of the poem Eurydice’s voice becomes a clamorous echo of the interrogatives “why” and “what.” However, Orpheus is given neither opportunity nor means to respond to the barrage of questions, and the speaker ventures her own answer, demanding:

what was it that crossed my face
with the light from yours
and your glance?
what was it you saw in my face?
the light of your own face,
the fire of your own presence? (l. 34-39)

Orpheus's fatal glance backward is not the impatience of a heartsick lover, but the impulse of a narcissistic artist, hungry for his own image. While more confrontational than H.D.’s narration of the Leda myth, this poem is similarly challenging masculinist concepts of desire.

Elizabeth Dodd, in her book *The Veiled Mirror and the Woman Poet* (1992), notes that critics regularly neglect one of the more obvious elements of this poem:

Eurydice makes no mention of Orpheus's great gift of song. In H.D.'s revisionist

mythmaking, the plight of the female speaker at the hands of the egocentric male eclipses the traditional emphasis on the power of the poet. Indeed, a more traditional understanding of the myth includes a sense of tragic inevitability; the sensitive poet's song is the product of a love so strong that it empowers his own splendid talent, but it also compels him to look back to his beloved. ... H. D. subverts this interpretation both when Eurydice accuses Orpheus of looking back to see his own reflection and in her omission altogether of poetry's role (53-54).

The following stanzas move from Eurydice's personal experience to an extended metaphor of the feminine's relation to the natural world. H.D. embraces the interwoven images of female and earth, but challenges their significance. The finesse of this prismatic shift (where Orpheus sees his image reflected in her face which in turn reflects the earth) can hardly be overlooked – H.D. subtly realigns the conventional Woman-as-Nature who serves as an inspiration for the Artist in order to attain a liminal state of existence:

what had my face to offer
but reflex of the earth,
hyacinth colour
caught from the raw fissure in the rock
where the light struck,
and the colour of azure crocuses,
and the bright surface of gold crocuses
and of the wind-flower,
swift in its veins as lightning
and as white. (l. 40-49)

H.D.'s appropriation of the flower as poetic symbol is strikingly innovative: the surprising combination “wind-flower” is a re-evaluation of conventional imagery, incorporating the harshest aspects of Nature – rock, wind, and lightning – as inherent elements of Eurydice's face and of the azure and gold crocuses. This lyrical reorientation of the natural world *necessarily* redefines the nature of the feminine as well. The dramatic colors (azure/blue, gold, and later red) emerge and fade throughout the poem like Eurydice's own rise and fall from life to death and back again in a twice-repeated

cycle. The crocuses, symbolizing new life and fresh beginnings, represent her twice-lost life but foreshadow rebirth (l. 65), contrasting with the darkness of the Underworld, the “black upon black/ and worse than black,/ this colourless light” (l. 57-59). The flowers themselves, now linked to her image, are sharp and strong, more powerful than the earth itself – they are “flowers that cut through the earth” (l. 53).

The fourth section is defined by the color blue, the lost sights of the living world, and the conditional “if,” conveying a sense of nostalgia for what she could have experienced on earth *if* Orpheus had succeeded. Section five returns to the sentiments of stanza two, repeating the accusation that her lover's “arrogance” and “ruthlessness” have cost her “the flowers of the earth” (l. 84). Indeed, Eurydice's mourning for a breath of life, lost to her because of Orpheus's failed quest, seems to be the premise of the poem until Section five. However, lines 92-95 mark a dramatic shift in the tone of the poem, a marker not unlike Sappho's “*but I say it is whatever one loves,*” where the poet asserts an opinion that contrasts with the poem's earlier sentiments:

yet for all your arrogance
and your glance,
I tell you this:

such loss is no loss (l. 92-95)

Eurydice subverts her previous lament for a lost life, dismissing the earlier imagery of a living earth and a black hell as *Orpheus'* illusions – poetic tropes that carry no meaning for her (or have been misread within his tradition). The repetition of the possessive “your” emphasizes that these are *his* flowers and light:

hell is no worse than your earth
above the earth,
hell is no worse,
no, nor your flowers

nor your veins of light
nor your presence,
a loss;
my hell is no worse than yours
though you pass among the flowers and speak
with the spirits above the earth. (l. 100-109)

The following section expresses new power as Eurydice asserts her own strength against the circumstances of the mythic tragedy. The stanza echoes the conditional “ifs” of Part Four but with a new meaning – it is no longer a matter of *if* he had succeeded (since her personal agency is now independent from his), but rather *if* she could make him understand (“if I should tell you” l. 117). She is powerful enough to encompass the flowers, the light, and even the dark rocks. The final section emphasizes possessive pronouns again but now the experience and its sensations are *hers* – her spirit and “thoughts.” The dramatic imagery of the final lines echoes the colors black and red from the beginning of the poem as well as the words “loss” and “lost.”

though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass. (l. 129-134)

Not only has Eurydice asserted her own control over her destiny, she has essentially switched roles with Orpheus, asserting her own power to “open hell.” The final flower, a red rose, becomes Eurydice's newly defined poetic experience, one that comprehends and encompasses the consciousness of Orpheus while superimposing her own perceptions.

The process of moving from poetic object to subject, from Orpheus’ version of the myth to Eurydice’s, becomes a symptomatic move through a middle space where the poetic voice exhibits a double consciousness. It is this theoretical approach that clarifies

H.D. as a Sapphic poet along with W.B. Yeats and, as we will see, Anna de Noailles. H.D. is commonly read as a “Sapphic modernist” due to her expressed admiration for Sappho’s poetry, the stylistic influence in her verse, and her sexuality (her lesbian relationship with Bryher). I have demonstrated a specific Sapphic consciousness in her poetry that ties her work into a larger community of Modernism.

Contemporaries H.D. and Anna de Noailles both enjoyed popular recognition and renown as writers during their lifetime, keeping company with literary titans such as Ezra Pound and D.H. Lawrence (H.D.) and Colette and Marcel Proust (de Noailles). However, their success (and occasional dismissal) resulted from their categorization as *women* writers, even more specifically as *female poets*. Despite (or perhaps because of) the growing public presence of women writers and artists during Modernism, the Victorian Poetess in the English tradition lingered, still carrying strong associations of sentimentalism. In French *la poésie féminine* was quickly being catalogued and filed as a charming but marginal sub-genre of the male-dominated field of lyric poetry.⁷⁰ Catherine Perry notes the double standard permeating poetic critical analysis at the turn of the century; she points out that de Noailles insisted on the label “poète” rather than “poetesse,” no doubt because the relational difference is similar to that of *maître*/master versus *maîtresse*/mistress (*Persephone* 110 and “Retour” 1).

While de Noailles and her *amie* Colette enjoyed great popularity and recognition as writers during their lifetime (and provoked their share of scandal), Engelking correctly points out that de Noailles is rarely included in modern curricula while Colette is

⁷⁰ Gretchen Schultz's book, *The Gendered Lyric: Subjectivity and Difference in Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* (1999) outlines the powerfully gendered standards of lyric poetry, particularly within the French tradition.

commonly anthologized. I suggest this difference stems from their *métier*, in particular the uncomfortable position that de Noailles' poetry occupies in relation to both established masculinist lyric tradition *and* feminist movements anxious to distance themselves from conformist “femininity.” Engelking’s article “‘La mise en scène de la femme-écrivain:’ Colette, Anna de Noailles, and Nature” (2004) outlines the shifting historical perceptions of aristocratic de Noailles and *paysanne* Colette, many fostered by Colette herself to distinguish her role as a “fin-de-siècle *femme de lettres*” from de Noailles’ “feminine” writing. And yet de Noailles has been ironically censured for both “feminine sensibilities” *and* usurping the role of the masculine poet, or “poetic ‘cross-dressing’ [which] may have alienated her male critics” (Engelking “La mise en scène” 62). However, as Engelking notes, “Critics were clearly judging Noailles against a standard that she happily ignored ...” (“Anna de Noailles Oui et Non” 103) and reconsideration of her poetry is long overdue in both popular and scholarly communities.

The nineteenth-century Romantic notions of the feminine included the trope of the dead Beloved who acted as a silent muse for the male poet, and the synonymy of the feminine with the natural world through which the implied male poet attained a kind of privileged enlightenment (which in turn allowed him to speak for mankind in general). Despite Modernism's spirit of experimentation and innovation, these particular trends persisted into the twentieth-century. In fact, mid-nineteenth century reactions *against* Romanticism did not liberate the feminine from symbolic associations with Nature, and generally led only to a disapprobation of both. Charles Baudelaire, decadent poet *par excellence* whose poetry is populated by “fallen women,” stated in 1887 that “La femme

est *naturelle*, c'est-à-dire abominable” (“Woman is *natural*, that is to say abominable”).⁷¹

Engelking's article points out that the *nature* of the feminine in art altered very little from Romanticism's idealized Muse to Baudelaire's *femme damnée* since both retained the idea of female as *object*. She says that: “Fin-de-siècle art as well as literature consistently represented woman as bacchant, siren, nymph, more vegetal and bestial than she was human” (99).

In *Objects of Desire* Beryl Schlossman traces the reconsideration of the female muse under Modernism back to Sappho's poetics via Christian worship of the feminine in the form of the Virgin Mary:

In her portrayal of the subjectivity of love, the poet Sappho sets the stage for modernism... In part through Sappho's literary influence, the Madonna figures lead the reader beyond the dichotomies of male and female, of artist and subject, to the resonance of voices in silence. These figures speak from the outside in, or from the inside in... The voice of the Poet is dramatically altered in the framework of modernism, but Eros the bittersweet takes on modern shapes that echo its lyrical origins (201).

In addition, according to Schlossman female sexuality continues to be “sacred and dangerous, fetishized and fatal to men” under Modernism. She points out that female sexuality continued to fascinate writers: “Virginity appeals to the jealous lover, to the courtly lover at a distance, and to the mariolater... For Freud and Lacan, however, love is predicated on the debasement of the object as such. The emphasis on female virginity reinforces debasement, and guarantees that the lover alone possesses his beloved in soul and in body” (33). Definitions of masculine desire therefore depend on the “possession”

⁷¹ From Baudelaire's *Mon coeur mis à nu : journal intime* (1887, no pagination). Catherine Perry elaborates on how Baudelaire transformed concepts of Nature from the Romantics: “[For] Baudelaire, the 'spiritual father' of Decadent and Symbolist writers, ... nature is a threat and an evil to be overcome through the cult of the artificial. ... [W]ith its biblical resonances, the adjective 'abominable' suggests a violent repulsion toward the female body on account of its potential to corrupt physically as well as morally ...” (*Persephone* 112).

and thus debasement of the female love object; even under Modernism, a female poet who threatens this dynamic is a challenge to centuries of prescribed gender roles from troubadours to psychoanalysts. As the next poem demonstrates, Anna de Noailles posed just such a threat by adopting the “masculine” role of a sexually expressive poet.⁷²

De Noailles' poem, “Tu vis, je bois l'azur...” (1913), follows a more traditional rhyming scheme (abab, or *rime croisée*) than H.D.'s verse but with a similarly Sapphic style and exploring a distinct “double consciousness.”⁷³ The complex opposition between “you” (the Beloved here) and “I” (the poet) is comparable to H.D.'s poem “Eurydice.” Most significantly, the initial stanza in de Noailles' poem establishes the *female* speaker-poet as the lover, and the object of her desire, the male, as the muse-Beloved. The lyrical convention of the “dead Beloved” (best exemplified by Dante's adoration of the angelic Beatrice) is extensively subverted in the poetry of both H.D. and de Noailles – in “Eurydice” the dead Beloved is herself given a voice and perspective, whereas in “Tu vis, je bois l'azur...” the gender roles are reversed, and the female Poet soliloquizes about her silent male Beloved's impending and inevitable death. Eurydice's accusation that Orpheus desires his own image rather than *her* is reformulated in stanza seventeen of de Noailles' poem where the Beloved becomes a mirror in which she (the poet) sees her own pain and pleasure:

⁷² For the complete poem by de Noailles see **Appendix F: De Noailles**.

⁷³ Catherine Perry, in her article, “Retour au mythe païen dans l'oeuvre d'Anna de Noailles,” details de Noailles' complex relationship with the classics in an ultimate re-empowerment of her own position as *femme poète*: “Par son [de Noailles'] affranchissement du monde social elle se transforme à son tour en persona mythique, donnant ainsi à la femme poète, de même qu'à ses lectrices, la possibilité d'accéder à un mode d'existence libérateur” (2).

Vous en qui, flot mouvant, j'ai brisé tout ensemble,
 Mes rêves, mes défauts, ma peine et ma gaîté,
 Comme un palais debout qui se défait et tremble
 Au miroir d'un lac agité (l. 49-52)⁷⁴

In fact, the poet refers to her own sight or gaze throughout the poem (in stanzas 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 20) and thus to her role as a visionary. The verb “voir” (“to see”) is conjugated in the past, present, and future tenses as her Beloved and his destiny reveal themselves or are exposed before her eyes. The reader is guided through a myriad of scenes, dependent on the poet's vision of past and future events.

De Noailles' poem is also characterized by repetitive meter and imagery, linking the progression of the poet's contemplation and the orientation of her desire within allegorical spaces and eras:

Solitaire, nomade et toujours étonnée,
 Je n'ai pas d'avenir et je n'ai pas de toit,
 J'ai peur de la maison, de l'heure et de l'année
 Où je devrai souffrir de toi. (l. 5-8)⁷⁵

The repetition of hard consonant sounds followed by a soft vowel across the stanza (“Je n’ai... je n’ai... j’ai... je”) and within individual lines (“*de la maison, de l’heure et de l’année*”) creates a sensual rolling or echoing of the poet’s voice. The pattern of internal parallelism resembles Sappho's “*oi men ippéon stroton oi de pesdón*” (“Some say a host

⁷⁴ “You in whom, floating wave, I broke all together,
 My dreams, my faults, my pain and my joy,
 Like an upright palace which comes undone and trembles
 In the mirror of an agitated lake”
 (translation mine)

⁷⁵ “Solitary, nomadic and always surprised,
 I have no future and I have no shelter,
 I am afraid of the house, of the time and of the year
 When I will have to suffer without you.”
 (translation mine)

of cavalry, others of infantry”)⁷⁶ and H.D.'s haunting, reverberating prosody in “Eurydice”:

Fringe upon fringe
of blue crocuses,
crocuses, walled against blue of themselves,
blue of that upper earth.
blue of the depth upon depth of flowers,
lost; (l. 60-65)

The phonetic repetition in all three poems marks a specific aspect of the poetic consciousness – the rupture of this repetition often indicates a shift in consciousness or poetic voice. The images “fringe,” “blue,” and “crocuses” in H.D.’s text disrupt the previous linear progression of Eurydice’s experience as she relives her narrative through more than one consciousness (her own, that of the collective feminine, and Orpheus’s). The syntactical repetition in de Noailles’ verse structurally reinforces the poet’s access to multiple moments in time; within the stanza quoted above the poetic “I” exists in both the present and future.

Stanza three's final phrase “tu t'en vas” (“you go away”) becomes the initial phrase in the following two stanzas where the poet's breathless anticipation of heartbreak undergoes two interesting transformations, both of which defamiliarize male-female sexual relations. In stanza four the poet's likeness to a “chien farouche” (“wild dog”) chasing down the “shadow of a butterfly” (“l'ombre d'un papillon”) recasts the female poet as the aggressor chasing down the most fragile, ephemeral, and elusive Beloved. In the following stanza the poet's representation of the beloved as a ship (“navire”) that is literally and figuratively engulfed by her “vaste et tranquille port” presents a sexual metaphor where desire is both personal and universal. While the ship’s role as a phallic

⁷⁶ Complete analysis of Sappho’s Fragment 16 in Chapter One and printed in **Appendix A: Sappho**.

metaphor upholds poetic tradition, the power in this instance clearly shifts to the speaker's superior "port" which can hold "la cargaison du monde" ("the weight of the world") (l. 19).

In fact, throughout her poetry de Noailles expresses a sensuality that, while less subtle than that of H.D., is empowering and unapologetic.⁷⁷ Like Sappho's, her eroticism is a source of inspiration untinged by judeo-christian guilt (de Noailles was an atheist) and thus outside the reductive tendencies of the virgin/whore polarities inherent in the Western cult of the Beloved. De Noailles subscribed to an Aphrodite-inspired concept of maternity and eroticism that were not mutually exclusive (traditionally the Christian concept of "Mother," embodied by the *Virgin* Mary, was irreconcilable with female sexuality, personified by figures such as Salome and Eve). In addition, the French language allows a play on the homonyms l'amour ("love") and la mort ("death"), as well as la mer ("sea") and la mère ("mother"). The role of de Noailles' poet is larger than that of a lover – she is love *and* death, mother *and* lover, as implied by line 17, "et la mer qui te berce" ("the sea which cradles you") and stanza 21:

Mon enfant, je me hais, je méprise mon âme,
Ce détestable orgueil qu'ont les filles des rois,
Puisque je ne peux pas être un rempart de flamme
Entre la triste mort et toi! (l. 81-84)⁷⁸

The poet's references to antiquity allegorically situate her and the object of her desire in

⁷⁷ In contrast to Baudelaire (and even Vivien), H.D. withdraws her sexuality from the spying eyes of an orthodox public – however, like de Noailles she writes in code *for* women, not *about* women for the pleasure of men.

⁷⁸ "My child, I hate myself, I scorn my soul,
This detestable pride of the daughters of kings,
Since I cannot be a wall of flame
Between the sad death and you!"
(translation mine)

the roles of past Greek heroes and heroines.

In Stanza 20 the poet states that – despite the fact that she, like all mortals, will eventually join the “haggard ghosts” (“fantômes hagards” l. 78) – she is *more* than women of myth, and with greater knowledge: “Moi qui, *plus qu'*Andromaque et qu'Hélène de Sparte,/Ai vu guerroyer des regards?” (l. 79-80, emphasis mine) (“I who, *more than* Andromeda and than Helen of Sparta, saw gazes wage war”). By contrast, in stanza 12 the male Beloved is doomed to die like the classical men to whom he is compared:

Tu seras mort, ainsi que David, qu'Alexandre,
Mort comme le Thébain lançant ses javelots,
Comme ce danseur grec dont j'ai pesé la cendre
Dans un musée, au bord des flots. (l. 45-48)⁷⁹

In this verse, her beloved is like the greatest figures of antiquity – David, Alexander, a Theban athlete – but is mortal and will cease to exist as they did. The following line shifts to the past tense as the poet remembers holding the ashes of these dead figures in a museum, categorized and placed on display. In the next stanza she reiterates her *own* role as a visionary who, unlike the man (doomed to a death she has already witnessed), transcends a specific epoch. She can see both past (“*J'ai vu* sous le soleil d'un antique rivage/Qui subit la chaleur comme un céleste affront” l. 49-50) and future (“Tu *seras* mort”/ “You *will be* dead”).

In a final tribute to the traditional lyric formula, the poet's desire and grief are contingent upon her lover's silence and immobility; in stanza six her description of her

⁷⁹ “You will die, along with David, with Alexander,
Dead like the Theban throwing his javelins,
Like the Greek dancer whose ashes I weighed
In a museum, beside the waves.”
(translation mine)

lover's dying breath also reads like a command: “ne bouge plus” (“move no longer”), and in stanza nine she includes the object of her desire in the “grand peuple d'esclaves /Qui gît, muet et tolérant” (“great slave people, who lie, mute and tolerant”). Her power over him, it would seem, is complete.

However, like the poems of Sappho and H.D., this poem does *not* simply reverse the gender roles of poet and object. Stanza seven presents a hermaphroditic image of sexual pleasure (“Quand mes regards joyeux font jaillir dans les tiens” l. 26) attributed simultaneously to the poet and beloved whose gazes “burst” into each other. Perry associates the merging or confusion of gender in de Noailles’ poetry with the Nietzschean Dionysus:

Par sa vision d'une nature puissante dont les caractéristiques à la fois féminines et masculines l'apparentent à l'identité sexuelle ambiguë de Dionysos ..., Noailles dépasse donc un romantisme de type bucolique. ... L'érotisme dans la poésie d'Anna de Noailles se manifeste à la fois ouvertement et sous des déguisements, eux aussi tirés d'un fonds mythique (“Retour” 4-5).⁸⁰

In fact, rather than reaffirming the roles of Poet as subject and Beloved as object, de Noailles re-inhabits these roles in a way that creates a shell of the cult of the Beloved. While still retaining the privilege of *la parole*/speech, she relinquishes the role of inspired omniscience as a gesture of *choice*, in favor of a richer and more complicated poetic role. Her poetry embraces a hermaphroditic identity, allowing the poetics of gender to interact with and confront each other.

As in H.D.'s “Eurydice,” the poetic voice shifts address midway through – in stanza 15 the poet begins addressing “vous” rather than “tu,” obfuscating the poet's

⁸⁰ “By her vision of a powerful nature whose characteristics are feminine and masculine at the same time, resembling the sexually ambiguous identity of Dionysus..., Noailles thus surpasses the bucolic romantic type. ... The eroticism in Anna de Noailles’ poetry manifests itself both openly and from behind masks, which are also drawn from a mythic origin” (translation mine).

addressee – has she “formalized” her lover to an emotional distance? And yet she returns to the pronoun “tu” in stanza 22 in a reaffirmation of their intimacy. The “vous” equally implies, of course, a more general audience than the poet's lover, now including us as readers in the poet's experience (recalling Sappho's Fragment 16, which includes the reader in the poet's own impressions by the second half of the poem).

In addition, de Noailles' poet confronts her own mortality in contemplating her lover's finite lifespan, leading to a consideration of the cyclical nature of human existence, which diminishes poetic claims to immortality or unnatural greatness (similarly, of course, to Eurydice's contemplation of her own mortality and her denunciation of Orpheus's hyperbolic abilities). De Noailles' poet demonstrates just the “double consciousness” attributed to Sappho by Winkler – the voices within her poem embrace normalized tropes of lyrical desire and human mortality while also challenging assumptions of the poetic tradition, reorienting concepts of gender and authority in the process.

Female Modernists evoke a Sapphic lyrical style as they re-imagine themselves in the poetics of the past, resulting in both fragmentation and reconciliation. Sappho's “double consciousness,” her voice (like those of H.D. and Anna de Noailles) exists both *within* and *without*. Perry notes that de Noailles manipulates the gendered roles of the poet: “Working from within the patriarchal tradition, [de Noailles] did not hesitate to recover for the purposes of her artistic creation images traditionally applied to women, but in so doing she often transformed their significance” (*Persephone* 26). For these women, adopting a Sapphic style was a gesture of subversion, to be sure, but also an

awareness of the contradictions which make desire so elusive and powerful – to quote Sappho, so “bittersweet.”

Guillaume Apollinaire’s Sapphism

The poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire concludes this chapter not as a historical bookend, but as another final piece that fits into the argument for a new Sapphic consciousness during Modernism which includes male poets among H.D. and her “queer” contemporaries. Theo Hermans’ chapter on Apollinaire in his book, *The Structure of Modernist Poetry* (1982), points out that Apollinaire’s œuvre demonstrates a reorientation away from Symbolism and embraces the fractured representations of Cubism (influenced by his often-noted friendship with Picasso). Apollinaire’s experimentation with representations of the poetic self, Hermans observes, occurs early and regularly throughout his poetry: “The notion of a dual self occurs frequently in the poems of *Alcools*. As early as 1902-3, in the ‘Chanson du mal-aimé,’ a duality consisting of ‘moi’ and ‘mon ombre’ is established...” (57). The most celebrated example of the fractured “je” is Apollinaire’s poem “Zone” (1912), which becomes a tool for inclusiveness since the poet occupies multiple roles (within and outside of the poem), such as reader, writer, passerby, and narrator. “In ‘Zone’... the view of the dual/multiple self is developed in two ways, first in the interchangeability of the pronouns ‘je’ and ‘tu’, and secondly in the application of the (Cubist) multiple point of view” (Hermans 58). While Apollinaire’s fractured lyric identities draw critical attention as symptoms of modernism, the implications of their gender-bending tendencies are rarely considered; thus their relevance to this study’s definition of Sapphic consciousness.

My analysis of Apollinaire's poetics will focus on one of his lesser-studied poems, "Salomé," published in *Alcools* (1913). One of the few articles dedicated to this poem, "Apollinaire, Salomé and the Dance of Death" by Willard Bohn (2003), explores the textual inspirations for the poem's setting, including children's rhymes and the medieval French court. Bohn reads this poem as specifically set during the Summer Solstice (Midsummer Night known in French as *la nuit de la Saint-Jean*), a time of madness and play. The poem, he notes, focuses on "the aftermath of Salome's actions rather than on the actions themselves," which have driven her insane (493). Bohn points out that Salome was a popular figure with Decadents, Symbolists, and Modernists; however, Apollinaire's treatment of this *femme fatale*, in contrast with other poets', creates a sympathetic personage whose "psychological distress is intimate and unforgettable" (493). Bohn's detailed narration of the poem's events and context is compelling, but his article misses the principle lyrical strategy that contributes to Salome's humanity – Apollinaire's poet speaks *for* and *with* her in the first person singular "je." Bohn briefly acknowledges Salome's shared consciousness with the poet and her observers within the poem, but stops short of analyzing their implications: "Salome serves as an unconscious mirror, reflecting the actions of those around her. We never view the other characters directly" (494). At this point Bohn moves on to discuss the grief on Herodias' face at her daughter's madness (rather than triumph at John the Baptist's demise), without considering the poetic voice itself.

The poem "Salomé" structurally and aurally replicates Salome's increasingly whirling dance that in turn reflects her own fractured consciousness. Written initially in alexandrines in *rime croisée* (abab), the final stanzas tighten into decasyllables (stanza

four), ending in *rime embrassée* (abba) followed by three half-lines. The first two stanzas of the poem are reproduced here:

- Pour que sourie encore une fois Jean-Baptiste
Sire je danserais mieux que les séraphins
Ma mère dites-moi pourquoi vous êtes triste
En robe de comtesse à côté du Dauphin
- 5 Mon cœur battait battait très fort à sa parole
 Quand je dansais dans le fenouil en écoutant
 Et je brodais des lys sur une banderole
 Destinée à flotter au bout de son bâton (l. 1-8)⁸¹

The second line establishes the shared identity between the poet and Salome: “Sire *je* danserais mieux que les séraphins” (emphasis mine). Apollinaire ruptures with tradition by sharing both identity and consciousness with the conventional female poetic object. In addition, the fact that she *could* dance better than an angel if she wasn’t tormented by guilt and grief, challenges the traditional interpretation of Salome as cruel, overly sexualized, and self-serving – a seductress responsible for the death of John the Baptist. Apollinaire’s Salome is a twentieth-century Ophelia, a sensitive soul torn apart by divided loyalties and love to the point of madness. In addition, the verses are notably lacking punctuation of any kind, refusing to give the reader a breath in the giddy movement through the poem as well as inviting confusion between pronoun and subject. For example, in line five Salome confesses “Mon cœur battait battait très fort à sa parole”

⁸¹ I would dance Sire better than seraphim
 Once more to see the Baptist smile
 Mother why are you moping
 Like a countess on a prince’s arm

 My heart beat wildly when he spoke
 When I danced I was listening
 Embroidering lilies on a pennant
 To wave at the end of his stick
 (trans. Donald Revell, 1995)

without grammatically anchoring “*sa parole*” to a specified person – it could be logically argued that the possessive pronoun refers back to the Dauphin of the previous line but within the context of Salome’s story this makes little sense. Bohn argues convincingly that she is talking about John the Baptist himself, whom she loved and betrayed at the urging of her mother (hence her descent into grief and madness). In any case the overall effect is a fluidity between Salome’s impressions of those surrounding her and the poet’s voice, giving the effect of a spinning dancer as well as implicating all who watch as players in John the Baptist’s death.

While the first three stanzas are marked by a contrast between “*je*” (“I”) and “*vous*” (“you”), the verses emphasize the constant parallels between the characters. For example, the internal rhyme in the line “Prends cette *tête* au lieu de ta *marotte* et danse” (l. 15, emphasis mine) creates a synonymous relationship between the head of John the Baptist and the puppet/bauble (“*marotte*”) of the court jester (“*fou du roi*”). Whether the gallows humor of the suggestion augments Salome’s own awareness of her tragic act or emphasizes her descent into madness, it also accuses those around her as co-conspirators in the tragedy. Her invitation in the third stanza, “Venez tous avec moi” (l. 13) becomes a challenge both within the poem (Salome to her viewers) and without (Apollinaire to his reader), representing a dual consciousness of the poet and his object (the character of Salome) that will merge by the end of the poem. Stanzas three and four are reprinted here:

10 Et pour qui voulez-vous qu'à présent je la brode
 Son bâton refleurit sur les bords du Jourdain
 Et tous les lys quand vos soldats ô roi Hérode
 L'emmenèrent se sont flétris dans mon jardin

Venez tous avec moi là-bas sous les quinconces

Ne pleure pas ô joli fou du roi
15 Prends cette tête au lieu de ta marotte et danse
N'y touchez pas son front ma mère est déjà froid (l. 9-16)⁸²

The final stanza demonstrates both a schematic shift and a change in the poet's address – Salome dictates that she and the entire court will dig a grave, plant flowers, and dance in circles around it. Her dance, initiated in the first stanza, has now become a communal activity: the distinction between *her* movements (“je dansais” and “je brodais” in stanza two) and those of the people around her (“ô roi Hérode” l. 11 and “Ma mère dites-moi pourquoi vous êtes triste/... à côté du Dauphin” l. 3-4) dissolves into a collective activity and, for the poet and Salome, shared guilt in the murder of John the Baptist. The repetition of “nous” (the first time the first person plural pronoun “we” is used in the poem) consolidates the experience for all previously named characters (as well as the poet and reader): “*Nous* creuserons un trou et l'y enterrerons / *Nous* planterons des fleurs et danserons en rond” (l. 18-19, emphasis mine). Here is the final stanza:

Sire marchez devant trabans marchez derrière
Nous creuserons un trou et l'y enterrerons
Nous planterons des fleurs et danserons en rond
Jusqu'à l'heure où j'aurai perdu ma jarretière
Le roi sa tabatière
L'infante son rosaire
Le curé son bréviaire (l. 17-23)⁸³

⁸² The stick is a flower alone at Jordan
To whom shall I give my needlework now
All the lilies Herod in my garden
Withered when you seized him

Come with me everyone under the quincunx
Weep no more my pretty court-jester
Here is his head your new cap-and-bells
Mother stand clear the brow is cold
⁸³ Herod leads the procession and spearmen follow
We scoop out a hole and bury it there
We plant new flowers and dance in a circle
A ring until I have no garters

The final four lines describe lost objects that are linked to the identity of each persona – beginning with Salome (traditionally a *femme fatale*), the king, the priest, and the child, who all lose the items that anchor them in stereotype. Salome states that they *will have* lost these things (“l’heure où j’aurai perdu...” l. 20), fixing her statement in the future perfect: the verb tenses oscillate between past, present, and future now intertwine in an action (a loss) that is both predicted and already passed.

Apollinaire’s assumption of both the experience and the perception of Salome’s story recalls Baudelaire’s lyrical cross-dressing in the poem “Lesbos” where he adopts Sappho’s position as poet/prophet, as well as Yeats’ tenuous empathy with Leda during her rape. However, unlike Baudelaire, Apollinaire does not *replace* his (female) poetic object, but rather adopts her perspective in a unique re-orientation of the *femme fatale* myth; the cross-gender identification is more comfortably achieved in “Salomé” than in the verses of the other male poets of this study.

As a conclusion to this chapter I return to Vered Shemtov’s article “Metrical Hybridization: Prosodic Ambiguities as a Form of Social Dialogue,” discussed briefly in Chapter Two, which makes a rare connection between the poetry of Apollinaire and that of Emily Dickinson. For the purposes of this study, Shemtov’s article is exceptional because he establishes his theory using comparative examples of poetry by Dickinson and Apollinaire, the only critical work to date (to my knowledge) that makes a stylistic connection between these two artists. Shemtov modifies/builds on Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of double-voiced discourse to demonstrate his own concept of “metrical

The king no snuffbox
The princess no prayer-beads
The priest no prayers

hybridization.” In Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel” (1981) he defines double-voiced discourse:

What we call hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems (qtd. in Shemtov 69).

While Shemtov agrees with Bakhtin’s definition of voice and *heteroglossia* in general, he takes exception to the claim that the unifying rhythm inherent in poetry destroys the possibility of a “double voice” – in other words, that two voices can coexist in prose but not in poetry. Shemtov discusses Apollinaire’s poem “Automne” to demonstrate how prosody can voice two “social languages,” that of the speaker/poet (a position of privilege and tradition) and that of the peasant, whose voices become chorally enmeshed.⁸⁴

Shemtov acknowledges that hybridization is more difficult in poetry than in prose, and interestingly notes that the quality is not common during Modernism despite his choice of examples: “Even in modern and postmodern poetry of the ‘Pound tradition,’ the encyclopedia of genres and dialects often collapses into a presentation of *heteroglossia* within one voice” (73). In the context of Shemtov’s article, this kind of *heteroglossia* is a voice expressing multiple viewpoints but does not become “double-voiced.” The poets whose works attain this quality, such as Dickinson and Apollinaire among other poets in my study, are therefore unique, and manifest symptoms of Sapphic double consciousness.

Renée Vivien’s poetry occupies Baudelairean lyricism in much the same way that Sappho’s voice exists in dialogue with Homer’s in Fragment 16. Her desire for a feminine creative space is evident in her occupation and revision of the masculine French

⁸⁴ “Automne” printed in full in **Appendix G: Apollinaire**.

lyrical tradition. H.D., the Sapphic Modernist *par excellence*, is contextualized with contemporaries W.B. Yeats, Anna de Noailles, and Guillaume Apollinaire; each poet engages in a “double discourse” about the function of the gendered roles in poetry. All four writers reorient concepts of the “Sapphic” by displaying Winkler’s definition of creative “bilingualism,” an ability to analytically express the public ethics of a hegemonic norm *and* the private reality of a queer “other.” For example, H.D.’s poems occupy the pleasures of both genders, while Yeats’ poetic identification with the victimization of Leda creates a unique “cross-dressing” that links him with Sapphic lyricism. Anna de Noailles challenges Modernist depictions of female sexuality by adopting the “masculine” role of a sexually expressive poet, providing a hermaphroditic image of pleasure that breaks down traditional gendered binaries. A reading of Apollinaire’s poem reveals a tendency towards Sapphic double consciousness through the interchangeability of pronouns, which critics do not usually consider for their gendered implications. The readings in this chapter illustrate poets who use a “self-conscious discourse” that manipulates gendered roles and the power dynamic between poetic subject and object. This destabilization of gender concepts presents a challenge to conventional methods of poetic expression. Sapphic consciousness “queers” poetic traditions in a way that is related, but not identical, to either Modernism or lesbianism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sapphic Poetic Prose and Hybridization of Genres

This final chapter will broaden concepts of Sapphic Modernism in the poetic prose of Colette, Djuna Barnes, and Marguerite Yourcenar. This chapter serves both as a conclusion to my study and as an exploration of the broader theoretical potential of “Sapphic consciousness,” particularly when applied to prose within the larger framework of Modernism and the twentieth-century. In particular, I propose a reading of the experimental prose of Colette’s *Le Pur et L’impur* (1932) and Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1937) as texts exhibiting both poetic tendencies and an identifiable “double consciousness.” I examine this comparative relationship apart from the authors’ confessed influences and instead with an eye for structure and narrative voice. Both books dwell in a third or “middle” realm, which effectively defuses the gendered polarities of subject and object, therefore becoming relevant to discussions of Sapphic consciousness. I will conclude with Marguerite Yourcenar’s book of poetic prose *Feux*, focusing on the chapter “Sappho ou le suicide,” which reunites both the narrative and the stylistic examples of Sapphic consciousness studied in these chapters.

Within the selected Modernist texts of this study, the Other becomes a central subject and the margins of society are thus inverted to become representative of all of society. As in previous chapters, the theory of Judith Butler serves as a framework to

support my readings of the Modernists by emphasizing the artificiality (or “performativity”) of subject/object and queer/norm dualisms. The following quote by Butler aptly applies to Colette’s *Le Pur et L’impur* and Barnes’ *Nightwood*: “The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (*Bodies* Butler 3). This is the premise of both books, which are approached from the point of view of the “abject” non-subject; Butler’s theory of unstable and discontinuous gender constructions is narratively played out in Colette and Barnes’ fictions. It is the constant negotiation between binaries that establishes a unique Sapphic consciousness in both texts, representing (rather than rejecting) society in general as “Other.”

It is worth devoting several pages to comparing and contrasting the books’ narrative structures before examining each text individually. The chapters of each book are independently dedicated to creating a portrait of a specific person/character but nonetheless result in a multidimensional experience for the reader at the end, which no individual chapter does on its own. This “quilted” prosody recalls the narrative strophes of the longer poems we have studied by Baudelaire and de Noailles, each of which weaves portraiture into its stanzas in order to demonstrate a larger thematic progression.

In addition, the setting in both texts by Colette and Barnes is labyrinthine at times, and revolves around comparable times (at night) and places (urban areas with occasional trips to countryside). The nighttime in both Colette and Barnes becomes a time of

security and/or confession in both novels, where characters (and the narrator) can freely express themselves. The dusk and dawn are moments of reckoning – a transition time when characters withdraw, or travel, or when chapters end.

For example, in the *Nightwood* chapter “Watchman, What of the Night,” when a heartbroken Nora Flood comes to see Matthew O’Connor after losing Robin, she asks him to tell her about the night. He responds: “Well, I, Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O’Connor, will tell you how *the day and the night are related by their division*. The very constitution of twilight is a fabulous reconstruction of fear, fear bottom-out and wrong side up. Every day is thought upon and calculated, but the night is not premeditated” (Barnes 102, emphasis mine). As Joseph Boone notes in *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (1998), the daytime is a conscious *construction*, which parallels the premise of queer theory that gender (and binaries in general) are performative. The boundaries between day and night are *naturally* fluid (there’s no “light switch” instantly moving from one to the other), metaphorically contrasting with (and ultimately calling into question) the artificial divisions defining masculine/feminine and gay/straight. Barnes’ nighttime setting thus challenges the essentialism inherent in hegemony. O’Connor’s emphasis here is specifically on the *twilight* – the moment where day *becomes* night and the space between the binaries.

Later on in the same chapter Nora recalls that Robin’s nighttime wanderings usually brought her back home in some form, to which O’Connor exclaims, “Dawn, of course, dawn! That’s when she came back frightened. At that hour the citizen of the night balances on a thread that is running thin” (173-4). The text’s “citizens of the night” are in fact characterized by that moment before daylight, and Barnes’ characters exist in

shadow but not in darkness. The *faux* Baron Felix Volkbein, in his effort to “be properly garbed” for a patchwork identity and social position, uneasily straddles the light and dark; “wishing to be correct at any moment, he was tailored in part for the evening and in part for the day” (12). Felix himself, born of a Gentile and a Jew, resists categorizations of class, ethnicity, and nationality. He is drawn to the “pageantry of the circus and the theatre” because they are places without permanence, constantly traveling, and in this setting “he had neither to be capable nor alien” (15). In the way that Yeats’ poetic expression is affected by his identity as an Irishman, Felix’s privileged masculine status is compromised by uncertain or alien nationality.

As we will see during this chapter, the moments in these two novels that take place out of the city, such as the Ladies of Llangollen’s elopement to their utopian homestead in *Le Pur et l’impur* and Robin’s reappearance in upstate New York at the end of *Nightwood*, represent anomalous visions of gender expression and definition since the majority of the texts are set in a turmoil of cities and circuses. However, in keeping with the space defined by Sapphic consciousness, Colette never relinquishes her ability and right to express normative views as she navigates the underworld of Parisian artists, writers, and outmoded aristocracy, even if the resulting dynamic maintains an uneasy dialogue between convention and deviance. Julia Kristeva’s chapter “Hommes et femmes, purs et impurs” in *Le génie féminin: Colette* (2006) argues for a hermaphroditism that is grounded in, but not dependent on, traditional “saphism.”

Quel être au monde pourrait reconnaître et accepter sans crainte cet ‘hermaphrodisme mental’ si puissamment revendiqué par Colette? ... Très subtilement, [elle] trace une ligne de démarcation souvent incertaine entre, d’une part, sa bisexualité, qu’elle croit commune à toutes les femmes, et, d’autre part, le libertinage saphique, qui possède lui-même plusieurs versions (351).⁸⁵

⁸⁵ “What being in the world could recognize and accept without fear that ‘mental

Kristeva's analysis is grounded in a wide study of Colette's work, but specifically draws on the writer-narrator of *Le Pur et l'impur*, who successfully negotiates among the queer and normative "types" who enter and exit her text.

Boone points out in his chapter on Barnes' *Nightwood* that her text consistently resists categories of "High Modernism," including surrealist experimentation and antihumanist/individualist narratives, as well as claims to being a lesbian novel. "In light of this [text's] resistance to categorization, I suggest that the term *queer* in its current usage comes closer to providing an appropriate theoretical medium for making sense of the realm of polymorphous desire that circulates among *Nightwood*'s wandering community of outsiders, outcasts, and orphans" (234). The city dwelling provides a setting that can accommodate all the tortured identities in each book, where "queer" and "alien" become the norm because the "norm" doesn't exist.

The representation of these characters and their setting is dependent on the narrative voice. There is a notable difference between the narrators *chez* Colette and Barnes: Colette writes in the first person as if recounting an autobiographical experience; Barnes removes herself from the story and relays the actions of her characters in the third-person. However, both authors inherently explore aspects of metafiction: they self-consciously call attention to themselves as *narrators*, who, to one extent or another, invent or subjectively portray their characters/protagonists, insisting on the subjectivity of consciousness, *including* that of the narrator/author.

hermaphroditism' so powerfully embraced by Colette? ... Very subtly Colette traces an often vague line of demarcation between, on one hand, her bisexuality, which she believes common to all women, and, on the other, Sapphic libertinage, which itself has several versions" (261). All translations drawn from: Kristeva, Julia. *Colette*. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. Columbia University Press: New York, 2004.

For example, Barnes toys with the role of the storyteller/speaker while maintaining a third-person narrative voice. The principle storyline – Robin’s relationship with Nora and eventual affair with Jenny – is retold three times during the novel, each time with startlingly different perspectives and illustrative *pathos*. The chapters “Nightwatch” (Nora), “The Squatter” (Jenny), and “Watchman, What of the Night” (Matthew) fumble with the events of Robin’s relationships and betrayals without reconciling the differing accounts of events. The characters’ speculative efforts to tell their story create a metanarrative awareness of the author’s own presence as storyteller, and thus of her subjectivity.

In comparison, as several critics point out, in *Le Pur et L’impur* the chapter on the Ladies of Llangollen is the only one where Colette removes herself from the setting, conveying their story via her reading of a journal kept by one of the lovers instead of basing it on personal encounters and interviews. Initially, she claims to be a simple vessel, relaying the words of another writer: “Je copie ces mots, cent fois tombés de la plume de lady Eleanor Butler...” (106, emphasis mine).⁸⁶ However, later in the same chapter she confesses to her role as a subjective narrator: “Je traduis ça et là, j’intervertis et ne m’en excuse point. Le conte fantastique se soucie bien des équinoxes!” (114).⁸⁷ Both passages, in addition to inserting the writer’s voice into the narrative of her characters, dismiss the passage of time as immaterial to the events recounted (“cent fois

⁸⁶ “I have copied those last words, fallen a hundred times from the pen of Lady Eleanor Butler...” (114). All translations drawn from: Colette. *The Pure and the Impure*. Trans. Herma Briffault. Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1967.

⁸⁷ Briffault’s translation reads: “The fantastic tale cares not a whit for the equinoxes!” (123). However she eliminates what I consider to be a crucial line so I provide my own translation here: “I translate here and there, I invert/switch and make no excuses. The fantastic tale cares little for the equinoxes!”

tombés” and “des equinoxes”), and to the relationship between these two women in particular. Colette’s self-conscious presence as author *and* character in the other chapters is tweaked here, but her voice only reinforces the illusion inherent in *all* narratives – the autobiographical costume worn in order to tell a story.

Most significantly for discussions of a “double” or Sapphic consciousness, both texts explore the possibility of a third sex, sometimes androgynous, sometimes hermaphroditic or even beyond the realm of the living/ “doll-like” (and thus the immediate reality of the characters). Not only does Barnes blur the lines between genders in *Nightwood* but she questions the very premise of gender definitions. The book becomes a barrage of challenges to gender stereotypes, referring to Robin at one point as “a tall girl with the body of a boy” (58). As we will see, Robin occupies both *and* neither gender, occupying traditional feminine roles like motherhood and marriage while drifting among lesbian lovers and wearing men’s clothing. Her characterization thus eludes the theories of simple sexual “inversion,” along with that of other characters in the book. For example, Matthew O’Connor’s offhand comment, “Why is it that whenever I hear music I think I’m a bride?” is diagnosed by his companion Felix as “Neurasthenia” (42).⁸⁸ This erroneous response foregrounds both the elusive nature of gender and the unsatisfactory efforts of psychoanalysis to categorize gender and sexuality around the turn of the century. Both Matthew’s comment and Felix’s response cause only defamiliarization without reconciliation among the gender indicators in the text.

Linked to the disturbance of gender is a similar space that is explored in both books – one existing between two women that eludes concretization. In *Nightwood*,

⁸⁸ “Neurasthenia” is now regarded as an archaic medical term. *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines it as “a syndrome marked by physical and mental fatigue accompanied by withdrawal and depression,” that was more often applied to women (a form of “hysteria”).

lovers Robin and Nora are portrayed as opposing figures (a yin and yang that should fit perfectly and don't): "...[S]ometimes, going about the house, in passing each other, they would fall into an agonized embrace, looking into each other's face, their two heads in their four hands, so strained together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart" (Barnes 74). The double vision of the lesbian couple – the mirroring of the beloved so often discussed in these books when referring to homosexual relations (and almost exclusively female same-sex couples in both texts) – often does not form a bastardization of the heterosexual binary (which is "balanced" by two opposing and interlocking halves), but rather creates the vision of a third entity. Carolyn Allen, in her article "The Erotics of Nora's Narrative in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*" (1993), argues that the relationships in Barnes' novel represent lesbianism neither as narcissism nor as unnatural otherness, but rather as a subjective space of difference:

These relations of difference, within and across which power is sometimes balanced but seldom simultaneously equal, are crucial in the novel because another of its repeated formulations focuses attention on the 'sameness' of the lovers. In my reading, circulations of power assured by the palimpsest of differences counter 'sameness' to produce neither narcissistic identification nor radical alterity, but a doubled subjectivity of resemblance (179).

When viewed along the lines of *resemblance* but not *sameness*, this third "space" (or sometimes persona) enacts a consciousness/identity that is an alternative to heteronormative binaries. In this new context, hegemony becomes an irrelevant standard of comparison, and the Sapphic "third space" emerges as an elusive but present alternative.

By comparison, in *Le Pur et L'impur* this same "third space" between women (also a realm of Sapphic consciousness) invites a sense of *creation* (which runs contrary to the prejudice against homosexual relations as "sterile"). When discussing the Ladies of

Llangollen, Colette states that the scandalous elopement of two English ladies to France resulted in a surprisingly benign domesticity. However, having left behind the prescriptions of their former lives, the two women become something new: “Elle n’est plus Sarah Ponsonby, mais une partie de cette personne double qui s’appelle ‘nous’” (110). In this case the “space” between the women is transformed (or even created) with a new name and thus new identity. However, the text implies that this is only attainable by a physical and psychological isolation from societal prescriptions, a seclusion that Nora and Robin are unable to achieve in *Nightwood*.⁸⁹ Kristeva posits that the focus on this space between *women*, rather than same-sex couples in general, is due to the fact that a lesbian relationship represented the ultimate “other” (at least within the context of early twentieth-century Paris), stating that “l’homme homosexuel semble accepté sans aucune réserve” (356). She cites Colette’s text as the antiproustian vision of “un amour gomorrhéen” (351), particularly drawing on *Le Pur et l’impur* and the representation of a lesbian couple: “Le couple féminin [est] de ce fait une ‘création aussi fragile, et de tout menacée’” (351, *Pur* qtd 615). As we will see, Colette’s concept of the female couple as the other “Other” negotiates a separate gendered space apart from homo/hetero and masculine/feminine polarities.

⁸⁹ The final chapter of *Nightwood*, “The Possessed,” shows Robin removed from New York City to “Nora’s part of the country” (209) where she resumes her nighttime wanderings, but this time in the woods rather than the city, communing with animals rather than the occupants of latenight cafés. Robin’s intimate game with Nora’s dog suggests a desire for companionship or connection that she is incapable of achieving with humans. However, her return to Nora after wandering Europe and America leaves the narrative open, as if some reconciliation might recommence in this new setting.

Colette and the Problem with Purity

Colette's *Le Pur et L'impur* is perhaps best defined as poetic prose. This is a little-employed definition, but critics and readers comment widely on the jarring prosody of the text – the nonlinearity, lack of transitions between the immediate scenes/conversations and the author's personal reflections, and the use of ellipses and dashes which create pauses in sentences, recalling the poetry of Dickinson and H.D. The chapters become like exaggerated stanzas, each seeming to treat an independent topic but still dependent on the whole text to create a cohesive aesthetic experience. I posit that Colette's text as an elusive genre is precisely its link to the Sapphic style; I use this chapter to remedy past critical misreadings.

“On s'apercevra peut-être un jour que c'est là mon meilleur livre” (“One will realize possibly one day that this is my best book”) Colette wrote to her third husband, Maurice, in 1932. However, readers and critics continue to maintain a bewildered distance from this novel, preferring her other short stories and novels like the Claudine series, *La Vagabonde*, *Gigi*, and *Chéri*. While the novel is regularly explored in critical articles, there are no book-length studies focusing on *Le Pur et L'impur*, perhaps due to its unconventional plot line (which doesn't follow a linear storyline arc) or the complex and elusive narrative voice. Although numerous studies are available about her life and the autobiographical aspects of her work, most skim the first-person narrative in *Le Pur et L'impur* and focus on *Les Vrilles de la vigne* and *Sido*. The critics who do approach the book struggle with the obvious ethical implications of the word “pure.” For example, a 1933 book review by Margaret Wallace in *The New York Times* approaches the novel as a “Case-Book of Love” and is thus duly unimpressed. Her conclusion conveys

dissatisfaction with the “unity” of the work:

On the whole, "The Pure and the Impure" presents a mildly interesting collection of case histories, and some of the generalizations Colette is tempted to draw from them are provocative in the highest degree. But the effect of the book, on the whole, is rather empty. Except as a collection of anecdotes of uneven quality, it lacks excuse for being; and Colette emerges in it less as the philosopher of love she has always seemed to be than as an industrious reporter of love affairs (no pagination).⁹⁰

Approaching this text with a predetermined frame inevitably leads to confusion or dissatisfaction – Wallace’s complaint that the “anecdotes” lack “excuse for being” presumes there should be a tidy moral at the end that completes a linear formula of narration. A more recent review in *L’Humanité* by Jean Ristat (2005) indicates that there has been a reconsideration of *Le Pur et L’impur* within the past decade: “Les malentendus autour de l’œuvre de Colette sont le signe de sa richesse et de sa diversité. Une relecture s’impose, aujourd’hui, grâce aux études universitaires des féministes américaines” (no pagination).⁹¹

Colette’s book was originally entitled, *Ces plaisirs...*; she evidently decided that the focus of her book was not the erotic pleasures of a shadowy underground but rather their indefinability. Julia Kristeva quotes Colette’s noncommittal explanation for the title change: “S’il me fallait justifier un tel changement, je ne trouverais qu’un goût vif des sonorités cristallines, une certaine antipathie pour les points de suspension bornant un titre inachevé – des raisons, en somme, de fort peu d’importance” (qtd. in Kristeva

⁹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/10/17/specials/colette-pure.html> (archive).

⁹¹ “The misunderstandings surrounding the word of Colette are a sign of its richness and diversity. Today rereadings are being established thanks to the university work of American feminists” (translation mine).

399).⁹² The final title, *Le Pur et L'impur*, establishes false ethical binaries which the author is unable or unwilling to define. I posit that Colette's title challenges the reader to analyze the cultural assumptions inherent in the words "pure" and "impure." In addition, as Maryann De Julio's "Writing Aloud: A Study of Voice in Colette's *Le Pur et L'Impur*" (1989) points out, the narrative act itself – Colette's process as a woman writer – becomes central to the text: "By the end of the book, expression itself becomes more important than considerations of gender and genre" (De Julio 36). Her observation provides a response to the dismissive evaluations that Colette's "goal" of exploring *pleasure* falls flat, a response that is reinforced by Colette's own move away from the word "pleasure" in her title.

The opening chapter of *Le Pur et l'impur* establishes several significant aspects of Colette's book. Colette's narrator literally and figuratively enters the underworld setting of her text, a Parisian opium den that is described as simultaneously foreign and familiar. Her description of the room's occupants is soporific and slightly disorienting like the drugs being distributed: sexually ambiguous guests of all ages, clothed in silk kimonos and furs, lounge under dimmed red lamps. The scene is defined by muted lighting, and the large hall is decorated with throws and pillows from Asia. However, the "broderies de Chine *que la Chine exécute pour l'Occident*," (7, emphasis mine) belie the exoticism of the setting, since even the Eastern décor was made for the West, and is not, we can assume, "authentic." In this world the omnipresence of marginalized populations in fact indicates an essential *lack* of the "other." This casual decorative detail begins, as early as

⁹² "If I had to justify this change, I would find only a keen taste for crystalline sounds, a certain antipathy for ellipses ending an incomplete title – reasons, in short, of very little importance" (297).

the first page, to reveal constructed binaries (East and West, domestic and foreign, “us” and “other”) as a fragile, ephemeral house of cards.

Colette also establishes her setting within the realm of literature: writers, poets, and artists, among whom she is a paramount participant, populate her text. On the first page she greets “[s]ans surprise...un confrère journaliste et romancier” (7). She herself is quickly identified as a writer, and her “confrère” asks if she has come to the decadent, drug-laced salon as an interested observer or curious participant. De Julio uses this scene as an example of Colette’s double narrative function, presenting both the “immediacy of dramatic dialogue (*récit de paroles*)” and the distance of an “impersonal narrator of the activities observed (*récit d’événements*)” (37). The ambiguity of gender and belonging next becomes interlaced with a question of genre:

- Vous venez en curieuse? me demanda mon confrère. ...
- Non, répondis-je. Par devoir professionnel. Il sourit.
- Je le pensais bien... Un roman?

Et je le détestais davantage, pour qu’il me croyait incapable – moi qui l’étais en effet – de goûter ce luxe...Je n’avais apporté qu’un chagrin bien caché, qui ne me lassait point de repos, et une affreuse pais des sens (8).⁹³

Her colleague’s assumption that she is writing a novel, a work of fiction for which she seeks inspirational material and experiences, is no doubt partially based on her gender. But his offense is more complex than patronizing bigotry – he has oversimplified and categorized her *métier*, which also diminishes her artistic experience. We as readers are therefore warned that this is *not* “un roman” without being told explicitly what it is. This

⁹³ “ ‘You’re here as a sightseer?’ my writer friend inquired....
‘No,’ I answered. ‘On a professional assignment.’
He smiled.

‘I thought as much. Writing a novel?’
And I loathed him still more for thinking me incapable – as indeed I was – of enjoying this luxury... I had brought with me only a well-concealed grief which gave me no rest and a frightful passivity of the senses” (4-5).

in turn complicates Colette's role as both author and character within her own vaguely defined textual genre. Colette's rejection of her *confrère's* reductive evaluation of her work is not followed up by a definition of what she *is* doing, but rather an attempt to define her own artistic experience.

Colette's narrative voice is thus highly interpretable and occasionally elusive to readers and critics alike. Sherry Dranch's "Reading through the Veiled Text: Colette's *The Pure and the Impure*" (1983) defines the novel as an exploration of the limitations of female sexuality within the confines of a heteronormative culture, in particular discussing the narcissistic aspects of lesbianism. Dranch's article becomes a hetero-essentialist dialogue about the ultimate compatibility of the sexes (more specifically "is homosexual satisfaction possible? Must the absence of men bring with it the absence of sexual arousal, for women?") (181). Her conclusion echoes Wallace's *New York Times* review a half a century earlier that *Le Pur et l'impur* is a failed exploration of female desire: "A sad and bitter book, indeed, *Le Pur et l'impur*, which Colette thought might some day be recognized as her best book, affects us most deeply in its depiction of a virile and sensual woman writer's capitulation to silence, to censorship, to the unsaid" (189).

Far from being a "capitulation," I find this book to be a brilliant tribute to the lyrical space between normative and queer identities, exhibiting a consciousness of the illusory walls dividing the two. While Dranch's reading is an over-simplification (and the question of same-sex satisfaction she raises is outdated, of course), her essay does contain accurate observations of Colette's narrative strategy/approach, even if she misreads its underlying significance: "Since the unsaid in a literary text is established in contrast to what is said, we can detect the features, the contours, of the unsaid by

identifying patterns of ellipses, through a hermeneutic reading of a censored style” (177). Dranch notes the “intense” identification between Colette and Charlotte (the first named character in the book), and the narrator’s inexplicable desire to explore their unnamed kinship. This exploration follows an illustrative curve similar to the following chapters where silence, or what is “unsaid,” becomes just as significant as what is said. Colette’s relationship with Charlotte, like with her colleague in the opening scene, leaves interpretive spaces in the text between characters *and* between writer and reader. Dranch asks: “What is left out in all those ellipses, sixty-six of them – though some appear simply to indicate pauses in dialogue – in the ten pages of ‘Madame Charlotte’ alone?” (Dranch 179-180).

In this scene and the following chapter, the enigmatic Charlotte is clearly set up as a mimetic character for the narrator Colette. The resemblance of their names, their age, and their similar tastes in both literature and younger men, immediately create a bond between the two women. Charlotte’s contentment with her young lover is qualified by her feigned orgasms, which Colette understands on a creative level. Kristeva points out that the primary result of this mimetic characterization is the fictionalization of the narrator herself: “Si Charlotte fascine ainsi Colette, c’est peut-être moins par l’énigme de la frigidité hystérique que par le miracle de la feinte. En effet, Charlotte met en scène un acte imaginaire par excellence, qui ne manque pas d’apparaître comme un double de l’acte de la sublimation elle-même, de l’acte de l’écriture en particulier” (403).⁹⁴ These prismatic reflections of writer and character disorient the reader’s sense of originality. In

⁹⁴ “If Charlotte fascinates Colette, it may be less by virtue of the enigma of hysterical frigidity than by the miracle of the feint. In fact, Charlotte performs an imaginary act par excellence, which does not fail to appear as a double for the act of sublimation itself, the act of writing in particular” (301).

the first chapter, Colette as a “real” person re-emerges, phantom-like, in her own narrative in the form of Charlotte. Whispers of Charlotte and sounds from the floor above the party-goers announce her presence but she is revealed slowly and in careful pieces, first by her voice, later a hand:

Une femme, là-haut, luttait contre son plaisir envahissant, le hâtait vers son terme et sa destruction, sur un rythme calme d'abord, si harmonieusement, si régulièrement précipité que je me surpris à suivre, d'un hochement de tête, sa cadence aussi parfaite que sa mélodie.
L'inconnu voisin se dressa à demi, et dit, pour lui-même:
– C'est Charlotte (11-12).⁹⁵

The status of the narrator herself is therefore ambiguous and shifting: she is both insider and outsider, the *voyeur* watching this underground world but also living within it. Even her gender is challenged. It is the fact that she is a woman that allows her access to the social intimacies of her friends Renée Vivien and “La Chevalière,” but she is also dismissed as one by the philanderer Damien:

Dans un temps où j'étais – où je me croyais – insensible à Damien, je lui suggérai que nous ferions, pour un voyage, une paire de compagnons courtoisement égoïstes, commodes, amis des longs silences...
– Je n'aime voyager qu'avec des femmes, répondit-il.
Le ton doux pouvait faire passer le mot brutal... Il craignait de m'avoir fâchée et “arrangea tout” par un mot pire:
Vous, une femme? Vous voudriez bien... (56).⁹⁶

The irony of his statement is that for all his claims to “know” women, the category is

⁹⁵ “Up there on the balcony a woman was trying hard to delay her pleasure and in doing so was hurrying toward its climax and destruction, in a rhythm at first so calm and harmonious, so marked that I involuntarily beat time with my head, for its cadence was as perfect as its melody. My unknown neighbor half sat up and muttered to himself, ‘That’s Charlotte’” (8-9).

⁹⁶ At the time when I was – or thought I was – insensible to Damien’s attraction, I suggested that he and I got for a voyage together, a pair of courteously egotistic companions, accommodating, fond of long silences...
‘I only like to travel with women,’ he replied.
His gentle tone was meant to soften the brutal remark. But, afraid he had offended me, he dressed it up with a remark that was even worse.
‘You, a woman? Why, try as you will...’” (58).

narrowly defined by those who fulfill a certain sexual role – conquest or object of desire – and not by the complex creature who sits before him, recording his confidences.

Just as Damien challenges Colette’s “femininity,” Kristeva roundly challenges the gendering of Damien’s character as the mythic “Don Juan” Colette wants to see in him. Colette the narrator claims that her interviews with Damien are for the purpose of “creating” him in her text. However, despite the narrator’s desire to write him as a typecast character – the womanizer and lover – his personality eludes this stereotype. Kristeva notes the inconsistencies of his character:

En fait, se plaint-il d’être incapable de jouir comme... une femme? Don Juan le frigide? Plus profondément encore, ce don [sic] Juan misogyne est un misanthrope. Mais s’il se défend aussi fébrilement contre la compagnie des humains, serait-ce parce qu’il craint l’homme et, plus crûment, la sexualité des homes? Don Juan misanthrope, ou don Juan homophobe? (411)⁹⁷

Both Colette and Damien acknowledge that the attempted portraits of a Don Juan figure in *Le Pur et L’impur* fall short of the idealized, virile lover established in fictions and *romans* of previous centuries. Colette relates her friend Damien’s dissatisfaction with his role: he laments that despite his ostensible power/control as the manipulative lover and heartbreaker, he leaves each relationship with less of a profound experience than his female companions: “Leur plaisir n’était que trop vrai. Leurs larmes aussi. Mais leur plaisir surtout... Être leur maître dans le plaisir, mais jamais leur égal... Voilà ce que je ne leur pardonne pas” (Colette 47-8).⁹⁸ Damien reflects that his failure to share in the

⁹⁷ In fact, doesn’t he complain of being incapable of jouissance – like a woman? Don Juan the frigid?... At an even deeper level, that misogynous Don Juan is a misanthrope. But could the reason he defends himself so passionately against the company of humans be that he fears men and, more crudely, men’s sexuality? Don Juan the misanthrope, or Don Juan the homophobe?” (307)

⁹⁸ “Their satisfaction was all too real. Their tears, as well. But their satisfaction especially... They allow us to be their master in the sex act, but never their equal. That is what I cannot forgive

passion of his female lovers is embittered by his inability to relate to his own sex as well:

“Je n’ai rien à échanger, je n’ai jamais rien eu à échanger avec les hommes... Je crois, dit-il en hésitant, je crois que je ne les comprends pas” (Colette 50-1).⁹⁹ Rather than emerging as an archetype for masculine virility, Damien admits that he is envious of his female lovers’ poignant pleasure (and pain), and that he avoids the company of men because he does not understand them.

Damien’s ambiguous understanding of gender is reinforced in the following chapter as Colette reflects on her own desire for a certain level of classification:

La parole de Damien me blessa assez longtemps... Je n’eus plus guère l’occasion de lui avouer qu’à cette époque-là j’aurais secrètement bien voulu être une femme... Je vise le véridique hermaphrodisme mental, qui charge certains êtres fortement organisés. Si la parole décrétable de Damien me fâcha, c’est que j’espérais alors dépouiller cette ambiguïté... (57).¹⁰⁰

Colette’s own struggle with her “hermaphroditism” is significant because it is her uneasy negotiation of this space that is symptomatic of Sapphic consciousness: this erotic, psychological, and creative exploration of an “in-between” or third space defines the textual voice of Colette and Barnes, as well as the lyrical prosody of H.D., Anna de Noailles, and W.B. Yeats.

The chapter on Damien is then followed by a portrait of Marguerite Moreno, “La Chevalière,” a female Don Juan in men’s shoes. La Chevalière becomes an “inverted”

them” (48).

⁹⁹ “‘I have nothing to say to men and never had... I believe,’ he hesitated, then concluded, ‘I believe I don’t understand men’” (52).

¹⁰⁰ “Damien’s remark hurt me for quite a while... I never had the opportunity to admit to him that, oddly enough, I was secretly craving just then to be completely a woman. ... I am alluding to a genuine mental hermaphroditism which burdens certain highly complex human beings. And if Damien’s pronouncement vexed me, it was because I happened to be making a particular effort at the time to rid myself of this ambiguity...” (59-60).

version of Damien, “une femme-homme,” complicating both gender roles. While her character is often critically read as a “castrated” or androgynous version of her male counterpart (an “invert” or lesbian *par excellence*), the text does not support such a simplification or stereotype. Her expression of a “lack” (“manque”) in the following quote is often read a Freudian desire for the phallus (a common interpretation even today): “—Je ne suis ni cela, ni, hélas! autre chose..., disait la Chevalière en quittant la petite main impure. Ce qui me manque ne se trouve pas en le cherchant. *Elle est celui – ou celle – qui n’a point de semblable*” (72, emphasis mine).¹⁰¹ However, a close reading of the text demonstrates that her lack is neither masculine (“celui”) *nor* feminine (“celle”), and in fact cannot be defined in either of these culturally loaded terms. The casual description of her “impure” hand hangs over the narration not as a moral judgment but rather as an indefinability external to the dominant cultural mores of her society, mores which become increasingly irrelevant and unstable in Colette’s text.

The narrator, Colette, comprehends her new confidante to such an extent that they leave each others’ sentences unfinished, relating to each other *as women*: “Je l’interrompis d’un signe: c’est entre nous un usage nonchalant que de suspendre la phrase en son beau milieu, dès que celle qui écoute a compris celle qui parle” (58).¹⁰² Unlike the dynamic between her and Damien, which carried moments of discomfort, Colette finds communication effortless with her new narrative subject. However, La Chevalière’s “masculine” qualities (“cette femme à dégain de beau garçon”) as well as her propensity

¹⁰¹ “‘I am neither that nor anything else, alas,’ said La Chevalière, dropping the vicious little hand. ‘What I lack cannot be found by searching for it.’ She is the person who has no counterpart anywhere” (77). The English translation lacks the gendered contrast between “celui” and “celle.”

¹⁰² “I interrupted her with a gesture. We had the comfortable habit of leaving a sentence hanging midway as soon as one of us had grasped the point” (61).

for seducing other women, prevent her from comfortably occupying the role of female confidante (69). This new character further complicates the “type” of both Don Juan Damien and female intimate Colette – the oppositions of subject/writer, man/woman, active (speaker)/ passive (listener), fragile from the start of the book, begin to disintegrate in this chapter. I posit that La Chevalière, as neither man nor woman, both companion and seductress, *becomes* the Sapphic third space and represents key aspects of the Sapphic consciousness.

De Julio’s discussion of the narrator’s “double function” coincides with my reading of the text as a hybrid genre expressing Sapphic consciousness. Her article approaches the unique narrativity of the book as a response to critics who “have tended to consider this text as a series of literary portraits and sensuous experiences, generally ignoring its stylistic merits” (36). She continues by pointing out that Colette’s text “was felt to be so fragmented and disconnected that it outstripped most categories of genre and even of gender” (36). De Julio sees Colette’s narrative experiment as a study of voice, referencing Barthes’ prescription to write “aloud” (36). De Julio initially focuses on the character-doubling of Colette the narrator and Charlotte, whom she meets in the first chapter, and is her first named protagonist. Colette’s personal narration and physical presence in this chapter contrasts with the narrator’s absence from the description of the domestic bliss of the Ladies of Llangollen in the following chapter.

Colette’s text does explore the pleasures of the Paris underworld, from a frustrated string of Don Juan figures to the tragic, “puérile” persona of “la femme poète” Renée Vivien. However, the book ends with the reminiscences of the utopian elder “Lady

of Llangollen,” who rejects any attempt to pigeonhole her relationship with her lover as merely maternal or purely physical/sensual: “Notre infini était tellement pur, que je n’avais jamais pensé à la mort...” (“We were joined in an infinity so pure that I never thought of death...”) (Colette 159). Their companionship is defined by the single entity that they become, the “nous.” In her discussion of Colette’s *Le Pur et L’impur* Kristeva wonders if “le pur serait l’absence d’homme, l’‘entre-deux’ femmes?” (“could the pure be the absence of man, the ‘space between’ women?”) (400). Kristeva’s chapter opens with an exploration of Colette’s title, and the elusive meaning behind the words “pure” and “impure,” stating: “La définition du mot ‘pur’ est constamment éludée, et le livre s’achève par une pirouette, une rêverie sur les sonorités et les sensations” (399).¹⁰³ The final paragraph of *Le Pur et L’impur*, the “conclusion,” makes what appears to be an attempt to define and contextualize the book’s title. However, Colette’s inability to understand the concept “pure” intellectually means that she cannot understand the categorical boundaries of “impure” either – the two are mutually dependent (defining one would immediately define the other). Colette’s following (and final) paragraph reduces the ethically/morally loaded word “pure” to an aural sensation, focusing on the phonetic effect of the letters and the tangible, sensual sounds:

De ce mot pur qui tombait de sa bouche, j’ai écouté le tremblement bref, l’*u* plaintif, l’*r* de glace limpide. Il n’éveillait rien en moi, sauf le besoin d’entendre encore sa résonance unique, son écho de goutte qui sourd, se détache et rejoint une eau invisible. Le mot « pur » ne m’a pas découvert son sens intelligible. J’en suis qu’à étancher une soif optique de pureté dans les transparences qui l’évoquent, dans les bulles, l’eau massive, et les sites imaginaires retranchés, hors d’atteinte, au sein d’un épais cristal (159).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ “The definition of the word ‘pure’ is constantly dodged, and the book ends with a pirouette, a reverie on sounds and sensations” (298).

¹⁰⁴ “As that word ‘pure’ fell from her lips, I heard the trembling of the plaintive ‘u,’ the icy limpidity of the ‘r,’ and the sound aroused nothing in me but the need to hear again its unique

The conclusion is no resolution at all, and surrenders to the rhythm and beauty of poetry. Interestingly, Colette presents an English, lesbian couple (doubly “other”) as the most utopian solution to desire and identity. More importantly, Colette defamiliarizes the words of her own title, calling into question any conclusions the reader may have drawn from the character portraits in the preceding chapters.

Borderlands: Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*

Despite T.S. Eliot’s rather elitist comment that *Nightwood* “is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it” (viii), he does skate around a relevant point – the fact that critics, past and present, continue to struggle with the categorization of Barnes’ text. Allen’s article describes the novel’s unique narration as a *palimpsest*, an attribute which, we will see, directly contributes to its Sapphic qualities: “The novel’s narrative structure . . . is palimpsestic in that the story of Robin and Nora is told first by a third-person narrator, then reviewed and reshaped through the repetition by Nora’s own overlaying [sic] account to Matthew O’Connor, the novel’s ebullient doctor-confessor” (182). While the book is written in the third person, the narrators within the text demonstrate an increasing subjectivity (even unreliability) when telling their stories, making the reader aware of the author’s role herself as a deceptive presence.

For example, the first chapter opens with the birth of Felix who is “thrust” from his dying mother Hedvig amid an elaborate staging of his Jewish and Gentile heritage.

resonance, its echo of a drop that trickles out, breaks off, and falls somewhere with a splash. The word ‘pure’ has never revealed an intelligible meaning to me. I can only use the word to quench an optical thirst for purity in the transparencies that evoke it – in bubbles, in a volume of water, and in the imaginary latitudes entrenched, beyond reach, at the very center of a dense crystal” (174-5).

The descriptions recall the opening scene in Colette's book, with shades of red and a confusing mélange of styles defining the interior space: "The full length windows (a French touch that [Felix's father] Guido thought handsome) overlooking the park were curtained in native velvets and stuffs from Tunis, and the Venetian blinds were of that peculiarly sombre shade of red so loved by the Australians" (9). Most significant are the impressive portraits Baron Guido Volkbein claims as parents, dressed in a "baffling mixture of the Romantic and the Religious." The reader is then instructed to "look into the matter" at which point she would discover that the paintings are "reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors" (10-11). The narrator's revelation that Felix's personal history is a fabrication foregrounds her own story and therefore voice as comparably inventive.

Parallels are regularly drawn between Barnes' novel and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly the chapter "Circe"; this is understandable due to the admiration Barnes herself expressed for Joyce's work (and thus its assumed influence on her). However, this comparison is also an effort on the part of critics to categorize her text in a comfortable and comprehensible way. Catherine Whitley's excellent article "Nations and the Night: Excremental History in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*" (2000) notes the novels' similarities in narrative style: "Both writers offer in their books nightworlds and possibilities not limited by the linear logic of day, worlds which require a matching prose of flexibility and dreamlike openness that can convey ideas and sensations usually censored by rationality" (85). While the experimental prose styles of Barnes and Joyce exhibit important parallels, Barnes makes several notable alterations to

the non-linear interior monologues exemplified by Joyce, and the private indirect discourse of contemporary Virginia Woolf, making her uniquely relevant to this study.

In marked contrast to contemporary modernist characters like Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway, Barnes' characters give the reader very little access to their inner thoughts and emotions (with the possible exception of Nora Flood). Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* narratively prioritizes the subconscious, the characters' thoughts and sensations, through which external events are filtered. Boone develops a fascinating comparative reading between "Circe" and *Nightwood*, acknowledging that "while *Nightwood*'s 'descent' into the psychology of the unconscious is as total as that of any text..., Barnes does not represent the individual thought-processes or inner worlds of her characters" (248). Joyce and Woolf's emphasis on interiority and the subconscious mind is frustrated in Barnes' text. For example, the "doctor" Matthew O'Connor, who personifies the unfettered ramblings of a bastardized stream-of-consciousness (albeit a rather pretentious mind seeped in cultural and literary references), becomes a ridiculous character who verbally interrupts other people and seems incapable of holding a mutual conversation. If anything, he *hinders* the reader's access to knowledge of the other characters. Barnes' book, far from imitating the literary strategies of her contemporaries, seems to be exploring their limitations, and even satirizing them.

As in the sexual/mental theaters of *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the blurring distinctions between interior and exterior denaturalize the fantasy of the self as the repository of an organizing coherence, and of gender and sexuality as the expression of an inner fixity. Rather, Barnes's distanced mode of presenting character, like her estranging use of language, drives the point home that the performative play of surfaces is *all* we ever get (Boone 249, emphasis in original).

In fact, this limited access on the part of the reader is reflected in the difficulty the characters have communicating with each other. Allen reads the dialogues between

characters as frustrated moments of confession and satirical portraits of dominant institutions during the early twentieth century, particularly the Church and “new” sciences like psychoanalysis: “In *Nightwood*’s parodic psychoanalytic scenes, both doctor and patient speak volumes but seldom directly to each other. ... In its confessional mode, the novel reverses the traditional power of the confessor in that Matthew fails in his absolution of his ‘parishioner’” (Allen 182). In particular, the chapter “Watchman, What of the Night” is written in dialogue but ultimately manifests qualities that can only be read as two simultaneous monologues, operating independently and providing only superficial access to the characters’ thoughts.

T.S. Eliot saw Matthew O’Connor as the essential character in the book – the pivotal piece – and writes in his Introduction to *Nightwood*:

When I first read the book I found the opening movement rather slow and dragging, until the appearance of the doctor... It was notable, however, that as the other characters, on repeated reading, became alive for me, ...the figure of the doctor was by no means diminished. On the contrary, he came to take on a different and more profound importance when seen as a constituent of the whole pattern (ix).

The doctor’s knowledge of the Paris night scene creates a structural connection between the inhabitants of Barnes’ underworld. But O’Connor becomes a caricature not of the decadence and corruption of the urban underworld but rather of the human condition in general. Despite the “queerness” of her characters, Barnes presents them not as abnormalities but rather as *representations* of humanity. At the end of the chapter “Go Down, Matthew,” the doctor, drunk and rambling, is initially a source of amusement and derision to onlookers (“Funny little man”) (203). But his voice in this case becomes the expression of human nature – the queerness that inhabits the norm.¹⁰⁵ “God, take my

¹⁰⁵ O’Connor echoes Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis” decades later in *Histoire de la sexualité*

hand and get me up out of this great argument – the more you go against your nature, the more you will know of it... I wouldn't be telling you about it if I weren't talking to myself. I talk too much because I have been made so miserable *by what you are keeping hushed*" (202, emphasis mine). O'Connor's disruptive monologues, often compared to a Greek chorus, are not (only) the pseudo-psychobabble of a "funny little man" but rather a frustrated communal voice expressing the "queer" aspects of his onlookers' identities (and that of the reader who is also "observing"). The chapter closes with O'Connor's voice, which turns back wrathfully on his audience (which is *both* the characters in the bar *and* the book's reader): " 'I've known everyone,' he said, 'everyone!'" (206). The fact that he has known "everyone" subverts his role as a perversion of society and reorients him *within* the dominant culture. The doctor's position as an outsider, a transvestite who lies about his credentials and experiences, comes to rest beside his portrayal as an Everyman – not an abomination of the human race but rather its most potent self-conscious illustration.¹⁰⁶

This same chapter epitomizes Barnes' textual explorations of gender expression beyond divisions of male/female and homosexual/heterosexual. When Nora surprises Dr. O'Connor in his room when she comes to ask him about the night, he is shockingly and grotesquely attired in a dirty flannel nightgown and wig, rouged and powdered. The room itself is described as "a cross between a *chambre à coucher* and a boxer's training camp"

that the repression of sexual identity results in a proliferation of scientific and religious discourse on the topic, and that the turn of the century exemplified this phenomenon. When viewed through a lens of Foucault's theory, O'Connor is expressing the repressed desires of his society.

¹⁰⁶ Ristat makes a similar statement about the narrative style in Colette's *Pur et L'impur*, and the text's treatment of its "deviant" characters: "Bref, ce livre n'obéit à aucun genre littéraire traditionnel. Et Marine Rambach [explique], avec raison: 'Colette fait apparaître les contradictions, les mécanismes cachés, et démontre que les jugements moraux s'appuient sur des apparences et qu'ils ignorent l'essentiel des motivations humaines'" (no pagination).

(100). However, Nora suspects that she is seeing his “true” identity, and that the clothes he wears during the day are his costume: “she wondered why she was so dismayed to have come upon the doctor at the hour when he had evacuated custom and *gone back to his dress*. ... She thought: ‘He dresses to lie beside himself, who is so constructed that love, for him, can only be something special’” (101-2, emphasis mine). In an era when homosexuality was labeled as “sexual inversion” Barnes is questioning the very concept of polarized sexualities by inverting the assumed inversion. The *naturalness* of one gender construction over another is threatened by the fact that the doctor’s “inversion” is in fact a return to his true self. As Boone states, the implications of this detail echo throughout the text:

...Barnes transposes those who generally exist on the margins (of society, of texts) to center stage. As in contemporary queer theory, this tactic undoes the imprisoning cultural binaries of inside/outside, dominant/marginal, upon which the hetero/homo divide depends. For in imagining a world of otherness that is both all-encompassing and central, Barnes creates a *conceptual space* in which the normative becomes, for once in history, the excluded, the taboo, and the unmentionable (Boone 235, emphasis in original).

This conceptual space does not represent the replacement of one world by another but rather a challenge to the definitions of both.

Chapter Two in *Nightwood*, entitled “La Somnambule,” introduces Robin Vote, to whom Dr. O’Connor is summoned upon being told that a lady has fainted. Not only does Robin become the recipient of both Felix and Nora’s single-minded attentions, she is interwoven into the remainder of the chapters until the end when she eclipses Dr. O’Connor as the focal character. Both Whitley’s article and Jean Gallagher’s “Vision and Inversion in *Nightwood*” (2001) devote a significant portion of their discussions to this

scene. Both critics note that Robin's appearance in the novel presents the reader with a series of images and perspectives that fail to reconcile themselves into a unified schema.

When Matthew O'Connor is called to Robin's room she is laid out on the bed in a scene reminiscent of Felix's mother in childbirth, from the legs spread apart to the red coloring of the carpet. She is surrounded by houseplants, "exotic palms and cut flowers," which simultaneously represent domesticity and wildness; "she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room" (44). She is a disruption rather than a fusion of concepts of woman and Nature; Barnes' text (via Robin) perverts the feminine relationship to Nature, a re-evaluation of Romantic associations of the feminine with nature as seen in the poetry of H.D., Emily Dickinson, and Anna de Noailles, who also challenge the "natural" feminine as a construction.

The unconscious Robin is described as existing between the worlds of living and dead, plant and animal. In addition, her sleeping figure becomes a bastardization of the Madonna since her "halo" is associated with "deterioration" rather than life and eternity: "About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of water – as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations – the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds – meet of child and desperado" (44). Whitley posits that the "text, in a sense, competes with and subverts itself" since "Barnes... attempts to present a character who is two unreconcilable things at once" (91).

Robin's simultaneous representation as living woman, plant, and corpse defies a wide range of categories. In particular, the disruption of gendered associations with plant/flower imagery is linked to wider questions of gender. The "unnaturalness" of

Robin's ambiguous gender is challenged since the natural world is no longer a reliable referent. Like La Chevalière in *Le Pur et L'impur*, Robin represents the third Sapphic space – she exists between polarized realms, neither living nor dead, neither male nor female.

Robin suffers from being in the 'middle condition' in *Nightwood*; she challenges the gender binary by being a member of the 'third sex' in Matthew's terms... Barnes exploits a singular style within moments of characterization in order to explore the ideas of fixed identity, gender stereotypes, and linguistic referentiality and thus to challenge the concept that 'nature' is not a social construct like "culture" (Whitley 89-90).

The sexuality and gender displacement is visually linked to the disruption of the subject/object dynamic. Gallagher discusses this scene as a deconstruction of the traditional male gaze embodied by Felix, through whom the reader experiences the scene, with Robin as the central object of his (our) regard. However, Felix's position as voyeur is threatened by his own uncertainty about his position as the scene unfolds; apparently discomfited by the woman like "a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau," Felix steps behind some of the palms "out of delicacy" (44-5).¹⁰⁷ Gallagher notes that this movement "suggests an awareness of the possibility of *being seen*" (286), thus undermining Felix's initial position as the perpetrator of the gaze. In addition, once Robin is revived by a shock of cold water, Felix's gaze shifts involuntarily to O'Connor.

Experiencing a double confusion, Felix now saw the doctor, partially hidden by the screen beside the bed, make the movements common to the 'dumbfounder,' or man of magic... Felix saw that this was for the purpose of snatching a few drops from a perfume bottle picked up from the night table; of dusting his darkly bristled chin with a puff, and drawing a line of rouge across his lips, his upper lip compressed on his lower, in order to have it seem that their sudden embellishment was a visitation of nature... (45-6).

¹⁰⁷ Henri Rousseau or "Le Douanier" (1844-1910) was a French Post-Impressionist/Primitivist painter whose work tended to be simultaneously childlike and savage.

By disrupting the dynamic of the voyeuristic male gaze towards the female object, the scene challenges the gendering of the regard by introducing a third character, the transvestite doctor (who attempts a “natural” transition). However *all* of the characters depend on the others to play their “role” – by destabilizing one all three are thrown into an undefined space.¹⁰⁸ Gallagher points out that the doctor’s transvestism destabilizes not only *his* gender, but the nature of gender construction in general: “The doctor’s movements, displaying the usually hidden processes that create the visible surface of gender, belie the certainty or naturalness of gender” (Gallagher 287). The reader, like Felix, experiences a “double confusion” when faced with the instability of Robin and Matthew’s identities (both of whom are classified as “inverts” in the text). Most significantly, Gallagher suggests that “in its representation of the ‘inverted’ characters... *Nightwood* also attempts to model an ‘inverted’ observer who is... ‘turned in’ to the novel’s visual field rather than occupying a privileged, transcendent, voyeuristic position outside of it...” (280). The reader’s omniscient status, already challenged by the unreliability of character narration, is now doubly jeopardized by the destabilization of gender *and* genre, both within and without of the text.

Like the end of Colette’s novel, the last chapter of *Nightwood*, “The Possessed,” surrenders to the inadequacy of language to express identity or narrative. While Colette’s phonetic contemplation of the word “pure” disassociates the word from its ethical and cultural meanings, Barnes’s narration abandons any remaining premise as an elucidatory

¹⁰⁸ In a Baudelairean vein, *Nightwood* confesses to the danger inherent in objectifying a female character: “The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a ‘picture’ forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human” (Barnes 47).

text. Robin's return to Nora is devoid of any spoken language and the focus of the scene is Robin's "obscene" courtship of Nora's dog:¹⁰⁹

On a contrived altar, before a Madonna, two candles were burning. Their light fell across the floor and the dusty benches. Before the images lay flowers and toys. Standing before them in her boy's trousers was Robin. Her pose, startled and broken, was caught at the point where her hand had reached almost to the shoulder, and at the moment Nora's body struck the wood, Robin began going down (210).

This scene is scattered with religious and domestic remnants of a "female" life, recalling Dickinson's poem "I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs—," where the poet reorients the significance of "Dolls" (l. 5) and "the string of spools" (l. 6). In the center of the toys, flowers, and the Virgin Mary, Robin in her boy's clothing represents an uneasy simultaneous occupation of maternity, childhood, lesbianism, the natural world, light and shadow. She is "broken" by these things but has rejected none of them conclusively – her motion towards the ground and the dog conveys a desperate search for attachment to something that language, even humanity, cannot express. "[T]he terms in which [Robin] is described mutate too rapidly for an overriding denotative meaning to be pinned down, as if language as a referential system proves an inadequate tool for accurately specifying the totality of an individual's unique being and can only proffer fragment after dissonant fragment" (Whitley 91). Robin remains stranded between queer and normative expectations. Her disintegration in the face of cultural standards, which she neither acknowledges nor understands, reflects *Nightwood*'s broader discourse on the artificiality

¹⁰⁹ Miriam Fuch's "Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot: Authority, Resistance, and Acquiescence" (1993) points out that while Barnes complied with much of Eliot's editing during the writing of *Nightwood*, she refused to change the adjective "obscene" to "unclean" at Eliot's suggestion. While Eliot had occasionally deleted entire passages without protestation on Barnes' part, in the case of the final chapter she held firm: "Whatever discussion followed, she must have been adamant that the sexual allusions generated by 'obscene' and the ambiguities of the passage remain as vexatious as they are today. 'Obscene' was never deleted" (295).

of gender and national categories.

Conclusion: Sappho's Final Leap

Joan DeJean concludes her book *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1937* (1989) with a discussion of Marguerite Yourcenar's distinct revival of Sappho: "With her thoroughly undecidable fiction of Sappho, Yourcenar forces us, in the end as in the beginning, to remember that all Sapphic speculation has its roots in Sappho's own rejection of the readerly desire for unambiguous erotic resolution" (299). While concluding with Yourcenar is a historical choice for DeJean, who frames her project chronologically, it remains a thematic and aesthetic decision for my study. Marguerite Yourcenar's book of poetic prose, *Feux* (1936), concludes my study because it represents an aesthetic intersection between the treatment of Sappho's myth itself, the lyricism of poetic prose, and the borderlands explored in Colette and Barnes' texts. Notably, Yourcenar's treatment of the figure Sappho contributes to the trends of her Modernist contemporaries in a major way – she "modernizes the past," particularly that of ancient Greece.¹¹⁰ In this book, she acknowledges, like H.D., that the predominantly classical figures represented in her poetry are only shadows, existing solely in the works of the poets, sculptors, and artists who span the centuries between Classical Greece and the twentieth century. Yourcenar claims that *Feux* is a book of love prose poems: "Produit d'une crise passionnelle, *Feux* se présente comme un recueil de poèmes d'amour, ou, si l'on préfère, comme une série de proses lyriques reliées entre elles par une certaine notion de l'amour"

¹¹⁰ "À des degrés divers, tous ces récits modernisent le passé" (Yourcenar *Préface* 11).

(9).¹¹¹ However, like Colette's dismissive reason for her title *Le Pur et l'impur*, this approach seems limiting and unsatisfying.¹¹²

The section called "Sappho ou le suicide," Yourcenar admits, retains only "un écho des seuls bons vers" ("an echo of the only good lines") left from Sappho's fragments (18). Most notably, Yourcenar is the first author to translate the mythic Sappho into a modern setting – the European turmoil between world wars. She states candidly in the *Préface*: "L'aventure de Sappho tient à la Grèce par la légende fort controuvée du suicide de la poétesse pour un bel insensible, mais cette Sappho acrobate appartient au monde international du plaisir d'entre-deux-guerres et l'incident du travesti se relie aux comédies shakespeariennes plutôt qu'aux thèmes grecs" (13).¹¹³ Yourcenar specifies that "cette Sappho" ("this Sappho") is one of many, an artistic creation with relevance to the writer's world (in this case, twentieth-century Europe). In her retelling (added in among the infinite versions of Sappho's life), Sappho is lifted out of her Classical context only to exist simultaneously during Modernism, early Modern England ("comédies shakespeariennes"), and Ancient Greece.

The section itself begins with an image of a mirrored hall, where both reader and author spot Sappho. Yourcenar's acknowledgment of Sappho as a poetic predecessor

¹¹¹ "Produced from a crime of passion, *Feux* presents itself as a collection of love poems, or if you prefer, as a series of lyrical prose linked together by a certain notion of love" (translation mine).

¹¹² *Feux* in general cryptically re-imagines ancient personalities: referring to her collection of re-imagined and revived classical characters including Antigone, Achilles, and Sappho, Yourcenar states that "Ce bal masqué a été l'une des étapes d'une prise de conscience" (Préface 27).

¹¹³ "Sappho's adventure is attached to Greece by the largely invented suicide of the poetess for the sake of a handsome, heartless man, but this acrobatic Sappho belongs to the international inter-war world of pleasure and the cross-dressing incident is linked to Shakespearean comedies more than to Greek themes" (translation mine).

immediately conjures typically Sapphic images of fragmentation, illusion, and reflection. She is ghostlike in appearance and profession, and as an acrobat she belongs neither in the heavens nor on earth but rather remains suspended between the two. Yourcenar also describes Sappho in language reminiscent of Fragments 1 and 31 – she is pale, as if close to death: “Je viens de voir au fond des miroirs d’une loge une femme qui s’appelle Sappho. Elle est pâle comme la neige, la mort, ou le visage clair des lépreuses. Et comme elle se farde pour cacher cette pâleur, elle a l’air du cadavre d’une femme assassinée...” (193).¹¹⁴ These opening lines achieve several multiple effects: the narrator claims to have stepped into Sappho’s Modernist world and that she “just saw” a woman named Sappho. However, this sighting is in a hall of mirrors so the narrator’s gaze is unfixed – is she seeing Sappho or just a reflection? In addition, Sappho’s resemblance to a corpse recalls Baudelaire’s poetic resurrection of Sappho only to watch her die again as he replaces her. Sappho’s existence is elusive – is she alive or dead, immortal or “the corpse of an assassinated woman”? Furthermore, Sappho is aware of her pallor and attempts to disguise it under make-up; she tries (perhaps futilely) to walk among the living and exist in this moment in time.

The Sappho in *Feux* maintains a shadowy connection with her classical counterpart, as if existing reincarnated for a new generation. “Elle est acrobate comme aux temps antiques elle était poétesse, parce que la forme particulière de ses poumons l’oblige à choisir un métier qui s’exerce mi-ciel... Créature aimantée, trop ailée pour le sol, trop charnelle pour le ciel, ses pieds frottés de cire ont rompu le pacte qui nous joint à

¹¹⁴ “I just saw, at the back of a dressing room’s mirrors, a woman who is named Sappho. She is pale like snow, death, or the light face of lepers. And since she wears make-up to hide this pallor, she seems like the cadaver of an assassinated woman...” (translation mine).

la terre...” (194-5).¹¹⁵ She exists outside of time and yet is distinctly modernized, and she is neither complete seductress nor all angel. Like *Nightwood*’s Robin Vote, she is neither living nor dead, barely human and hardly belonging to a specific era.

The lover Phaon, for whom the ancient Sappho lept to her death, is a transvestite in Yourcenar’s text, a mere replacement for the girl Atthys whom Sappho loves and loses. Phaon himself expresses interest in his predecessor: “Phaon se penche avec curiosité vers les portraits d’Attys” (210). His contemplation of her portrait, as if staring into a mirror, reveals a fusion of identities, which he embraces much to Sappho’s horror:

[E]lle l’entend déboucher des flacons sur la table de toilette, fouiller dans les tiroirs avec une sûreté de cambrioleur ou d’un ami de Coeur [sic] qui se croit tout permis... Elle se lève, se retourne : débarrassé des stricts vêtements d’homme, ce corps flexible et lisse est presque un corps de femme. Ce Phaon à l’aise dans le travesti n’est plus qu’un substitut de la belle nymphe absente ; c’est une jeune fille encore qui vient à elle avec un rire de source. (211)¹¹⁶

Sappho is dismayed neither by the vision of Phaon nor by the image of her Atthys, but the physical manifestation of their transgendered coexistence – Phaon is not disguised but has *become* the third sex – he is neither Aphrodite nor Hermes, but the Hermaphrodite.

However, within this context all of the characters wear a mask of some sort – Sappho herself is “un athlète qui refuserait d’être ange” (“an athlete who would refuse to be an angel”) who is difficult to describe from the air as well as when she is on the

¹¹⁵ “She is an acrobat as in ancient times she was a poetess, because the particular shape of her lungs compels her to choose a profession practiced mid-air... A magnetic creature, too winged for the ground, too carnal for the sky, her feet rubbed in wax broke the pact that binds us to the earth...” (translation mine).

¹¹⁶ “She hears him uncorking the bottles on the dressing table, rummage through the drawers with the confidence of a burglar or of a soul mate who believes anything is permitted... She rises, turns; free of the severe men’s clothes, this flexible and smooth body is almost a woman’s body. This Phaon comfortably in drag is no longer just a substitute for the absent, beautiful nymph; it is a young girl who comes toward her again with a light laugh” (translation mine).

ground; “on lui trouve l’air d’être déguisée en femme” (195). Her refusal to “be” an angel, her appearance of one “disguised as a woman” do not in turn explain to the reader what in fact she *is* – like La Chevalière in *Le Pur et l’impur* her “lack” positions her in a third space, tensely balancing multiple identities.¹¹⁷

While Yourcenar’s version of Sappho’s suicide acknowledges her lesbianism (or more accurately her bisexuality), her treatment of Sappho’s sexuality resembles the Baudelairean model more than H.D.’s. Sappho is presented as a corpse from the beginning – her body is voyeuristically analyzed and dissected. Despite her plunge from the ropes of the circus tent, Sappho’s suicide attempt is a failure; she becomes tangled in the ropes of the circus tent and the reader is left with the deathly, defeated body of Sappho laid out on the sand like the classical Sappho at the foot of the Leucadian cliff.¹¹⁸ Her suffering, in keeping with Longinus’s notions of the sublime, disempowers her as an artist (an act which arguably leads to Yourcenar’s usurpation of Sappho’s creative powers as the new writer chosen to sing Sappho’s song). DeJean interprets Sappho’s proverbial leap as her inability to reconcile herself to her own desires (a Sapphic figure reminiscent of the emaciated Renée Vivien in Colette’s *Pur et l’impur*). However, I complicate this reading by suggesting that the new Sappho’s “failure” to commit suicide and her modernization actually represent a new vision and resurrection of Sapphism in the twentieth century. She literally and figuratively walks a tightrope between the artificial

¹¹⁷ “Narcisse aime ce qu’il est. Sappho dans ses compagnes adore amèrement *ce qu’elle n’a pas été*” (Yourcenar 198, emphasis mine). This distance from Narcissus challenges the concept of homosexuality as a perverted love of self.

¹¹⁸ As the first woman (eventually) admitted into L’Académie française, Yourcenar is often criticized by feminists for avoiding associations with a feminine heritage and for failing to promote the works of other female writers.

identities of masculine and feminine, between earth and sky. The indicative final page of the story in *Feux* contains isolated lines separated by asterisks and blank page, laid out like verses of a poem. The lines follow here:

Je ne me tuerai pas. On oublie si vite les morts.

On ne bâtit un bonheur que sur un fondement de désespoir. Je crois que je vais pouvoir me mettre à construire.

Qu'on n'accuse personne de ma vie.

Il ne s'agit pas d'un suicide. Il ne s'agit que de battre un record. (217)¹¹⁹

Yourcenar's Sappho addresses the reader directly, asserting her desire to shed the past versions of herself, old categories, and repeated myths. This new Sappho is creative but not self-destructive, constructive, and comfortable with her multiple identities.

The textual representation of the critical and creative potential of Yourcenar's Sappho is a fitting conclusion to the Sapphic Modernists treated in this study.

Yourcenar's text connects Sappho's myth and lyricism with the double consciousness, or "in between" space, created in the works of Colette and Barnes. The fluid relationship between masculine and feminine, and subject and object, creates an interpretive freedom that permits the exploration of a third sex which does not *replace* either gender but rather challenges their definitions. The narrative space of these texts allows for the exploration of a third space and new consciousness that is represented in affirmative, creative terms.

As Foucault and other theorists note, current concepts of sexual identity and

¹¹⁹ "I will not kill myself. The dead are so quickly forgotten.

Happiness is only constructed on a foundation of despair. I believe that I am going to be able to starting building.

That no one in my life is accused. [or "Let no one be accused of/for my life" – the French remains ambiguous here.]

It isn't about a suicide. It's only about beating a record" (translation mine).

experimental poetics find their roots in Modernism's negotiation of shifting definitions of gender and expression. This developing sense of a "modern" self in the midst of increasing urbanization and technological innovation contributed to dissolving boundaries between private and public life. Suzette Henke, in her article "(En)Gendering Modernism: Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes" (1992), discusses the continued relevance of Modernism for critics and readers in the twenty-first century: "Perhaps modernism as we think of it never existed. Perhaps it is still going on... Gender is, without question, a factor in the semiosis of modernism" (326). Current trends in queer and gender theory provide the tools for a reevaluation of Modernists' texts, and fresh comparisons reveal a self-conscious "third space" between definitions of alien and indigenous, and masculine and feminine. By defining a particular "double" or Sapphic consciousness, this study diversifies readings of Modernism by challenging national and gender boundaries.

Appendix A: Sappho

The following translations of Sappho's Fragment 1 were chosen to demonstrate the wide range of interpretations that inevitably accompany translation. Both Symonds and Winkler are renowned Classicists separated by a century. Winkler points out that while most editors agree on the first word of the poem – Ποικιλόθρον/*poikilothron* – meaning “ornate-“ or “richly-throned,” there is an alternate possibility. The survival of the poem is due to the fact that Dionysios of Halikarnassos quoted the poem “as an example of perfect smoothness” in the third century B.C. (Winkler 166). The alternative opening word could also be *poikilophron* – “many-minded.” It is also interesting to note that Symonds adopts a masculine pronoun to describe the beloved object, a choice that is (accurately) altered in Winkler's more current version.

Sappho Frag. 1

Ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε
μή μ' ἄσαισι μήτ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
 πότνια, θυμόν·
ἀλλὰ τυῖδ' ἔλθ', αἵποτα κατέρωτα
τᾷς ἔμας αὖδως αἴϊοισα πῆλυι
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα
 χρῦσιον ἦλθες
ἄρμ' ὑποζεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον
ῶκεες στρουῖθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας
πύκνα δινεῦντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω αἶθε-
 ρας διὰ μέσσω.
αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· τὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,
μειδιάσαις' ἀθανάτω προσώπῳ,
ἦρε', ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι
 δηῦτε κάλημι,
κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλα θυμῷ· τίνα δηῦτε Πείθω
μαῖς ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα, τίς σ', ὦ
 Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ' ἀλλὰ δώσει,
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει
κῶύκ ἐθέλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλεπᾶν δὲ λύσον
ἐκ μεριμνᾶν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτὰ
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

Glittering-throned, undying Aphrodite,
Wile-weaving daughter of high Zeus, I pray thee,
Tame not my soul with heavy woe, dread mistress,
Nay, nor with anguish!

But hither come, if ever erst of old time
Thou didst incline, and listenedst to my crying,
And from thy father's palace down descending,
Camest with golden

Chariot yoked: thee fair swift-flying sparrows
Over dark earth with multitudinous fluttering,
Pinion on pinion, through middle ether
Down from heaven hurried.

Quickly they came like light, and thou, blest lady,
Smiling with clear undying eyes didst ask me
What was the woe that troubled me, and wherefore
I had cried to thee:

What thing I longed for to appease my frantic
Soul: and Whom now must I persuade, thou askedst,
Whom must entangle to thy love, and who now,
Sappho, hath wronged thee?

Yea, for if now he shun, he soon shall chase thee;
Yea, if he take not gifts, he soon shall give them;
Yea, if he love not, soon shall he begin to
Love thee, unwilling.

Come to me now too, and from tyrannous sorrow
Free me, and all things that my soul desires to
Have done, do for me, queen, and let thyself too
Be my great ally!
(J. Addington Symonds, 1893)

Intricate, undying Aphrodite, snare-weaver, child of Zeus, I pray thee, do not tame my spirit, great lady, with pain and sorrow. But come to me now if ever before you heard my voice from afar and leaving your father's house, yoked golden chariot and came. Beautiful sparrows swiftly brought you to the murky ground with a quick flutter of wings from the sky's height through clean air. They were quick in coming. You, blessed goddess, a smile on your divine face, asked what did I suffer, this time again, and why did I call, this time again, and what did I in my frenzied heart most want to happen. Whom am I to persuade, this time again... to lead to your affection? Who, O Sappho, does you wrong? For one who flees will Soon pursue, one who rejects gifts will soon be making offers, and one who does not love will soon be loving, even against her will. Come to me even now release me from these mean anxieties, and do what my heart wants done, you yourself be my ally.
(John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* 1990)

Fragment 31 survives thanks to Longinus's treatise "On the Sublime" during the third century B.C. Joan DeJean points out that translations of this version remain controversial today. Winkler was one of the first (and remains one of the few) scholars to "make clear that the man may not be there at all," and that therefore the love triangle does not revolve around the male persona (DeJean 324). Many translators still avoid using adjectives that determine the gender of the beloved in the original (in French and Greek the modifiers carry the feminine signature), including Yourcenar who eliminates the phrase "greener (*f*) than grass" altogether. However, I include her translation because I agree with DeJean that she is one of the first and few French translators to successfully convey the "sparse economy" of Sappho's poetry.

Sappho Frag. 31

Φαίνεται μοι κήνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν ὦνῆρ, ὅστις ἐναντίος τοι
ἰζάνει, καὶ πλυσίον ἄδυ φωνεύ-
σας ὑπακούει

καὶ γελαίσας ἱμερόεν, τό μοι μάν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόασεν·
ὥς γάρ εὕιδον βροχέως σε, φώνας
οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει·

ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε, λέπτον δ'
αὐτίκα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημ', ἐπιρρόμ-
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι.

ἀ δέ μίδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δέ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης
φαίνομαι [ἄλλα].

ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον, [ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα].

... Il est pareil aux dieux, l'homme qui te regarde,
Sans craindre ton sourire, et tes yeux, et ta voix,
Moi, je tremble et je sue, et ma face est hagarde
Et mon cœur aux abois...
La chaleur et le froid tour à tour m'envahissent ;
Je ne résiste pas au délire trop fort ;
Et ma gorge s'étrangle et mes genoux fléchissent,
Et je connais la mort...
(Marguerite Yourcenar 1979)

That one seems to me to be like the gods, the man whosoever sits facing
you and listens nearby to your sweet speech and desirable laughter –
which surely terrifies the heart in my chest; for as I look briefly at
you, so can I no longer speak at all, my tongue is silent, broken, a
silken fire suddenly has spread beneath my skin, with my eyes I see
nothing, my hearing hums, a cold sweat grips me, a trembling seizes
me entire, more pale than grass am I, I seem to myself too little short
of dead. But everything is to be endured, since even a pauper...
(John J. Winkler 1981)

Sappho Frag. 16

Οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖς' ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον
ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅττω τις ἔραται
πά]γχν δ' εὖμαρες σύνετον πόησαι πά]ντι τ[οῦ]τ'.
ἀ γὰρ πόλυ περσκόπεισα κά]λλος ἀνθρώπων Ἐλένα
[τῶ]ν ἀνδρα[κρίνεν ἄρ]ιστον

ὅς τὸ πᾶν] σέβας Τροΐα[ς ὅ]λεσσε,
οὐδὲ παῖδος οὐδὲ [φίλ]ων το[κ]ήων
οὐδεν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀ[λλὰ] παράγαγ' αὐτὰν
Κύπρις ἔραι]σαν,
ἧ μάλ' εὖκ]αμπτον γαρ [ἔφ]υ βρότων κῆρ]

καὶ μάτει] κούφως τ[όδ', ὅ] κε ν]οήση.
ἀλ]λά νῦν,
Ἀνακτορί[ας γε] μάμναι-
μ' οὐ] παρεοίσας
τᾷ]ς τε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κ]ἀμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
ἦ τᾶ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὅπλοισι πεσδομ]άχεντας
εὖ μεν ἴδ]μεν οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι
λῶστ'] ὄν' ἀνθρώποις, πεδέχην δ' ἄρασθα

Some say a cavalry corps,
some infantry, some, again,
will maintain that the swift oars

of our fleet are the finest
sight on dark earth; but I say
that whatever one loves, is.

This is easily proved: did
not Helen – she who scanned
the flower of the world's manhood –

choose as first among men one
who laid Troy's honor in ruin?
warped to his will, forgetting

love due her own blood, her own
child, she wandered far with him.
So Anactoria, although you

being far away forget us,
the dear sound of your footstep
and light glancing in your eyes

would move me more than glitter
of Lydian horse or armored
tread of mainland infantry

(Mary Barnard, Sappho, 1958)

Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry, and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatsoever a person loves. It is perfectly easy to make this understood by everyone: for she who far surpassed mankind in beauty, Helen, left her most noble husband and went sailing off to Troy with no thought at all for her child or dear parents, but (love) led her astray... lightly ... (and she?) has reminded me now of Anactoria who is not here; I would rather see her lovely walk and the bright sparkle of her face than the Lydians' chariots and armed infantry... impossible to happen... mankind... but to pray to share... unexpectedly.
(Campbell frag. 16)

Appendix B: Baudelaire

Benjamin, DeJean and Reynolds point out that there are differences in Baudelaire's treatment of the Lesbian in "Lesbos" and "Femmes damnées" (1868). Benjamin states that "'Lesbos' is a hymn to lesbian love; ['Femmes damnées']... is a condemnation of this passion" (121). While the voyeuristic and conflicted lyricism remains consistent, Baudelaire's poet identifies with the poetess Sappho as his lyrical predecessor, a reincarnated heroine of *modernité*, rather than with the socially ostracized, masculinized lesbians.

À celle qui est trop gaie

Ta tête, ton geste, ton air
Sont beaux comme un beau paysage ;
Le rire joue en ton visage
Comme un vent frais dans un ciel clair.

Le passant chagrin que tu frôles
Est ébloui par la santé
Qui jaillit comme une clarté
De tes bras et de tes épaules.

Les retentissantes couleurs
Dont tu parsèmes tes toilettes
Jettent dans l'esprit des poètes
L'image d'un ballet de fleurs.

Ces robes folles sont l'emblème
De ton esprit bariolé ;
Folle dont je suis affolé,
Je te hais autant que je t'aime !

Quelquefois dans un beau jardin
Où je traînais mon atonie,
J'ai senti, comme une ironie,
Le soleil déchirer mon sein ;

Et le printemps et la verdure
Ont tant humilié mon cœur,
Que j'ai puni sur une fleur
L'insolence de la Nature.

Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et, vertigineuse douceur !
A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T'infuser mon venin, ma soeur !

To Her Who Is Too Gay

Your head, your gesture, your air
Are beautiful as a beautiful landscape;
The smile plays in your face
Like a fresh wind in a clear sky.

The fleeting care that you brush against
Is dazzled by the health
Which leaps like clarity
From your arms and your shoulders.

The re-echoing colors
Which you scatter in your toilet

Cast in the hearts of poets
The image of a ballet of flowers.

These silly clothes are the emblem
Of your many-colored spirit;
Silly woman of my infatuation,
I hate as much as love you!

Sometimes in a pretty garden
Where I dragged my weakness,
I have felt the sun like irony
Tear my chest;

And the spring and the green of things
Have so humbled my heart,
That I have punished a flower
For the insolence of Nature.

Thus I would wish, one night,
When the voluptuary's hour sounds,
To crawl like a coward, noiselessly,
Towards the treasures of your body,

In order to correct your gay flesh
And beat your unbegrudging breast,
To make upon your starting thigh
A long and biting weal,

And, sweet giddiness,
Along those newly-gaping lips
More vivid and more beautiful,
Inject my venom, O my sister!

(trans. Geoffrey Wagner, 1974)

Lesbos

Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques,
Lesbos, où les baisers, languissants ou joyeux,
Chauds comme les soleils, frais comme les pastèques,
Font l'ornement des nuits et des jours glorieux,
5 Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques,

Lesbos, où les baisers sont comme les cascades
Qui se jettent sans peur dans les gouffres sans fonds,
Et courent, sanglotant et gloussant par saccades,
Orangeux et secrets, fourmillants et profonds;
10 Lesbos, où les baisers sont comme les cascades!

Lesbos, où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,
Où jamais un soupir ne resta sans écho,
À l'égal de Paphos les étoiles t'admirent,
Et Vénus à bon droit peut jalouser Sapho!
15 Lesbos où les Phrynés l'une l'autre s'attirent,

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;
20 Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses,

Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'oeil austère;
Tu tires ton pardon de l'excès des baisers,

Reine du doux empire, aimable et noble terre,
 Et des raffinements toujours inépuisés.
 25 Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'oeil austère.

Tu tires ton pardon de l'éternel martyr,
 Infligé sans relâche aux coeurs ambitieux,
 Qu'attire loin de nous le radieux sourire
 Entrevu vaguement au bord des autres cieux!
 30 Tu tires ton pardon de l'éternel martyr!

Qui des Dieux osera, Lesbos, être ton juge
 Et condamner ton front pâli dans les travaux,
 Si ses balances d'or n'ont pesé le déluge
 De larmes qu'à la mer ont versé tes ruisseaux?
 35 Qui des Dieux osera, Lesbos, être ton juge?

Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste ?
 Vierges au coeur sublime, honneur de l'archipel,
 Votre religion comme une autre est auguste,
 Et l'amour se rira de l'Enfer et du Ciel!
 40 Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste?

Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre
 Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs,
 Et je fus dès l'enfance admis au noir mystère
 Des rires effrénés mêlés aux sombres pleurs;
 45 Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre.

Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,
 Comme une sentinelle à l'oeil perçant et sûr,
 Qui guette nuit et jour brick, tartane ou frégate,
 Dont les formes au loin frissonnent dans l'azur;
 50 Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,

Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne,
 Et parmi les sanglots dont le roc retentit
 Un soir ramènera vers Lesbos, qui pardonne,
 Le cadavre adoré de Sapho, qui partit
 55 Pour savoir si la mer est indulgente et bonne!

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
 60 De la mâle Sapho, l'amante et le poète!

— Plus belle que Vénus se dressant sur le monde
Et versant les trésors de sa sérénité
Et le rayonnement de sa jeunesse blonde
Sur le vieil Océan de sa fille enchanté;
65 Plus belle que Vénus se dressant sur le monde!

— De Sapho qui mourut le jour de son blasphème,
Quand, insultant le rite et le culte inventé,
Elle fit son beau corps la pâture suprême
D'un brutal dont l'orgueil punit l'impiété
70 De celle qui mourut le jour de son blasphème.

Et c'est depuis ce temps que Lesbos se lamente,
Et, malgré les honneurs que lui rend l'univers,
S'enivre chaque nuit du cri de la tourmente
Que poussent vers les cieux ses rivages déserts.
75 Et c'est depuis ce temps que Lesbos se lamente!

Lesbos

Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,
Lesbos, where kisses, languishing or gay,
As melons cool, or warm as solar flames,
Adorn alike the glorious night and day:
Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,

Lesbos of kisses reckless as cascades
That hurl themselves to bottomless abysses,
Stormy and secret, myriad-swarming kisses,
That cluck and sob and gurgle in the shades.
Lesbos of kisses reckless as cascades!

Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,
Where never yet unanswered went a sigh,
Where Paphos with a rival is requited,
And Venus with a Sappho has to vie!
Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,

Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,
Where gazing in their mirrors as they dress
The cave-eyed girls, in barren, vain delight,
The fruits of their nubility caress.
Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,

Let Plato frown austere all the while.
Your pardon's from excess of kisses won,

Queen of sweet empire, rare and noble isle —
And from refinements which are never done.
Let Plato frown austere all the while.

From martyrdom your pardon you beguile,
Inflicted without stint on hearts that soar
Far, far away, drawn by some radiant smile
Seen vaguely on a strange celestial shore.
From martyrdom your pardon you beguile.

Lesbos, what God to judge you would make bold,
Or damn your brows so pale and sadly grave,
Not having weighed upon the scales of gold
The floods of tears you've poured into the wave.
Lesbos which God to judge you would make bold?

For us, what mean the statutes of the just?
Pride of the isles, whose hearts sublimely swell,
Your faith as any other is august
And Love can laugh alike at Heaven and Hell.
For us, what mean the statues of the just?

For Lesbos chose me of all men on earth
To sing the secrets of her virgin flowers,
Taught as a child the sacred rites of mirth
And mysteries of sorrow which are ours.
So Lesbos chose me of all men on earth.

Since then I watch on the Leucadian height.
Like a lone sentry with a piercing view
Who sees the vessels ere they heave in sight
With forms that faintly tremble in the blue.
Since then I watch on the Leucadian height

To find out if the sea's heart still is hardened
And from the sobs that drench the rock with spray
If it will bring back Sappho, who has pardoned,
The corpse of the adored, who went away
To find out that the sea its heart has hardened;

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
On the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers —

Fairer than Venus towering on the world
And pouring down serenity like water
In the blond radiance of her tresses curled
To daze the very Ocean with her daughter,
Fairer than Venus towering on the world —

Of Sappho, whom her blasphemy requited
The day she quit the rite and scorned the cult,
And gave her lovely body to be slighted
By a rough brute, whose scorn was the result
For Sappho, whom the blasphemy requited.

And since that time has Lesbos lived lamenting
In spite of all the honours of mankind,
And lives upon the storm-howl unrelenting
Of its bleak shores, the sport of wave and wind:
For since that time has Lesbos lived lamenting.
(trans. Roy Campbell, 1952)

Appendix C: Dickinson

Lefkowitz rightly warns against the dangers of Freudian interpretations of this poem, which employ a phallocentric discourse surrounding feminine sexuality. However, her unconditional rejection of past readings that understand Dickinson's poem as an erotic encounter (followed by physiological disenchantment) ignores the very real presence of multiple implications and meanings in Dickinson's poetry.

Poem 579

I had been hungry, all the Years --
My Noon had Come -- to dine --
I trembling drew the Table near --
And touched the Curious Wine --

5 'Twas this on Tables I had seen --
When turning, hungry, Home
I looked in Windows, for the Wealth
I could not hope -- for Mine --

10 I did not know the ample Bread --
'Twas so unlike the Crumb
The Birds and I, had often shared
In Nature's -- Dining Room --

15 The Plenty hurt me -- 'twas so new --
Myself felt ill -- and odd --
As Berry -- of a Mountain Bush --
Transplanted -- to a Road --

Nor was I hungry -- so I found
That Hunger -- was a way
Of Persons outside Windows --
20 The Entering -- takes away --

Poem 622

To know just how He suffered—would be dear—
To know if any Human eyes were near
To whom He could entrust His wavering gaze—
Until it settle broad—on Paradise—

5 To know if He was patient—part content—
Was Dying as He thought—or different—

Was it a pleasant Day to die—
And did the Sunshine face his way—

10 What was His furthest mind—Of Home—or God—
Or what the Distant say—
At news that He ceased Human Nature
Such a Day—

15 And Wishes—Had He Any—
Just His Sigh—Accented—
Had been legible—to Me—
And was He Confident until
Ill fluttered out—in Everlasting Well—

20 And if He spoke—What name was Best—
What last
What One broke off with
At the Drowsiest—

25 Was He afraid—or tranquil—
Might He know
How Conscious Consciousness—could grow—
Till Love that was—and Love too best to be—
Meet—and the Junction be Eternity

Appendix D : Vivien

Les Iles (*La Vénus des Aveugles*, 1904)

La mer porte le poids voluptueux des Iles...
Le lapis lazuli des ondes infertiles
Sollicite le frais recueillement des Iles.

Iles d'hiver, ô fleurs de la nacre et du nord !
Lorsque l'ombre a tressé les roses de la mort,
Les Iles ont jailli de la nacre et du nord.

Elles flottent ainsi que des perles d'écume...
Des blancheurs de bouleaux, des bleuités de brume
Se balancent, parmi les perles de l'écume.

Et voici, sous les violettes du couchant,
Lesbos, regret des Dieux, exil sacré du chant,
Lesbos, où fleurit la gloire du couchant.

Les parfums ténébreux qui font mourir les vierges
Montent de ses jardins et de l'or de ses berges
Où s'éteignent les voix amoureuses des vierges.

Leucade se souvient, et les fleurs d'oranger
Mêlent leur blanc frisson aux tiédeurs du verger...
Psappha pleurait Atthis sous les fleurs d'oranger...

Les âmes sans espoir sont pareilles aux Iles,
Et, malgré les langueurs de leurs armes fébriles,
Elles gardent l'orgueil solitaires des Iles.

Elles ont l'horizon, les algues et les fleurs.
L'isolement divin rafraîchit leurs douleurs
Et leur verse la paix des algues et des fleurs.

Appendix E: H.D.

Leda (1921)

Where the slow river
meets the tide,
a red swan lifts red wings
and darker beak,
and underneath the purple down
of his soft breast
uncurls his coral feet.

Through the deep purple
of the dying heat
of sun and mist,
the level ray of sun-beam
has caressed
the lily with dark breast,
and flecked with richer gold
its golden crest.

Where the slow lifting
of the tide,
floats into the river
and slowly drifts
among the reeds,
and lifts the yellow flags,
he floats
where tide and river meet.

Ah kingly kiss --
no more regret
nor old deep memories
to mar the bliss;
where the low sedge is thick,
the gold day-lily
outspreads and rests
beneath soft fluttering
of red swan wings
and the warm quivering
of the red swan's breast.

Eurydice (1916)

I
So you have swept me back,
I who have walked with the live souls
above the earth,
I who have slept among the live flowers

at last;

so for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I am swept back
where dead lichens drip
dead cinders upon moss of ash;

so for your arrogance
I am broken at last,
I who had lived unconscious,
who was almost forgot;

if you had let me wait
I had grown from listlessness into peace,
if you had let me rest with the dead,
I had forgot you
and the past.

II

Here only flame upon flame
and black among the red sparks,
streaks of black and light
grown colorless

why did you turn back,
that hell should be reinhabited
of myself thus
swept into nothingness?

why did you turn back?
why did you glance back?
why did you hesitate for that moment?
why did you bend your face
caught with the flame of the upper earth,
above my face?

what was it that crossed my face
with the light from yours
and your glance?
what was it you saw in my face?
the light of your own face,
the fire of your own presence?

what had my face to offer
but reflex of the earth,
hyacinth colour
caught from the raw fissure in the rock
where the light struck,
and the colour of azure crocuses,
and the bright surface of gold crocuses
and of the wind-flower,
swift in its veins as lightning
and as white.

III

Saffron from the fringe of the earth,
wild saffron that has bent
over the sharp edge of earth,
all the flowers that cut through the earth,
all, all the flowers are lost;
everything is lost,
everything is crossed with black,
black upon black
and worse than black,
this colourless light.

IV

Fringe upon fringe
of blue crocuses,
crocuses, walled against blue of
themselves,
blue of that upper earth.
blue of the depth upon depth of flowers,
lost;
flowers, if I could have taken once my
breath of them,
enough of them,
more than earth,
even than of the upper earth,
had passed with me
beneath the earth;

If I could have caught up from the earth,
the whole of the flowers of the earth,
if once I could have breathed into myself
the very golden crocuses
and the red
and the very golden hearts of the first
saffron,

the whole of the golden mass,
the whole of the great fragrance,
I could have dared the loss.

V

So for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I have lost the earth
and the flowers of the earth,
and the live souls above the earth,
and you who passed across the light
and reached
ruthless;
you who have your own light,
who are to yourself a presence,
who need no presence;

yet for all your arrogance
and your glance,
I tell you this:

such loss is no loss,
such terror, such coils and strands and
pitfalls
of blackness
such terror
is no loss;

hell is no worse than your earth 100
above the earth,
hell is no worse,
no, nor your flowers
nor your veins of light
nor your presence,
a loss;
my hell is no worse than yours
though you pass among the flowers and
speak
with the spirits above the earth.

VI

Against the black
I have more fervour
than you in all the splendour of that place,
against the blackness
and the stark grey

I have more light;
and the flowers,
if I should tell you,
you would turn from your own fit paths
toward hell,
turn again and glance back
and I would sink into a place even more
terrible than this.

VII

At least I have the flowers of myself,
and my thoughts, no god
can take that;
I have the fervour of myself for a presence
and my own spirit for light;
and my spirit with its loss
knows this;
though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks, 130
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass.

Hermes of the Ways

I
The hard sand breaks,
And the grains of it
Are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,
The wind,
Playing on the wide shore,
Piles little ridges,
And the great waves
Break over it.

But more than the many-foamed ways
Of the sea,
I know him
Of the triple path-ways,
Hermes,
Who awaiteth.

Dubious,

Facing three ways,
Welcoming wayfarers,
He whom the sea-orchard
Shelters from the west,
From the east
Weathers sea-wind;
Fronts the great dunes.

Wind rushes
Over the dunes,
And the coarse, salt-crustured grass
Answers.

Heu,
It whips round my ankles!

II
Small is
This white stream,
Flowing below ground
From the poplar-shaded hill,
But the water is sweet.

Apples on the small trees
Are hard,
Too small,
Too late ripened
By a desperate sun
That struggles through sea-mist.

The boughs of the trees
Are twisted
By many bafflings;
Twisted are
The small-leafed boughs.
But the shadow of them
Is not the shadow of the mast head
Nor of the torn sails.

Hermes, Hermes,
The great sea foamed,
Gnashed its teeth about me;
But you have waited,
Where sea-grass tangles with
Shore-grass.

Appendix F : De Noailles

Tu vis, je bois l'azur... (1913)

Tu vis, je bois l'azur qu'épanche ton visage,
Ton rire me nourrit comme d'un blé plus fin,
Je ne sais pas le jour, où, moins sûr et moins sage,
Tu me feras mourir de faim. 4

Solitaire, nomade et toujours étonnée,
Je n'ai pas d'avenir et je n'ai pas de toit,
J'ai peur de la maison, de l'heure et de l'année
Où je devrai souffrir de toi. 8

Même quand je te vois dans l'air qui m'environne,
Quand tu sembles meilleur que mon coeur ne rêva,
Quelque chose de toi sans cesse m'abandonne,
Car rien qu'en vivant tu t'en vas. 12

Tu t'en vas, et je suis comme ces chiens farouches
Qui, le front sur le sable où luit un soleil blanc,
Cherchent à retenir dans leur errante bouche
L'ombre d'un papillon volant. 16

Tu t'en vas, cher navire, et la mer qui te berce
Te vante de lointains et plus brûlants transports.
Pourtant, la cargaison du monde se déverse
Dans mon vaste et tranquille port. 20

Ne bouge plus, ton souffle impatient, tes gestes
Ressemblent à la source écartant les roseaux.
Tout est aride et nu hors de mon âme, reste
Dans l'ouragan de mon repos! 24

Quel voyage vaudrait ce que mes yeux t'apprennent,
Quand mes regards joyeux font jaillir dans les tiens
Les soirs de Galata, les forêts des Ardennes,
Les lotus des fleuves indiens? 28

Hélas! quand ton élan, quand ton départ m'opprime,
Quand je ne peux t'avoir dans l'espace où tu cours,
Je songe à la terrible et funèbre paresse
Qui viendra t'engourdir un jour. 32

Toi si gai, si content, si rapide et si brave,
Qui règnes sur l'espoir ainsi qu'un conquérant,

Tu rejoindras aussi ce grand peuple d'esclaves
 Qui gît, muet et tolérant. 36

Je le vois comme un point délicat et solide
 Par delà les instants, les horizons, les eaux,
 Isolé, fascinant comme les Pyramides,
 Ton étroit et fixe tombeau; 40

Et je regarde avec une affreuse tristesse,
 Au bout d'un avenir que je ne verrai pas,
 Ce mur qui te résiste et ce lieu où tu cesses,
 Ce lit où s'arrêtent tes pas! 44

Tu seras mort, ainsi que David, qu'Alexandre,
 Mort comme le Thébain lançant ses javelots,
 Comme ce danseur grec dont j'ai pesé la cendre
 Dans un musée, au bord des flots. 48

--J'ai vu sous le soleil d'un antique rivage
 Qui subit la chaleur comme un céleste affront,
 Des squelettes légers au fond des sarcophages,
 Et j'ai touché leurs faibles fronts. 52

Et je savais que moi, qui contemplais ces restes,
 J'étais déjà ce mort, mais encor palpitant,
 Car de ces ossements à mon corps tendre et preste
 Il faut le cours d'un peu de temps... 56

Je l'accepte pour moi ce sort si noir, si rude,
 Je veux être ces yeux que l'infini creusait;
 Mais, palmier de ma joie et de ma solitude,
 Vous avec qui je me taisais, 60

Vous à qui j'ai donné, sans même vous le dire,
 Comme un prince remet son épée au vainqueur,
 La grâce de régner sur le mystique empire
 Où, comme un Nil, s'épand mon coeur, 64

Vous en qui, flot mouvant, j'ai brisé tout ensemble,
 Mes rêves, mes défauts, ma peine et ma gaîté,
 Comme un palais debout qui se défait et tremble
 Au miroir d'un lac agité, 68

Faut-il que vous aussi, le Destin vous enrôle
 Dans cette armée en proie aux livides torpeurs,
 Et que, réduit, le cou rentré dans les épaules,

Vous avez l'aspect de la peur? 72

Que plus froid que le froid, sans regard, sans oreille,
Germe qui se rendort dans l'oeuf universel,
Vous soyez cette cire âcre, dont les abeilles
Ecartent leur vol fraternel! 76

N'est-il pas suffisant que déjà moi je parte,
Que j'aille me mêler aux fantômes hagards,
Moi qui, plus qu'Andromaque et qu'Hélène de Sparte,
Ai vu guerroyer des regards? 80

Mon enfant, je me hais, je méprise mon âme,
Ce détestable orgueil qu'ont les filles des rois,
Puisque je ne peux pas être un rempart de flamme
Entre la triste mort et toi! 84

Mais puisque tout survit, que rien de nous ne passe,
Je songe, sous les cieux où la nuit va venir,
A cette éternité du temps et de l'espace
Dont tu ne pourras pas sortir. 88

--O beauté des printemps, alacrité des neiges,
Rassurantes parois du vase immense et clos
Où, comme de joyeux et fidèles arpèges,
Tout monte et chante sans repos!... 92

Appendix G: Apollinaire

Automne

Dans le brouillard s'en vont un paysan cagneux
Et son bœuf lentement dans le brouillard d'automne
Qui cache les hameaux pauvres et vergogneux

Et s'en allant là-bas le paysan chantonne
Une chanson d'amour et d'infidélité
Qui parle d'une bague et d'un cœur que l'on brise

Oh ! l'automne l'automne a fait mourir l'été
Dans le brouillard s'en vont deux silhouettes grises

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